

The “But God” Passages

Heaven’s Intervention in Man’s Ruin

Series 1-10

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The “But God” Passages: Heaven’s Intervention in Man’s Ruin

Table of Contents

Introduction — The Two Words That Change Everything

1. The Evil Men Planned and the Good God Meant

Genesis 50:20

2. Hunted by a King, Hidden by the Almighty

1 Samuel 23:14

3. The Fool Whose Calendar Ended That Night

Luke 12:20

4. Rome Sealed the Tomb, but God Raised the King

Acts 13:29–30

5. Dead in Sin, Loved by Mercy

Ephesians 2:4–5

6. When the Cast Down Met the God of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 7:5–6

7. The Preacher Planted, but God Made It Live

1 Corinthians 3:6–7

8. When God Chose the Foolish to Confound the Wise

1 Corinthians 1:26–29

9. Temptation Drew the Trap, but God Made a Door

1 Corinthians 10:13

10. The Grave Takes the Body, but God Redeems the Soul

Psalms 49:15

Conclusion — God Has the Final Word

Detailed Series Chart — The “But God” Passages: Heaven’s Intervention in Man’s Ruin

Introduction: The “But God” Passages — Heaven’s Intervention in Man’s Ruin

There are two words in the King James Bible that have ruined more funerals for the devil, overturned more human verdicts, broken more impossible sentences, and exposed more earthly boasting than all the speeches ever delivered by kings, philosophers, educators, politicians, and religious dignitaries combined. Those two words are “but God.” They do not enter the passage with their hat in their hand asking permission from circumstances. They do not negotiate with the grave, consult the enemy, examine the latest opinion poll, or wait for human strength to recover. They arrive when man has finished speaking, when the enemy thinks the case is closed, when the stone has been rolled into place, and when every visible fact appears to support defeat. Man writes the obituary; “but God” opens the grave. Circumstances finish their argument; “but God” overturns the verdict. Satan stamps the paperwork; “but God” tears it in half. Those words are heaven’s intervention in man’s ruin.

The Bible does not hide the ruin preceding the phrase. It does not brighten the lighting, soften the diagnosis, or replace sin with a collection of comfortable explanations. Joseph’s brethren meant evil. Saul hunted David every day. The rich fool planned a future he would never live to see. Jerusalem condemned Christ, and Rome nailed Him to a tree. Sinners were dead in trespasses and sins. Paul was troubled on every side. Preachers planted and watered without possessing the power to create life. The world trusted wisdom, might, nobility, and reputation. Temptation tightened its trap. The grave waited for another body. Scripture does not hand out rose-coloured glasses and tell suffering men to admire the view. It describes the pit as a pit, the prison as a prison, death as death, sin as sin, and judgment as judgment. God has no need to exaggerate the darkness before displaying the light.

Modern religion has developed an entire vocabulary for avoiding the blunt words of God. Sin becomes dysfunction, rebellion becomes a struggle, unbelief becomes a journey, covetousness becomes ambition, pride becomes self-confidence, and spiritual death becomes low self-esteem. Apparently, fallen man’s greatest need is not redemption but a more flattering diagnosis. The Bible refuses to participate in the deception. A dead sinner does not need encouragement to discover the champion within him. He needs to be quickened by the God who raises the dead. A guilty man does not need his conscience placed on a couch and taught to speak kindly about itself. He needs the blood of Jesus Christ. A fool building larger barns does not need financial coaching. He needs to hear that his soul may be required that night. God never cures a disease by lying about the symptoms.

The words “but God” are not a religious slogan pasted over suffering as though faith required pretending that evil never happened. When Joseph told his brethren, “ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good,” he did not call their wickedness good. They hated him, conspired against him, cast him into a pit, sold him, deceived their father, and allowed years of grief to settle over Jacob’s house. God did not excuse their sin; He overruled it. Their intention remained evil, while His purpose remained good. Providence does not bleach wickedness white. It places wickedness beneath the government of a God wise enough to defeat it without becoming its author. Men remain responsible for what they choose, and God remains sovereign over what their choices can finally accomplish. The devil may move pieces with malice, but he has never owned the board.

This distinction destroys two errors at once. Fatalism treats man as a helpless machine and makes God responsible for every wicked motion. Humanism removes God from the matter and leaves history in the hands of blind chance and sinful men. The Bible teaches neither. Joseph’s brothers acted willingly and were guilty. Potiphar’s wife lied willingly and was guilty. The butler forgot Joseph, Pharaoh dreamed, famine came, and Joseph eventually stood in authority over Egypt. Through all of it, God was accomplishing a purpose no participant fully understood. Heaven never called an emergency meeting when Joseph entered the pit. God was not surprised by the caravan, confused by the false accusation, or delayed by the prison door. Providence is God’s ability to use men He does not approve, actions He condemns, and circumstances His servant does not understand to fulfil a purpose no enemy can cancel.

The same hand appears when Saul hunts David through the wilderness. Saul possessed the crown, soldiers, weapons, spies, government authority, and information. David possessed caves, rocks, wilderness paths, and a company of distressed men. Saul sought him every day, “but God delivered him not into his hand.” The verse does not attribute David’s survival to luck, superior camouflage, or an insufficient military budget. Saul had every earthly advantage except the one that mattered: God had not surrendered David. The king could search every hill in Judah, bribe every informer, question every citizen, and surround every mountain. His hand would still close upon air if God had determined to preserve the man. Saul occupied the palace without the promise; David occupied the wilderness with it. The safest man in Israel was not the king behind guarded walls but the fugitive hidden beneath the purpose of God.

Then the phrase enters the rich fool’s calendar and turns “many years” into “this night.” The man’s ground brought forth plentifully, his barns were inadequate, and his plans sounded perfectly sensible to every accountant who had forgotten eternity. He would pull down the old barns, build greater, store his goods, and say to his soul, “take thine ease, eat, drink,

and be merry.” The world would have called him successful, prudent, secure, and ready for retirement. “But God said unto him, Thou fool.” Heaven’s estimate did not match the financial report. He had calculated his harvest but not his heartbeat. He had prepared storage for his goods but no preparation for his soul. He owned enough to impress a city and lacked what was necessary to survive one sentence from God. When God enters a calendar, decades can collapse into hours.

The fourth passage brings us to the apparent triumph of religion, government, and death over Jesus Christ. The rulers condemned Him, Pilate surrendered Him, soldiers crucified Him, men took Him down from the tree, and His body was laid in a sepulchre. A stone sealed the entrance, guards watched the place, and His enemies assumed the trouble was finished. Then Acts 13:30 answers the entire machinery of earth and hell: “But God raised him from the dead.” Rome could authorize an execution but could not legislate resurrection out of existence. Religion could demand the stone be secured but could not keep the Holy One behind it. Death could receive Christ but could not retain Him. The grave had never held a prisoner like this One, and on the third day it lost its most important case.

The resurrection reveals the full force of “but God.” It is not merely recovery after disappointment. It is divine reversal at the point of human finality. Men had completed everything they intended to do with Christ. They rejected Him, mocked Him, scourged Him, crucified Him, pierced Him, buried Him, and guarded the tomb. Their work ended in death. God’s answer began with resurrection. The empty tomb declared that Christ’s sacrifice had been accepted, death had been conquered, Scripture had been fulfilled, and the crucified Nazarene was both Lord and Christ. Calvary was not an unfortunate tragedy repaired by Easter morning. The cross was the appointed altar where the Lamb of God paid for sin, and the resurrection was heaven’s public receipt announcing that the payment was complete.

From the resurrection of Christ, the series moves naturally to the resurrection power of grace in Ephesians 2. Fallen man is not described as spiritually inconvenienced, morally underdeveloped, or religiously uninformed. He is “dead in trespasses and sins.” He walks according to the course of this world, follows the prince of the power of the air, fulfils the desires of the flesh and mind, and stands by nature as a child of wrath. That diagnosis leaves no room for self-salvation. A corpse cannot improve its pulse through good intentions. Religion may dress it, educate it, baptize it, perfume it, and place it beneath stained glass, but it remains dead. Then comes the interruption: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.” The sinner supplied the death; God supplied the quickening.

Salvation begins with God’s mercy, proceeds through Christ’s finished work, and is received by grace through faith. It is “not of works, lest any man should boast.” Flesh

dislikes that arrangement because flesh wants a certificate hanging on the wall proving it assisted in the rescue. Grace throws the certificate into the fire. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. The sinner who believes is forgiven, justified, quickened, sealed, and placed into the body of Christ. God does not drag the old man into a religious repair shop and return him with improved manners. He creates a new man in Christ. Good works follow as the fruit of salvation; they never become the price, down payment, or monthly instalment by which eternal life is purchased or retained.

The sixth study turns from spiritual death to a faithful servant cast down under the pressure of ministry. Paul did not pretend to be a painted apostle floating six inches above the road. He admitted that his flesh had no rest, that he was troubled on every side, that fightings were without, and fears were within. Then he wrote, “Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” Divine comfort arrived wearing sandals. God could have sent an angel, opened the heavens, or spoken with thunder, but He sent a faithful brother carrying truthful news. The supernatural hand remained invisible while the human messenger walked through the door. That does not make the comfort less divine. It demonstrates that providence often uses ordinary obedience to deliver extraordinary strength.

Biblical comfort is not sentimental padding for self-pity. It does not tell the rebellious man that obedience is unnecessary or assure the careless servant that sin has no consequences. God comforts where Scripture comforts and rebukes where Scripture rebukes. Paul’s comfort came through the news that Corinth had responded to correction with godly sorrow and repentance. The apostle was strengthened because the word of God had produced fruit. Comfort put courage back into the labourer; it did not retire him from the field. The God of all comfort does not merely make His servants feel better about lying down. He binds their wounds, steadies their hands, and enables them to continue in the battle.

That truth leads directly to Paul’s statement concerning ministry: “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” The planter mattered, the waterer mattered, and the labour was commanded. Nevertheless, neither servant could manufacture life. Paul preached the gospel and established the work. Apollos taught the Scriptures and strengthened believers. God alone produced spiritual increase. A preacher can raise his voice, arrange meetings, advertise programs, build a platform, purchase equipment, and count attendance. He cannot reach into one dead soul and create eternal life. Religious machinery can produce movement, excitement, crowds, applause, and financial reports thick enough to stop a door. Only God produces fruit that survives eternity.

The Corinthian church had turned faithful ministers into rival banners because carnal men enjoy converting servants into celebrities. One said, "I am of Paul," another, "I am of Apollos," and another, "I am of Cephas." Paul answered the nonsense by asking, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" The pulpit is not a throne, the church is not a private kingdom, and sheep do not bear the preacher's brand. God may reward the labourer, but He never surrenders ownership of the field. The man who plants should labour faithfully without demanding applause. The man who waters should rejoice that someone planted before him. When increase comes, both should point upward before flesh begins printing commemorative plaques.

The eighth passage strikes the same pride from another direction. The world bows before credentials, wealth, reputation, intellectual standing, nobility, might, and influence. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." He chooses weak things to confound mighty things, base and despised things to bring proud things to nothing, "that no flesh should glory in his presence." God is not teaching that ignorance is holy or incompetence is a spiritual gift. Paul was educated, Moses was learned, Apollos was eloquent, and Luke was a physician. The point is that every ability must kneel before God. Education can sharpen a tool, but it cannot make the tool the Carpenter.

The preaching of the cross appears foolish to the man who worships his own intelligence because it leaves him nothing to contribute. Philosophy can discuss guilt; it cannot remove it. Politics can redistribute power; it cannot regenerate a heart. Psychology can rename sin; it cannot wash it away. Religion can prescribe ceremonies; it cannot raise the dead. But the gospel declares that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, and that all who believe are justified by grace. One plain preacher with an open King James Bible may possess more eternal truth than a university full of men explaining why God could not possibly mean what He said. Ten thousand zeroes still equal zero until something of value stands before them.

The ninth passage meets the believer inside temptation. Sin argues that the struggle is unique, the pressure unbearable, and surrender unavoidable. Scripture answers, "but God is faithful." The emphasis does not rest upon the believer's confidence in himself. Israel's wilderness graves prove how quickly privileged men can fall when they trust their flesh. They lusted, worshipped idols, committed fornication, tempted Christ, and murmured until judgment overthrew them in the wilderness. Paul therefore warns, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Pride is the carpet laid outside temptation's door. A man usually trips over his confidence before he falls into the sin.

God's faithfulness means temptation possesses limits and an escape accompanies it. The Lord does not promise the absence of pressure, but He refuses to permit pressure beyond

the measure He governs. The way of escape may be a remembered verse, an opportunity to leave, a warning from a brother, an interruption, a command to flee, or grace to endure without compromise. Joseph's escape from Potiphar's wife was a doorway reached at a run. He left his garment rather than remain to conduct a Bible study on the nature of temptation. Sometimes victory stands its ground; sometimes it uses both legs. God opens the door, but the believer must stop admiring the trap and take the exit.

The final passage carries the phrase to the grave itself. Psalm 49 strips wealth, honour, property, reputation, and human glory of every boast. No man can redeem his brother or give God a ransom for him. The redemption of the soul is precious, and silver and gold cannot purchase it. Rich men die, wise men die, fools die, and their possessions pass into other hands. They call lands after their own names and imagine their houses will continue forever, but the grave does not recognize a deed. Then the psalmist declares, "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me." Death takes the body; it does not own the redeemed.

That hope reaches its full revelation in Jesus Christ. We were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, "but with the precious blood of Christ." For the Church Age believer, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The conscious soul does not sleep in the cemetery waiting for a trumpet it cannot hear. The body sleeps in the dust as a temporary deposit awaiting resurrection. At the pre-Tribulation Rapture, the dead in Christ shall rise first, living believers shall be changed, and together we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The grave may hold dust, but it does not hold the title deed. Christ possesses the keys of hell and of death.

These passages belong to different historical settings and must not be thrown into a doctrinal blender until every distinction disappears. Joseph lived in the patriarchal period. David was the anointed king within God's dealings with Israel. Christ spoke to Israel during His earthly ministry. Acts records the transition following the resurrection. Paul revealed truth for the Church, the body of Christ. Psalm 49 speaks from the Old Testament setting while reaching toward redemption beyond the grave. Rightly dividing the word of truth does not weaken the unity of the theme. It preserves the exact meaning of every passage before making legitimate application. A man who steals Israel's promises to decorate the Church has not discovered deeper truth; he has misplaced the mail.

The phrase "but God" must never become an excuse for laziness, presumption, or careless optimism. Joseph remained faithful in slavery and prison. David inquired of the Lord and moved when warned. Paul planted, Apollos watered, Titus travelled, and tempted believers were commanded to flee. Providence does not cancel responsibility. Trusting God does not mean lying on the floor waiting for heaven to tie one's shoes. The servant obeys what has

been revealed, uses the means God provides, and leaves the outcome with the Lord. Faith works because it believes God is at work. Presumption refuses duty while demanding a miracle.

Nor does “but God” promise that every earthly situation will end exactly as the believer prefers. Joseph reached a palace, but other faithful men died beneath the sword. David escaped Saul, while Paul eventually finished his course beneath Roman authority. Some saints are delivered from death; others are delivered through death into the presence of Christ. Hebrews 11 records both kinds of testimony and calls both faith. God’s final good cannot be confined to comfort, prosperity, vindication, or long life in this present world. Sometimes His answer appears in history; sometimes it waits until resurrection. Either way, the enemy does not write the final sentence.

This series therefore begins where human confidence ends. It enters the pit, the wilderness, the rich man’s bedroom, the sealed tomb, the dead sinner’s condition, the exhausted apostle’s burden, the preacher’s field, the world’s hall of wisdom, temptation’s trap, and the believer’s grave. In every place, man reaches a limit he cannot cross by his own power. Then God acts according to His purpose, mercy, love, faithfulness, wisdom, and resurrection power. The ruin is not denied; it is overruled. The weakness is not praised; it becomes the stage upon which divine strength is displayed. The sinner is not improved; he is saved. The grave is not decorated; it is defeated.

Man may dig the pit, organize the hunt, enlarge the barns, seal the tomb, pronounce the sinner dead, surround the apostle with trouble, worship the preacher, crown the wise, bait the trap, and close the grave. Let him finish his speech. Let circumstances submit their evidence. Let Satan congratulate himself over another sealed case. The King James Bible still contains those two words, and heaven has not lost the power behind them. Men may write the sentence up to the final comma—but God reserves the right to finish the line.

1 of 10: The “But God” Passages – The Evil Men Planned and the Good God Meant

Key Passage: Genesis 50:20 — “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.”

There are two minds at work in Genesis 50:20, and the King James Bible does not confuse them. Joseph’s brethren “thought evil” against him, while God “meant it unto good.” The same historical event passed through two entirely different intentions. The brethren saw a troublesome dreamer they wanted removed; God saw a chosen vessel He intended to

position. They planned a disappearance; God planned a deliverance. They wanted Joseph buried in obscurity; God intended to seat him beside Pharaoh. Man's intention was vicious, but God's intention was victorious. The verse does not say that their evil accidentally produced a fortunate result. It says God meant the matter unto good. That is providence—not blind fate, religious optimism, or the cheerful nonsense that pretends nothing bad ever really happens. Evil happened. Joseph suffered. The betrayal was real. Yet above every scheming brother stood a God whose purpose was older than their hatred, wiser than their conspiracy, and stronger than their combined wickedness.

Joseph did not speak these words while sitting in the pit. He spoke them after years of slavery, false accusation, imprisonment, forgotten promises, famine, reunion, and restoration. By Genesis 50, Jacob was dead, the funeral was over, and Joseph's brethren feared that judgment had merely been postponed out of respect for their father. Their guilty consciences began preaching sermons to them that Joseph had never preached. They imagined that Joseph had been storing vengeance like grain in an Egyptian storehouse and would now make them pay. Instead, Joseph wept when they spoke unto him and answered, "Fear not: for am I in the place of God?" He had authority enough to crush them, memory enough to accuse them, and evidence enough to convict them. But Joseph had also lived long enough to see the hand of God where they had only seen the work of men. Time had not made the crime less evil; providence had made God's purpose more visible.

The great power of the words "but God" is that they interrupt the apparent finality of human ruin. Men may write the sentence, construct the gallows, close the prison door, and declare the matter finished. Then God enters the passage, and every human period becomes a divine comma. Joseph's brethren assumed that once the caravan disappeared over the horizon, Joseph's story had ended. In reality, they had only turned the page. They thought they were removing him from the family, but they were transporting him toward his appointment. They stripped off his coat, but they could not strip away God's calling. They sold his body, but they could not sell God's covenant. They changed his location, but they could not change his destination. A pit is deep when viewed from the bottom, but it is shallow when measured against the purpose of God. What men call the end may be nothing more than the hallway through which God brings His servant to the place prepared for him.

1. The Bible Calls Their Intention Evil

Joseph said plainly, "Ye thought evil against me." He did not call their behavior immaturity, sibling rivalry, family tension, poor communication, or an unfortunate reaction to a complicated upbringing. The Holy Ghost did not send a wagonload of psychological vocabulary into Egypt to explain away deliberate wickedness. These men hated their

brother, conspired against his life, cast him into a pit, sold him for profit, deceived their father, and maintained the lie for years. Genesis 37:18 says, “And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.” That is not a misunderstanding. A misunderstanding needs clarification; a conspiracy needs repentance. Modern man prefers to place sin on a couch and ask it how it feels. The Bible puts sin in the witness box and asks it what it did. Joseph’s brethren were not innocent victims of circumstance. They thought evil, chose evil, and performed evil.

Their hatred was aggravated by the light they had received. They knew Joseph was their father’s beloved son, and they knew his dreams carried a weight they could not comfortably dismiss. Genesis 37:8 records their response: “And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.” Truth did not soften them; it exposed them. Rather than bow to what God had revealed, they determined to prevent it. “Behold, this dreamer cometh,” they sneered, before plotting to kill him and see “what will become of his dreams.” There is biblical sarcasm in the outcome. They wanted to disprove Joseph’s dreams, but every step of their resistance helped fulfill them. Rebellion against God has always had that peculiar genius: it runs at full speed in the opposite direction and arrives exactly where God said it would. The brothers who refused to bow eventually travelled to Egypt, stood before Joseph, and bowed their faces to the earth. God did not misplace a single detail.

Calling their intention evil is essential because providence must never be used to bleach sin white. The fact that God brought good out of their crime did not make the crime good. Judas betrayed Jesus Christ according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, yet Acts 2:23 still charged Israel with taking Him and, “by wicked hands,” crucifying and slaying Him. God’s foreknowledge does not manufacture man’s wickedness, and God’s sovereignty does not erase man’s responsibility. The brothers acted voluntarily from envy and hatred. God did not inject malice into their hearts and then punish them for having it. James 1:13 declares, “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” A God holy enough to judge sin is not the author of it. Providence is not a courtroom trick that gives criminals an alibi because God overruled their crime. Men remain accountable for the evil they intend, even when God proves powerful enough to defeat it.

2. God Did Not Discover the Crisis After It Happened

The wording is exact: “but God meant it unto good.” God did not merely notice the evil afterward and devise a repair. He meant something in the matter from the beginning. Joseph told his brethren in Genesis 45:5, “God did send me before you to preserve life.” He repeated it in verse 7: “And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” Then verse 8 drives the nail through the

board: “So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.” They were the immediate human agents, but God was directing the outcome. The Lord was not pacing heaven, wringing His hands, and wondering how to rescue His plan from ten angry shepherds. Heaven never called an emergency meeting over Joseph’s disappearance. Before the famine appeared, God had already begun positioning the man who would administer the food.

This does not mean that every act in Joseph’s journey was pleasant or that he understood every turn while passing through it. Providence is usually clearer from the rear window than from the windshield. In the pit, Joseph did not know about Potiphar. In Potiphar’s house, he did not know about the prison. In prison, he did not know about Pharaoh’s dreams. When the butler forgot him, Joseph did not know that God was arranging the exact hour when Pharaoh would desperately need someone who could interpret what Egypt’s magicians could not. Each event appeared isolated, but God was threading them together. Men saw loose knots; God was weaving a garment. The pit, the slave market, the false accusation, the dungeon, the forgotten promise, and the royal summons were not separate accidents scattered across Joseph’s life. They were stations along one road, though some of the signs could only be read after he had passed them.

God’s providence works without requiring the cooperation or comprehension of His enemies. The brothers never gathered around the pit and said, “Let us assist the Lord in fulfilling His covenant with Abraham.” Potiphar’s wife did not falsely accuse Joseph because she wished to place him near Pharaoh’s butler. The butler did not forget Joseph because he understood that an immediate release would put Joseph in the wrong place too early. None of them knew what God was doing. That is precisely the point. God can employ actions He does not approve, overrule motives He condemns, and produce an end His enemies never intended. The devil may move the pieces with malice, but he never owns the board. Human wickedness is real, demonic opposition is dangerous, and suffering can be severe; nevertheless, none of them can force God into checkmate. Omniscience does not learn, omnipotence does not panic, and providence never arrives late.

3. The Pit Was Not Joseph’s Grave

When Joseph was cast into the pit, the circumstances preached a convincing funeral sermon. Genesis 37:24 says, “And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.” His coat was gone, his brothers were above him, and his cries found no mercy in their hearts. Genesis 42:21 later reveals that they saw “the anguish of his soul” and heard him beseech them, yet they would not hear. The pit was not imaginary, and Joseph’s anguish was not a small inconvenience dressed up for dramatic effect. Still, the pit could not become his grave because God had already spoken

concerning his future. Joseph's dreams required survival. As long as the word of God stood, the pit had limits. It could contain Joseph temporarily, but it could not cancel what God had revealed. Circumstances may shout loudly, but they do not have authority to overrule the voice of God.

The brothers lifted Joseph out of the pit only to sell him to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver. To them, this was a convenient revision of the murder plan: they could avoid shedding blood directly, make a little money, and still be rid of him. Sin often imagines that changing the method changes the guilt. Reuben could mourn, Judah could negotiate, and the others could count the silver, but Joseph was still betrayed. Yet the caravan they selected became God's transportation. The merchants thought they were carrying merchandise; they were transporting Egypt's future governor. Joseph travelled in chains, but God's promise travelled with him. Men can price a servant without knowing his value. They can put him on the auction block while heaven has already placed a crown in his future. The brothers made a sale; God arranged a transfer. Their receipt said "slave," but providence had written "preserver" across the journey.

Genesis 39 repeatedly says, "the LORD was with Joseph." That statement appears almost unreasonable when measured by sight. If the Lord was with him, why was he a slave? If the Lord was with him, why was he falsely accused? If the Lord was with him, why did he enter prison? Because the presence of God is not proved by the absence of trouble. The Lord's presence appeared in Joseph's favor, faithfulness, wisdom, and advancement within every place intended to confine him. Potiphar's house prospered because of him. The keeper of the prison committed everything into his hand. The places meant to reduce Joseph became training grounds that enlarged his administrative ability. God turned every prison into a classroom and made his enemies pay the tuition. The pit did not bury Joseph, slavery did not break him, and prison did not waste him. God was preparing a ruler in places where no royal court would have thought to look.

4. God Preserved the Covenant Through the Betrayed Son

Joseph's elevation was not merely a private reward for personal endurance. Genesis 50:20 gives the larger purpose: "to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." A famine was coming that would affect Egypt, Canaan, and the surrounding lands. God placed Joseph in authority before the crisis arrived so grain could be stored during the seven years of plenty. When the famine came, Joseph opened the storehouses. His position preserved Egyptians, strangers, his own brethren, Jacob's household, and therefore the family through whom God's covenant promises would continue. The story is larger than Joseph receiving a robe and an impressive Egyptian title. God was preserving a nation still contained within one troubled family. Israel entered Egypt as a household and

would later depart as a multitude. The unseen hand in Joseph's suffering was moving redemptive history toward Exodus, Sinai, the land, the throne, and ultimately the coming of Christ.

God had promised Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." He had confirmed the covenant through Isaac and continued it through Jacob. Those promises did not depend upon the good behavior of Jacob's sons, which is fortunate because Genesis provides no flattering family portrait. They were jealous, violent, deceitful, and capable of sitting down to eat bread while their brother cried from a pit. If the covenant had rested upon their moral perfection, it would have collapsed before lunch. But God's faithfulness was greater than their corruption. He used Joseph to preserve the very men whose descendants would form the tribes of Israel. The promised seed would not perish in the famine because God had already sent a man ahead. Human failure can create misery, discipline, and loss, but it cannot make God forget an unconditional promise. God's covenant does not hang from the frayed thread of man's reliability.

This distinction matters because the Church has not replaced Israel, inherited Israel's national covenants, or swallowed Israel's identity like a religious corporation completing a hostile takeover. Joseph's history belongs first to the patriarchal development of the nation God promised Abraham. The preservation of Jacob's family protected the literal seed through which the twelve tribes came. Later spiritual application is legitimate, but it must not vandalize the doctrinal setting. God's providential care of Joseph teaches believers much about suffering, faithfulness, and divine overruling, but Genesis 50 is not permission to steal Israel's deed and rename the property "the Church." A man who cannot distinguish Jacob's household from the body of Christ should not advertise himself as a master of deeper truth. The same God who preserved Israel in Genesis will fulfill His promises to Israel in prophecy. His faithfulness in Egypt is evidence that His word still stands.

5. Joseph's Suffering Casts a Shadow Toward Christ

Joseph presents one of Scripture's clearest historical pictures of Jesus Christ, though the picture must not be confused with the Person. Joseph was the beloved son of his father, sent to his brethren, hated without a just cause, stripped of his garment, sold for silver, falsely accused, numbered with offenders, and later exalted to a position of authority. His brethren did not recognize him at first, while Gentiles received blessing through his exaltation. Eventually, Joseph revealed himself to his brethren, and the revelation produced grief, fear, and reconciliation. These correspondences are not an excuse for uncontrolled imagination; they arise naturally from the inspired history. The Holy Ghost placed patterns in the Bible that point forward to the greater Beloved Son. Joseph suffered and was raised

from humiliation to rule, but Jesus Christ passed through death itself and rose as the living Lord before whom every knee shall bow.

The resemblance becomes especially powerful in the matter of human intention and divine purpose. Men meant the crucifixion for evil. Religious rulers envied Christ, false witnesses accused Him, Judas sold Him, Pilate surrendered Him, soldiers mocked Him, and the crowd demanded His blood. Yet Acts 4:27–28 declares that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel gathered together “to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Their wickedness remained theirs; the saving purpose belonged to God. Calvary was neither an accident nor a last-minute adjustment after Israel rejected the King. Christ was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Men erected the cross to eliminate Him; God used that cross to provide the only sacrifice that can eliminate sin. Earth raised an instrument of shame, and heaven made it the meeting place of justice and mercy.

Joseph saved people from physical death by distributing bread; Jesus Christ gives eternal life as the Bread of Life. Joseph’s storehouses answered a temporal famine; Christ satisfies the eternal need of the soul. Joseph was unable to erase sin by his suffering, but Christ “bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” The comparison therefore rises until Joseph must step aside. A type is a signpost, not the destination. Joseph points; Christ fulfills. Joseph forgave guilty brothers; Christ shed His blood to make forgiveness righteous. Joseph descended into a pit and prison; Christ descended into death and came forth victorious. Joseph received authority under Pharaoh; Christ declared, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” Men thought they were closing Christ’s case at Calvary, but God was opening the only door of salvation. The cross looked like man’s triumph until the stone rolled away.

6. Providence Did Not Remove the Need for Repentance

Before Joseph comforted his brethren in Genesis 50, God had already dealt thoroughly with their consciences. During their journeys to Egypt, they remembered Joseph’s anguish and confessed, “We are verily guilty concerning our brother.” Judah, who had suggested selling Joseph, later offered himself as a bondman in Benjamin’s place. The brothers were brought through fear, testing, exposure, and grief before Joseph openly revealed himself.

Providence did not teach them that their crime no longer mattered because everything had worked out nicely. God’s good purpose did not cancel their need to face their guilt. One of the devil’s cheapest counterfeits of grace says, “Since God brought good from it, there is nothing to repent of.” By that reasoning, Judas deserved a medal because the betrayal preceded redemption. No, the goodness of God magnifies His mercy; it does not convert wickedness into obedience. Sin must still be confessed for what it is.

Joseph's forgiveness also did not consist of pretending the past never occurred. He named their intention accurately: "ye thought evil against me." Biblical forgiveness is not amnesia, moral confusion, or compulsory dishonesty about the wound. Joseph remembered the pit, the sale, and the lie, yet he refused to occupy God's judgment seat. "Am I in the place of God?" was not weakness; it was spiritual sanity. Personal vengeance tries to seize an office that belongs to the Lord. Romans 12:19 instructs the Church, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves," and adds, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Joseph could comfort his brethren because he trusted God with the verdict. A man who knows God sits on the throne does not need to build a smaller throne in his own heart and spend his life issuing sentences from it.

Joseph then promised, "Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones." His forgiveness took visible form in practical goodness. He did not merely announce that he felt peaceful and then leave their children to starve. He comforted them and spoke kindly unto them. That grace is striking because Joseph possessed the power to retaliate. It is easy to boast of mercy when one has no means of revenge. Joseph had soldiers, prisons, wealth, and Pharaoh's authority, yet he used his strength to nourish those who had once used their strength against him. Grace did not deny justice; Joseph entrusted final justice to God. Nor did grace approve the sin; it overcame the sin with good. His brothers had once discussed killing him while eating bread. Joseph now supplied bread to keep them alive. That is not sentimental religion. That is victory over evil without becoming evil.

7. "But God" Is Not an Excuse for Laziness or Presumption

The doctrine of providence never made Joseph passive. He resisted temptation in Potiphar's house, served faithfully in prison, interpreted dreams truthfully, advised Pharaoh wisely, stored grain diligently, administered Egypt carefully, and dealt with his brethren discerningly. He did not lie in the dungeon saying, "If God means good, I suppose someone else will handle the details." Faith in providence is not a sanctified recliner. God's sovereignty establishes the believer's labor; it does not excuse indifference. Joseph could not control the hatred of his brethren, the lie of Potiphar's wife, or the forgetfulness of the butler, but he could control whether he feared God and remained faithful where he stood. The man who trusts God does the duty plainly before him and leaves the results with the One who sees the whole road. Providence is not permission to sleep through responsibility and call the snoring faith.

Neither does Genesis 50:20 promise that every earthly story will end with the sufferer becoming prime minister. Some saints are delivered from the sword, while others are delivered through martyrdom into the presence of Christ. Hebrews 11 records both kinds of testimony. Faith conquered kingdoms, stopped lions, and escaped the edge of the sword;

faith also endured torture, imprisonment, destitution, and death. The common victory was not identical circumstances but confidence in God's word. The Church's hope is not that every pit will become a palace before supper. Our hope is that Romans 8:28 remains true: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The verse does not say all things are good. It says they work together for good under the governing purpose of God.

That truth keeps the believer from worshipping circumstances. When circumstances are pleasant, he thanks God without assuming comfort proves perfect obedience. When circumstances are painful, he searches his ways without assuming suffering proves abandonment. Joseph's life moved through sharp reversals, yet the Lord remained the one unchanging reality in every scene. Coats changed, addresses changed, masters changed, accusations changed, and positions changed, but "the LORD was with Joseph." Believers in the Church Age possess something even greater: we are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption and accepted in the beloved. Our eternal standing does not rise and fall with the morning news. The world can alter our schedule, damage our reputation, reduce our possessions, and trouble our path, but it cannot remove us from Christ. Men can shake the branches; they cannot uproot what God has planted in His Son.

Conclusion

Genesis 50:20 does not offer a sugary slogan for placing over every unexplained tragedy. It provides a granite statement about the ability of God to govern history without becoming the author of sin. Joseph's brethren thought evil, and God called it evil. Joseph suffered, and the Bible never treated his anguish as imaginary. Yet the evil intention of man could not conquer the good intention of God. The brothers were responsible for the conspiracy, but God ruled the outcome. They dug the pit, but God determined it would not be a grave. They sold the servant, but God was sending a preserver. They carried home a bloodstained coat, but God was preparing a royal garment. Human sin introduced sorrow into the story; divine providence refused to surrender the final chapter. The sentence contains no denial of evil, only the defeat of evil by a wisdom it could neither see nor overcome.

The words "but God" place a boundary around every enemy. Satan may desire, men may devise, circumstances may darken, and the flesh may tremble, but none of them possesses unlimited jurisdiction. The persecutor is not sovereign. The betrayer is not sovereign. The prison is not sovereign. The famine is not sovereign. God alone is God. This does not mean the believer will understand every event while it happens. Joseph spent years without an explanation, and Scripture never records God giving him a detailed itinerary in advance. Faithfulness came before full understanding. He had to obey in Potiphar's house without seeing the palace, resist temptation without knowing the cost,

and serve in prison while apparently forgotten. God often reveals His purpose by fulfillment rather than advance notice. He does not owe the clay a blueprint before He shapes it. The believer's duty is to trust what God has said when he cannot yet trace what God is doing.

So let evil men make their plans. Let them gather around their pits, count their silver, fabricate their evidence, and congratulate one another over a job well done. They have never written the last line of a story belonging to God. The believer must not answer their evil with compromise, bitterness, cowardice, or revenge. He must remain faithful to the Book, clean in conduct, steady in service, and confident in the Lord. One day, whether in time or at the Judgment Seat of Christ, the hidden threads will meet in the hand of the Weaver. What looked scattered will display an order that human sight could not detect. Joseph's testimony will still stand when every conspiracy has crumbled into dust: "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." Men may prepare the funeral, Satan may order the tombstone, and unbelief may close the grave—but God still reserves the right to cancel the burial.

2 of 10: The "But God" Passages – Hunted by a King, Hidden by the Almighty

Key Passage: 1 Samuel 23:14 — "And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand."

There is enough military pressure in 1 Samuel 23:14 to make David's survival appear impossible. Saul possessed the throne, the army, the intelligence network, the weapons, the official authority, and the freedom to move throughout Israel. David possessed a band of distressed men, a collection of wilderness hiding places, and a price on his head. Saul did not search for him occasionally when royal business permitted; the verse says, "Saul sought him every day." This was not a passing burst of anger that cooled by morning. It was a sustained campaign driven by envy, pride, fear, rebellion, and murderous obsession. Yet the verse does not end with Saul's search. It turns upon four words: "but God delivered him not." Saul could seek, threaten, march, surround, interrogate, and spy, but he could not take possession of the man whom God had determined to preserve. The hunt was real, but the Hunter above the hunter was greater.

The passage does not say David escaped because Saul lacked information. Saul repeatedly received reports concerning David's movements. It does not say David survived because Saul lacked manpower. In 1 Samuel 24:2, Saul selected three thousand men out of all Israel to pursue him. It does not say David was protected because Saul lacked

determination. The king sought him every day and commanded others to help locate him. Nor does Scripture reduce the matter to David's military brilliance, though David certainly behaved wisely. The final explanation is theological: "God delivered him not into his hand." Between Saul's grasp and David's life stood the invisible restraint of Almighty God. David might enter a city, flee into a wood, cross a wilderness, hide among rocks, or descend into a cave, but the true fortress was never the geography. The safest place in Israel was wherever David stood under the purpose of God.

Those four words do not make the wilderness pleasant, and they do not turn danger into make-believe. David experienced fear, exhaustion, loneliness, betrayal, uncertainty, and the constant pressure of living as a fugitive. His psalms reveal a man who cried, prayed, questioned, worshipped, and pleaded for deliverance. But he was never outside the governing hand of God. Saul could make David uncomfortable, but he could not make God unfaithful. He could chase him from the palace, but he could not chase him out of the divine purpose. He could remove David from public honor, but he could not remove the anointing Samuel had placed upon him by God's command. Men often mistake present possession for permanent ownership. Saul sat on the throne, while David slept among rocks; nevertheless, heaven had already made its choice. One man wore the crown without God's approval, and the other carried God's approval without the crown.

1. The Rejected King Hunted the Anointed Man

The conflict between Saul and David did not begin because David attempted a political takeover. David had not raised an army against the king, published a royal manifesto, or demanded that Israel recognize his anointing. He served Saul, played the harp for him, fought Israel's enemies, married into Saul's household, and behaved himself wisely. First Samuel 18:14 says, "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him." That last clause explains Saul's hostility. Saul recognized something upon David that he no longer enjoyed himself. The Lord was with David, while the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul. David's success did not create Saul's corruption; it exposed it. Light does not manufacture cockroaches when the kitchen lamp is switched on. It merely reveals what had already been crawling in the darkness. Saul hated in David the evidence of what Saul had forfeited through rebellion.

Saul's rejection had been pronounced before David's rise. In 1 Samuel 13:13–14, Samuel told Saul that his kingdom would not continue and that the Lord had sought "a man after his own heart." In 1 Samuel 15, Saul again disobeyed the word of the Lord concerning Amalek, spared what God commanded him to destroy, blamed the people, and then attempted to decorate rebellion with religious language. Samuel answered him plainly: "To obey is better than sacrifice." Saul wanted the appearance of worship without the

submission that gives worship meaning. He was willing to build an altar as long as he could remain his own authority. Religious rebellion still works that way. It brings a Bible to the ceremony, borrows God's vocabulary, sings loudly enough to drown out conviction, and then does exactly what it intended from the beginning. Saul lost the kingdom because he treated the word of God as advice that could be improved by royal judgment.

After Samuel anointed David in 1 Samuel 16, David did not immediately ascend the throne. The oil came before the crown, and the wilderness stood between them. Saul remained king in office even though God had rejected his dynasty, while David was God's selected king without yet possessing the kingdom. That tension explains the pursuit. Saul believed that if David died, the prophetic sentence against his house might somehow die with him. He was attempting to defend by murder what disobedience had already forfeited. But a spear cannot kill the word of God. Saul could throw weapons at David, order his arrest, manipulate his family, and mobilize Israel's army, yet none of those actions could restore divine approval to his house. A man may polish a rejected crown until it shines like the sun, but polish does not restore what rebellion has lost. Saul was fighting David because he was really fighting the verdict of God.

2. Saul Sought Daily, but God Restrained Him Continually

The phrase "Saul sought him every day" reveals the relentlessness of the enemy. David was not facing one dramatic confrontation followed by months of peace. The threat renewed itself with every sunrise. Somewhere in Israel, Saul was asking questions, receiving reports, moving troops, and tightening the search. David's ordinary life had been replaced by watchfulness. Every stranger could be an informer, every path could lead into an ambush, and every delay could permit Saul's men to close the distance. Yet the daily pursuit was met by daily preservation. Saul sought every day, but God withheld David every day. The enemy's persistence did not exhaust God's ability to protect. Heaven did not provide David with a thirty-day supply of mercy and then discover the prescription had expired. As often as Saul hunted, God restrained; as often as danger rose, providence remained awake.

The verse carefully says, "God delivered him not into his hand." In Scripture, to be delivered into another man's hand means to be placed under his power. Saul could approach David, threaten David, and at times nearly surround David, but he could not possess him. God had set a boundary around the outcome. The Lord did not prevent every hardship, but He prevented Saul from obtaining the final result he desired. That distinction is important. Divine preservation does not always mean distance from danger. Sometimes it means that danger comes near enough to display its teeth but is forbidden to bite. David heard the footsteps, saw the soldiers, and felt the urgency of escape. Still, Saul's hand remained empty. The king could spend Israel's military budget searching every hill in Judah, but he

could not purchase one inch of access beyond what God permitted. Omnipotence has never been impressed by troop numbers.

David's preservation therefore cannot be reduced to luck. Luck is the idol men invent when they want an effect without acknowledging the God who governed its cause. David did not happen to move at the proper time through a string of favorable accidents. The Bible repeatedly attributes his deliverance to the Lord. Psalm 54, written when the Ziphims betrayed his location to Saul, begins, "Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength." David knew that wilderness knowledge, military judgment, and quick movement were useful, but none of them was his ultimate salvation. He did not worship the cave because one cave concealed him, nor did he build an altar to cleverness because one decision succeeded. Means are not the Master. God may use a forest, a rock, a warning, a messenger, or an enemy invasion, but the instrument must never steal the glory belonging to the Hand that employed it.

3. Keilah Proved That Gratitude Is a Frail Fortress

Earlier in 1 Samuel 23, David learned that the Philistines were fighting against Keilah and robbing the threshingfloors. He inquired of the Lord and received the command, "Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah." His men were afraid, so David inquired again. God repeated the promise: "Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand." David obeyed, defeated the Philistines, brought away their cattle, and "saved the inhabitants of Keilah." He had every natural reason to believe the rescued city would become a secure place of refuge. These people had watched him risk his life and the lives of his men to save their food supply and families. Surely gratitude would shut the gates against Saul. But gratitude is a poor lock when fear carries the key. The citizens who benefited from David's courage were prepared to surrender him when Saul appeared.

When Saul heard that David had entered Keilah, he declared, "God hath delivered him into mine hand." That statement is one of the chapter's sharpest ironies. The king who had rejected God's word now attempted to interpret circumstances as God's approval. Keilah was a city with gates and bars, so Saul assumed David had trapped himself. Rebellion loves to call favorable circumstances providence. If the road is smooth, the money arrives, the vote succeeds, or the opposition weakens, carnal religion immediately prints a certificate announcing divine approval. Saul had a city map and a military advantage, so he dragged God's name into his murder plot as though the Almighty had enlisted in his army. But circumstances do not correct Scripture. Samuel had already declared God's judgment upon Saul and God's purpose concerning David. No convenient city wall could reverse that verdict.

David did not assume that Keilah's inhabitants would protect him. He asked God directly whether Saul would come and whether the men of Keilah would deliver him up. The Lord answered both questions: Saul would come, and Keilah would betray him. David and his men departed before the trap closed. This was not cowardice; it was guidance. Faith does not require a man to remain inside a snare after God has shown him the door. David had saved Keilah, but he did not demand that God preserve him through the loyalty of Keilah. That distinction spared his life. Believers often decide in advance which person, institution, job, church, or relationship God must use, and then collapse when that chosen instrument fails. David's trust was not in the grateful memory of the city; it was in the present direction of the Lord. Keilah could forget its deliverer, but God did not forget His servant.

4. Jonathan Strengthened David's Hand in God

First Samuel 23:15 says David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life and that David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood. Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David "into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." Jonathan could not remove Saul from the throne, dismiss the army, or give David immediate possession of the kingdom. What he could do was direct David's heart back to the certainty of God's word. True spiritual encouragement does not pretend the wilderness is a garden or tell the hunted man that his danger exists only in his thinking. Jonathan acknowledged the danger and strengthened David in God. Biblical comfort is not a handful of cotton stuffed into a man's ears so he cannot hear the approaching army. It is confidence in the character and promise of God while the army is still approaching.

Jonathan told David, "Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee." That was exactly the issue raised in verse 14. Saul wanted David in his hand, but Jonathan declared that Saul's hand would fail. He continued, "thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth." Jonathan believed God's verdict even though it displaced his own natural expectation. As Saul's son, he was the apparent heir to the throne, yet he did not fight to preserve a position God had assigned to David. Saul grasped for a dynasty God had rejected; Jonathan surrendered a crown God had not given him. The rebellious father spent his strength resisting God's will, while the submissive son found peace agreeing with it. A man saves himself much misery when he stops applying for offices heaven never advertised as vacant.

Jonathan's words also reveal that Saul knew the truth he resisted. The king's persecution was not born from innocent ignorance. He understood that David would reign, yet he continued trying to prevent it. Knowledge alone does not produce obedience. A man may recognize the truth, fear the truth, discuss the truth, and still hate the truth because it threatens his pride. Saul's problem was not a shortage of evidence; it was a rebellious

heart. Jonathan responded differently to the same revelation. He and David made a covenant before the Lord, and Jonathan returned to his house while David remained in the wood. The circumstances did not immediately change, but David had been strengthened. Sometimes God delivers a man from trouble, and sometimes He sends a faithful brother into the wood to remind him that trouble cannot overturn the promise. Both are works of providence.

5. The Ziphites Had Information but Not the Final Authority

After Jonathan departed, the Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and reported David's location. They said, "Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah?" They offered to track David's movements and deliver him into the king's hand. These were not Philistines helping a foreign ruler against Israel. The Ziphites belonged to Judah, David's own tribe, yet they volunteered to betray him. Family connection does not guarantee spiritual loyalty. Men often stand nearest to the truth geographically while remaining miles from it in heart. The Ziphites knew where David was hiding but did not understand where God had placed him in the divine purpose. They had excellent intelligence and miserable discernment. A man may know every trail through the wilderness and still be utterly lost concerning the will of God.

Saul blessed the Ziphites "of the LORD" for showing compassion upon him. There is the old rebel again, sprinkling God's name over his wickedness like a priest shaking holy water over a stolen automobile. Saul portrayed himself as the victim needing compassion while he hunted an innocent man. Sin possesses a remarkable ability to reverse the labels. The persecutor calls himself persecuted, the tyrant complains of mistreatment, and the liar speaks solemnly about fairness. Saul told the Ziphites to identify David's haunts carefully because he had heard that David dealt "very subtilly." In Saul's account, David's survival became craftiness rather than divine preservation. Unbelief always searches for a natural explanation when God embarrasses its plans. If the enemy cannot deny the escape, he will attribute it to cunning, coincidence, or corruption—anything except the Lord.

The Ziphites' report tightened the danger, but information did not equal authority. They could tell Saul where David had been, study where he usually went, and help narrow the search, but they could not command the next movement of providence. Psalm 54 identifies this betrayal directly: "The Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?" David answered their treachery by appealing to God: "Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul." He did not deny that strangers had risen against him or that oppressors sought after his soul. He placed their hostility beneath the greater fact that God was his helper. Informers may sell a location, but they cannot sell the man

God is keeping. They may furnish the enemy with a map, but they cannot draw a road through the Almighty's restraint.

6. At the Rock of Division, Providence Split the Pursuit

Saul and his men eventually came frighteningly close to David in the wilderness of Maon. First Samuel 23:26 says Saul went on one side of the mountain while David and his men were on the other. David hurried to escape because Saul and his forces were surrounding them. This was not a distant theoretical danger. The king had maneuvered his army into position, and the wilderness appeared ready to become a net. From the human viewpoint, the hunt was ending. David had terrain behind him, soldiers around him, and very little time before the circle closed. Yet the promise of verse 14 still stood: "but God delivered him not into his hand." God did not need to transport David miraculously through the air. He only needed to govern one event beyond the mountain that Saul could not afford to ignore.

A messenger arrived and told Saul, "Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land." Saul was forced to abandon the pursuit and confront the national threat. The timing was not luck. The Philistines moved, the report travelled, the messenger found Saul, and the news arrived at the exact moment David needed relief. God used Israel's enemy to interrupt Israel's rebellious king. Saul had organized a large search operation, but one urgent message folded it up like a tent in a storm. The king who thought he controlled the hunt discovered that he could not control the day's agenda. Providence can ring the bell in another county and stop the army at your door. God did not ask Saul's permission to rearrange his priorities. One moment David was nearly surrounded; the next, Saul was marching away because God had placed another fire behind him.

The place was therefore called Sela-hammahlekoth, a name connected with division or separation. The rock marked the place where Saul was divided from David and the pursuit was broken. David would still face danger afterward, but that particular snare had failed. God's deliverances often leave memorials because frightened men are prone to remember the army and forget the interruption. The believer remembers how close the enemy came, how narrow the path looked, and how weak he felt; he must also remember that the hand of God was no less present because the rescue arrived through an ordinary messenger. Not every deliverance comes with thunder, angels, and a sea split down the middle. Sometimes God saves a man by making an enemy invade at the proper hour. The miracle is not always in the appearance of the instrument but in the absolute perfection of its timing.

7. God Preserved the Man Through Whom the King Would Come

David had to be preserved because God had appointed him to rule Israel. Samuel's anointing was not ceremonial guesswork. First Samuel 16:13 says, "the Spirit of the LORD

came upon David from that day forward.” Saul could delay David’s public accession, but he could not cancel the divine choice. The wilderness years formed part of David’s preparation. Before he governed a nation, he learned to depend upon God when he could not govern his own movements. Before he sat upon a throne, he lived among distressed, indebted, and discontented men. Before he wore royal garments, he learned the landscape of caves, woods, mountains, and strongholds. Saul viewed the wilderness as a killing ground; God used it as a training ground. The Lord was not merely preserving David from death. He was preparing David for life as a king under whose authority Israel would be united.

The Davidic covenant would later be formally declared in 2 Samuel 7, where God promised to establish David’s house, kingdom, and throne. That covenant ultimately reaches beyond Solomon to the Lord Jesus Christ, “made of the seed of David according to the flesh,” as Romans 1:3 declares. Matthew 1:1 introduces Him as “the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Saul did not understand the full prophetic reach of the life he was trying to extinguish. His spear was aimed at more than a young fugitive; it was being thrown against the historical line through which God had determined to bring Israel’s Messiah. The devil has always hated the promised seed and fought the line connected with God’s revelation. Pharaoh attacked Hebrew sons, Athaliah attempted to destroy the royal seed, Herod slaughtered children in Bethlehem, and Saul pursued David. Hell keeps attacking genealogies because God keeps His promises through history.

The earthly throne promised to David must not be dissolved into a vague spiritual metaphor or transferred wholesale to the Church. Jesus Christ will literally reign as David’s greater Son, fulfilling the promises God made to Israel. The Church is His body and possesses heavenly blessings in Him, but it does not cancel Israel, replace David’s throne, or spiritualize the kingdom into denominational influence. God preserved David because His purposes concerning Israel and the coming King were fixed. Saul’s failure to capture David therefore bears witness to the reliability of biblical prophecy. If God could not preserve the man, the promise would fail. But the man survived because the promise could not fail. Saul’s army was not merely chasing a fugitive through Judah; it was colliding with the faithfulness of God. An army may trample bushes, search caves, and surround mountains, but it cannot arrest a covenant.

Conclusion

First Samuel 23:14 sets human determination against divine restraint: “Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.” Saul’s pursuit was deliberate, daily, armed, informed, and officially sanctioned. David’s danger was immediate, exhausting, and often visible. Nevertheless, the final outcome did not belong to the man with the

crown. Saul could control soldiers, reward informers, question citizens, and march through the wilderness, but he could not make God surrender David. That is the humiliation of human pride throughout Scripture. Men imagine that authority, money, weapons, popularity, and organization make them sovereign. They build a machine large enough to frighten everyone within sight and then discover that one quiet sentence from God has already fixed the boundary of its success. Saul sought him every day. The Bible grants the hunter his full activity. Then “but God” enters the verse and leaves his hand empty.

The passage does not promise Church Age believers that no enemy will ever imprison, injure, or kill them. David occupied a unique place in God’s dealings with Israel and in the royal line leading to Christ. The doctrinal setting must remain intact. Yet the God who governed David’s wilderness remains faithful to every promise He has made to those who are in Christ. A saved believer is sealed “unto the day of redemption,” accepted in the beloved, and kept by the power of God. The enemy may attack his testimony, trouble his circumstances, tempt his flesh, and even destroy his body, but he cannot reverse the new birth, break the seal of the Holy Spirit, or separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Eternal security does not rest upon the believer’s ability to outrun Saul. It rests upon the inability of any created thing to reach through Christ and steal what belongs to Him.

Therefore, when the wilderness closes in and the enemy seems to know every hiding place, do not measure the faithfulness of God by the distance between you and Saul. Measure the enemy by the distance between Saul and the throne of God. David was hunted, but he was not forsaken; pressured, but not surrendered; hidden in the wilderness, but visible to heaven. Saul had the palace, yet could not secure his dynasty. David had a cave, yet carried the promise. The safest man in Israel was not the king sleeping behind guarded walls but the fugitive sleeping beneath the purpose of Almighty God. Let the enemies search every mountain, question every Ziphite, close every road, and surround every rock. If God has not delivered His servant into their hand, their fingers will close on air. Men may organize the hunt, but God still decides who is caught.

3 of 10: The “But God” Passages – The Fool Whose Calendar Ended That Night

Key Passage: Luke 12:20 — “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”

Luke 12:20 is where a prosperous man’s private speech collides with the public verdict of God. The man had surveyed his crops, calculated his capacity, approved a construction project, planned his retirement, and promised himself “many years” of ease. Then God

entered the conversation with two words the man had excluded from every calculation: “But God.” His fields had produced abundantly, his business had expanded, and his old barns had become too small. According to every earthly measurement, he was succeeding. According to God, he was a fool. The man believed he was planning the next stage of his life; in reality, he was arranging possessions he would never live to enjoy. He had estimated the size of his harvest but never measured the brevity of his life. His calendar was crowded with future pleasure, but heaven had written one final appointment across that very night.

The rich fool appears to be a careful planner, yet Jesus Christ exposes him as a man who planned around the only certainty that mattered. He knew how to enlarge a barn but not how to prepare a soul. He could forecast agricultural abundance but not the arrival of death. He made provision for goods, storage, food, drink, and leisure, but made none for standing before God. There was nothing wrong with farming, harvesting, constructing barns, or handling an increase responsibly. The sin lay in a life built upon covetousness, self-sufficiency, and complete practical atheism. God gave the ground its fertility, sent the rain, sustained the man’s breath, and permitted the increase, yet the rich man spoke as though heaven had contributed nothing. He had reduced God to silence in his plans, so God broke that silence with a verdict: “Thou fool.” Heaven’s accounting department found a bankrupt soul standing beside overflowing barns.

The passage strikes modern man where he keeps his most guarded idol: the assumption that tomorrow belongs to him. Men schedule years they have never received, spend money they have not yet earned, and promise themselves pleasures they may never reach. They insure the house, insure the automobile, insure the business, insure the jewellery, and then leave the soul uninsured against eternity. They prepare for college, marriage, promotion, retirement, and burial expenses, but do not prepare for judgment. Death is treated like an impolite salesman who can be ignored by refusing to answer the door. Yet death does not need an invitation, an appointment, or permission. When God says, “This night,” the finest calendar becomes wastepaper. The rich fool’s tragedy was not that his plans were too large. His tragedy was that his God was too small, his soul was forgotten, and his imagined future had no room for the One who owned his breath.

1. A Family Dispute Exposed the Root of Covetousness

The parable arose from a request made while Jesus was teaching a multitude. A man interrupted Him and said, “Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.” He did not ask for truth, repentance, forgiveness, or eternal life. He wanted Christ to enter a family property dispute and force his brother to produce his share. The request may have sounded reasonable, but the Lord saw beneath the legal question to the spiritual

disease. Jesus replied, “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” He had not come at His first advent to operate a claims court for squabbling heirs. The man wanted the authority of Christ placed behind his financial demand without submitting his heart to the teaching of Christ. He wanted the Lord as an attorney, not as Master. Religious men still enjoy recruiting God as legal counsel while refusing to let Him examine the client.

Jesus then addressed the entire company: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness.” He did not merely correct the man’s procedure; He exposed the sin motivating the dispute. Covetousness is not confined to wealthy men surrounded by luxury. A poor man can worship money he does not possess as fiercely as a rich man worships money he does. The sin consists in an unlawful craving for what belongs to another or in fastening the heart upon material increase as though possession could produce life. The man in the crowd may have believed his greatest problem was a selfish brother. Christ revealed that the more dangerous problem was a covetous heart. Men prefer a ruling that changes somebody else’s behavior; God issues a verdict that exposes their own. It is easier to demand half an estate than to admit that the estate has become lord of the heart.

The warning is sharp because covetousness frequently wears respectable clothing. Drunkenness may stagger down the street, but covetousness sits upright in the office, balances its accounts, and receives compliments for ambition. It can hide behind words such as security, opportunity, advancement, and responsibility while silently placing material increase above obedience to God. Colossians 3:5 calls covetousness “idolatry.” An idol does not require a carved face or a pagan temple; it only requires the allegiance that belongs to God. When money determines a man’s peace, identity, decisions, morality, and hope, he has built an altar whether he admits it or not. He may never bow his knee physically, because modern idols are considerate enough to fit inside a wallet. Christ therefore said, “Take heed.” Covetousness is dangerous precisely because a man can feed it every day while congratulating himself for being practical.

2. A Man’s Life Does Not Consist in His Possessions

Jesus gave the governing truth before telling the parable: “For a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” That sentence overturns the world’s method of measuring human worth. Society measures men by the address of the house, the number in the account, the title on the door, the car in the driveway, and the possessions accumulated behind locked gates. Christ measures from eternity. A man may own much and possess no wisdom; he may command employees and remain a slave to sin; he may have property in several counties and no dwelling prepared beyond the grave. Possessions can improve comfort, widen opportunity, and accomplish useful work, but they cannot create life, cleanse sin, quiet a guilty conscience, or purchase one extra

heartbeat when God requires the soul. A full bank account has never bribed death into postponing an appointment.

The rich man's ground "brought forth plentifully." Notice that the abundance began in the ground, not in the man. He did not manufacture soil, sunlight, seed, rain, seasons, or life. He worked within a creation he did not originate and received an increase he could not independently produce. Yet not one word of thanksgiving appears in his speech. He spoke of "my fruits," "my barns," "my goods," and "my soul," as though he had invented agriculture and issued the sun its morning instructions. Prosperity often persuades a man that he is self-made when he is standing upon a thousand mercies he never supplied. Deuteronomy 8:18 warned Israel, "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." Pride accepts the gift, erases the Giver's name, and then hangs a portrait of itself in the place where gratitude should have stood.

The Bible does not condemn wealth merely for being wealth. Abraham had great substance, Job possessed much, David gathered riches, and Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man who honoured Christ. The issue is not whether possessions are in a man's hand but whether they occupy his heart. First Timothy 6:17 instructs those who are rich in this world not to be highminded or to trust "in uncertain riches, but in the living God." Riches are uncertain because they can disappear, depreciate, be stolen, become useless, or remain behind when the owner dies. God is living, eternal, and unchanging. Trusting wealth is like fastening an anchor to a cloud and then boasting about stability. A man may use money wisely, give generously, provide responsibly, and enjoy God's provision thankfully. But the moment wealth becomes his confidence, his prosperity has begun preaching a funeral sermon over his soul.

3. He Enlarged His Barns While Neglecting His Soul

The rich man faced what appeared to be a practical question: "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" His existing storage could not contain the harvest. The obvious alternatives included distributing part of the abundance, assisting the poor, paying labourers generously, helping relatives, or using the increase for some purpose beyond himself. None entered his recorded reasoning. His difficulty was not that he possessed too little room; it was that his heart possessed too little generosity. He viewed abundance solely through the question of personal storage. God had permitted his fields to overflow, but his thoughts never overflowed toward anyone else. The man's vocabulary circles endlessly around himself: "I," "my," "I will," "my fruits," "my barns," "my goods," and "my soul." He held a private board meeting in which greed served as chairman, selfishness kept the minutes, and God was not invited.

His solution was demolition and expansion: “I will pull down my barns, and build greater.” There is nothing inherently sinful about replacing inadequate buildings with larger ones. The folly lies in believing that enlarged storage solves the deepest problem of life. His barns had become too small for his crops, but his spiritual vision was too small for eternity. He could imagine greater buildings but not a greater accountability. He had architectural plans for grain and no preparation for judgment. Modern civilization understands him perfectly. It builds larger houses to contain more objects, rents storage units for the overflow, then buys insurance to protect things it rarely uses. Meanwhile, the soul is neglected like an abandoned shed at the back of the property. Man has developed climate-controlled storage for furniture, documents, automobiles, wine, and clothing, but death still arrives to collect the owner at room temperature.

The man said, “There will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.” He intended to place everything where he could count it, control it, and use it for himself. Yet the word “all” exposes the captivity of his heart. Nothing in his plan belonged to God, neighbour, stranger, widow, or poor. His whole increase would be gathered into his own enlarged system. Proverbs 11:24 warns of one who “withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.” The rich fool’s barns would be full by earthly measurement, but he himself was already poor toward God. Money is a useful servant and a merciless master. It will help a righteous man feed others, print truth, support his household, and advance honest work; but once enthroned, it demands every thought and still sends its worshipper into eternity empty-handed. His barns were expanding because his soul had been shrinking.

4. “Many Years” Collided With “This Night”

After planning his barns, the rich man turned to his soul and said, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years.” That sentence contains a fatal confusion. Goods may sustain the body for a period, but they cannot satisfy or secure the soul. Grain can fill the stomach; it cannot forgive sin. Wine may warm the body; it cannot cool the tongue in hell. Money may hire physicians; it cannot purchase resurrection. The man spoke to his soul as though the soul lived on warehouse inventory. Christ had already asked in Mark 8:36, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” The rich fool had not gained the whole world, only a successful harvest, yet he was preparing to lose the one possession whose value exceeded everything he could store. He fed his barns and starved his eternity.

The words “many years” reveal his presumption. He assumed continued life because he possessed continued supplies. His financial provision extended far into the future, so he imagined his heartbeat had signed the same contract. James 4 rebukes such boasting: “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city,” continue there a year,

buy, sell, and gain. The answer is brutal in its simplicity: “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.” Life is “even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” The rich man planned many years without possessing tomorrow morning. He had a long-range financial strategy and a short-range pulse. Presumption always writes its plans in permanent ink on paper God has never promised to preserve.

God answered “many years” with “this night.” The contrast is the blade of the parable. The rich man spoke as though time belonged to him; God named the hour when time would release him into eternity. Death did not wait for the new barns to be completed, the goods to be arranged, or the retirement celebration to begin. The man may have gone to bed that evening satisfied with his plans, never imagining that his pillow was the last earthly place his head would rest. “This night” means that the remaining distance was measured in hours, not decades. When God shortens a man’s calendar, no accountant can lengthen it. Doctors may attempt treatment, family members may plead, and lawyers may update documents, but when the divine requirement arrives, the appointment stands. Death is never early when God has fixed the hour.

5. God Called Him a Fool While the World Called Him Successful

“But God said unto him, Thou fool.” God did not call the man unlucky, shortsighted, poorly advised, or insufficiently diversified. He called him a fool. In Scripture, folly is moral and spiritual before it is intellectual. Psalm 14:1 says, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” The rich man never verbally denied God’s existence, but he constructed his plans exactly as if God did not exist. Practical atheism can occupy a church pew, repeat religious language, and still conduct life without reference to the Lord. A man does not have to publish a book denying God to live like an atheist. He only has to make decisions as though money is provider, pleasure is purpose, self is owner, and death is too distant to matter. The rich fool’s creed was written in barns instead of books, but God read it accurately.

Earth would probably have called him prudent, industrious, visionary, and financially independent. His neighbours may have admired the harvest, contractors welcomed the expansion, and local businessmen anticipated increased trade. Had he delivered a speech about his success, someone might have invited him to teach a seminar on abundance. Heaven interrupted the applause with one word: fool. God’s verdict frequently contradicts man’s award ceremony. The world honours men for acquiring what they cannot keep, applauds them for ignoring what they cannot escape, and calls them successful when they are one heartbeat from eternal bankruptcy. It is possible to receive flattering introductions on earth and a devastating introduction before God. Human praise is a thin blanket for the day of judgment. It may warm vanity for an evening, but it cannot cover one unforgiven sin.

The rich man was a fool because he mistook stewardship for ownership, provision for permanence, comfort for security, and possessions for life. He treated his soul as property under his command, saying, “my soul,” but God demonstrated who held the final claim. The man could address his soul, yet he could not retain it. He could promise it ease, yet he could not protect it through the night. Ecclesiastes repeatedly exposes the vanity of labouring to accumulate wealth that must be left to another. A man may spend his whole life guarding possessions, only for death to change every lock without consulting him. The fool says, “These things are mine.” Death replies, “Not any longer.” God does not forbid responsible ownership on earth, but He does forbid the delusion that temporary possession makes a man lord over life.

6. The Soul Was Required and the Goods Were Left Behind

God said, “This night thy soul shall be required of thee.” The language is not that the man volunteered his soul, surrendered it at leisure, or negotiated the terms of departure. It was required. He had lived as though his soul belonged absolutely to himself, but the summons revealed that he was accountable to God. Hebrews 9:27 declares, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Death is an appointment followed by judgment, not extinction, reincarnation, soul sleep, or escape into nothingness. The body returns to the earth, but the conscious soul continues. The rich man’s earthly life ended, but his existence did not. His goods remained in the barn while he entered the realm where stored grain could render no assistance. The man who had calculated everything discovered that eternity does not accept earthly currency.

The question then came: “Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” Death transfers possession with ruthless efficiency. The barns, fields, grain, contracts, tools, furniture, clothing, and accounts pass into other hands. Heirs divide them, governments tax them, buyers purchase them, and strangers may eventually possess what the deceased once guarded anxiously. Psalm 49:16–17 warns, “Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away.” A funeral procession may include expensive automobiles, but the hearse still arrives empty of earthly treasure. Men sometimes joke that they have never seen a trailer behind a hearse. The reason is not that nobody wanted to bring one. It is that the border of death has the strictest customs inspection in existence: every earthly possession is refused entry.

The final question also exposes the uncertainty of legacy. The rich man assumed his goods would serve his pleasure for years, but another person would determine their use. That person might waste in months what he gathered over decades. Ecclesiastes 2:18–19 describes the grief of leaving one’s labour to the man who comes afterward, not knowing

whether he will be wise or a fool. The rich man controlled his plans only until his soul was required. Afterward, his will could distribute legal ownership, but it could not supervise every decision or reclaim a single object. The only riches that survive death are riches laid up toward God. Earthly assets can be used for eternal purposes while a man lives, but they cannot be converted after he dies. The grave closes the account of stewardship. Whatever good was going to be done with those possessions had to be done before “this night.”

7. Rich Toward God Does Not Mean Purchasing Salvation

Jesus concluded, “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” The contrast is not between owning nothing and owning much; it is between living for self and living in accountable relationship to God. The condemned man laid up treasure “for himself.” His possessions formed a closed circle with self at the centre. To be rich toward God is to recognize Him as Owner, Provider, Judge, and the only secure object of trust. It means valuing what God values, using temporal resources under His authority, and understanding that eternity outweighs every earthly balance sheet. But no sinner purchases salvation by giving money away. Charity cannot wash out sin, and generosity cannot substitute for the blood of Jesus Christ. A man could empty every barn into the houses of the poor and remain lost if he rejects the Saviour.

The historical setting must be respected. Jesus was speaking during His earthly ministry to Israel before the cross, exposing covetousness and calling men to reckon with God’s kingdom and coming judgment. The complete gospel later revealed for the Church declares that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,” was buried, and rose again the third day. Salvation in this present dispensation is “by grace...through faith,” “not of works, lest any man should boast.” The rich fool was not lost because his barns exceeded a permitted size, nor would he have been saved by reducing the square footage. His speech revealed a heart living without God. Today, eternal life is received by trusting the finished work of Jesus Christ, not by balancing material assets against charitable deeds. Heaven is not running a financial aid program for respectable sinners.

Once saved, however, a believer should not imitate the fool’s use of temporal things. First Timothy 6 instructs the rich to “do good,” to be “rich in good works,” ready to distribute, and willing to communicate. These works do not secure eternal life; they follow from possessing it. A saved man can use money to provide for his household, assist those in need, support sound gospel work, spread the Scriptures, and serve the local church. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, his service will be examined for reward, not to determine whether Christ’s blood was sufficient to save him. Grace removes boasting, but it does not sanctify selfishness. The believer knows that his earthly goods are tools, not treasure; servants, not

masters; temporary deposits, not permanent possessions. A barn is useful when kept beneath God. It becomes an idol when a man stores his soul inside it.

Conclusion

The rich fool made one final mistake that gathered all the others together: he believed he possessed more time. He had goods for many years, so he promised himself many years. He planned to eat, drink, and be merry as though pleasure could be scheduled indefinitely. “But God” shattered the fantasy. God did not consult the harvest report, inspect the new construction plans, or ask whether the man’s retirement arrangements were complete. He said, “This night.” That sentence ended the calendar, silenced the private speech, cancelled the leisure, and transferred the property. The man who believed he controlled tomorrow did not control midnight. His crops had reached maturity, his business had reached prosperity, and his life had reached its appointed end. He was prepared for abundance and unprepared for eternity. A crowded barn could not add one minute to an empty soul.

The parable therefore demands more than admiration for its clever reversal. It demands that every reader face the same God who spoke to the fool. Death remains certain, judgment remains appointed, possessions remain temporary, and the soul remains beyond price. No man knows whether his calendar contains decades, months, days, or hours. This does not mean believers should refuse to plan, save, build, work, or prepare responsibly. James 4 does not condemn planning; it condemns planning without submission to God: “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” Those words are not a superstitious phrase attached to careless speech. They are the confession that life is borrowed, opportunity is granted, and every future day remains under divine authority. Wise planning bends the knee. Foolish planning assumes the throne.

The answer is not to become morbid, fearful, or paralysed by uncertainty. The answer is to be ready. The sinner must quit trusting wealth, religion, morality, or time and trust the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sins and rose again. The believer must hold earthly things loosely, serve faithfully, give wisely, live cleanly, and labour with eternity in view. One day, “many years” will narrow to “this night” for every man unless the Lord first catches away His Church. When that hour arrives, titles, property, accounts, and possessions will fall from the hands that gripped them. Only what was settled with God will matter. The fool prepared a place for everything except his soul. He built larger barns but never opened the door to eternity. He owned enough to impress a city, yet lacked what was needed to survive one sentence from God.

4 of 10: The “But God” Passages – Rome Sealed the Tomb, but God Raised the King

Key Passage: Acts 13:29–30 — “And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead:”

Acts 13:29 closes like a funeral record. Everything appears settled. The rulers at Jerusalem condemned Jesus Christ, Pilate authorized His execution, Roman soldiers fastened Him to the cross, death took place publicly, His body was removed from the tree, and He was laid in a sepulchre. The stone stood between the living and the dead, while His enemies congratulated themselves that the voice troubling Jerusalem had finally been silenced. Then verse 30 opens with heaven’s interruption: “But God raised him from the dead.” Men supplied the cross, the nails, the spear, the grave, the stone, and the guard. God supplied the resurrection. Earth had rendered its verdict upon the Son of God; heaven overturned it on the third day. Religion rejected Him, government executed Him, disciples mourned Him, and death received Him—but God refused to allow corruption to touch the Holy One.

The contrast could not be sharper. Verse 29 records what men did with Christ; verse 30 records what God did. Men fulfilled the Scriptures while attempting to destroy the One of whom the Scriptures spoke. They acted from envy, hatred, unbelief, cowardice, and political convenience, yet their wicked hands could not escape the boundaries of divine prophecy. When they had accomplished everything permitted them, they placed His body in the tomb and reached the limit of human authority. They could kill the body, seal the entrance, position guards, and publish lies afterward, but resurrection lay outside their jurisdiction. Rome could issue death sentences; it could not issue an order binding the Prince of Life to the grave. The stone was heavy enough to discourage the disciples and satisfy the rulers, but it was not heavy enough to hold down the purpose of Almighty God.

The resurrection is not an ornamental doctrine placed beside the cross to brighten the Christian message. It is God’s public declaration that Jesus Christ is exactly who He claimed to be, that His sacrifice was accepted, that death was conquered, and that every promise concerning Him stands. Without the resurrection, the cross would be interpreted as the defeat of another rejected teacher. With the resurrection, Calvary is revealed as the altar upon which the Lamb of God paid for sin. First Corinthians 15:17 says, “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” Christianity does not survive upon moral lessons extracted from a dead martyr. It stands upon an empty tomb occupied for three days by the crucified Son of God. Men wrote the obituary on Friday, but God published the correction before sunrise on the first day of the week.

1. Paul Preached the Resurrection From Israel’s Scriptures

Acts 13 records Paul's sermon in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. He addressed "Men of Israel, and ye that fear God," beginning with God's historical dealings with Israel. He spoke of the fathers, the deliverance from Egypt, the wilderness, the land of Canaan, the judges, Saul, and David. This was not a speech floating free from biblical history. Paul located Jesus Christ within the promises God had made to Israel. From David's seed, "according to his promise," God raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus. The resurrection message did not appear as a foreign philosophy imported into Scripture after an unfortunate crucifixion. It stood at the appointed end of a prophetic road running through Israel's history. The Old Testament was not a collection of disconnected religious memories. It pointed toward the coming King whom Israel's rulers failed to recognize.

Paul declared that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their rulers fulfilled the voices of the prophets because they knew neither Christ nor the Scriptures read every sabbath day. That is one of the Bible's sharpest exposures of religious blindness. These men possessed the law, heard the prophets, kept the calendar, maintained the ceremonies, wore the robes, and occupied the offices. Yet when the One foretold by their Scriptures stood before them, they condemned Him. They could read Isaiah aloud without recognizing the Man of sorrows. They could discuss Moses while rejecting the Prophet of whom Moses wrote. They could polish the lampstand while refusing the Light. Religion without faith in the word of God is perfectly capable of holding a Bible in one hand and a hammer for the nails in the other.

Paul said, "though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain." Christ's innocence did not prevent their demand; it intensified their guilt. Pilate repeatedly acknowledged that he found no fault in Him. Judas confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood. The dying thief testified that Jesus had done nothing amiss. The centurion said, "Certainly this was a righteous man." Heaven, earth, a traitor, a criminal, and a Roman officer all supplied testimony, while the religious rulers continued shouting for crucifixion. Their problem was not lack of evidence but hatred of the truth. Unbelief likes to advertise itself as an honest investigator, but at Calvary the investigator arrived with the verdict written in advance. When evidence threatened the desired conclusion, they nailed the evidence to a tree.

2. The Cross Displayed Man's Verdict and God's Purpose

Crucifixion was designed to shame, torment, and publicly destroy the condemned. Jesus Christ was stripped, mocked, crowned with thorns, beaten, and fastened between criminals. The inscription above Him identified Him as the King of the Jews, though Rome intended it as the statement of His charge. Passersby reviled Him, rulers derided Him, and soldiers gambled for His garments beneath the cross. To the natural eye, Calvary appeared

to prove that His claims had failed. He had healed others, yet did not come down. He had spoken of a kingdom, yet hung beneath Roman authority. He had raised the dead, yet yielded up His own spirit. But appearances were preaching a false sermon. Christ did not remain on the cross because He lacked power to descend. He remained because no sinner could be saved if He refused the cup.

Acts 2:23 explains the two sides of Calvary: Christ was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” yet taken and slain “by wicked hands.” God’s purpose did not make wicked hands innocent, and man’s wickedness did not make the cross an accident. The rulers intended to eliminate Christ; God intended to provide the sacrifice promised before the world began. Isaiah 53:10 had declared, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.” That does not mean the Father delighted in the cruelty of men. It means the offering of the sinless Substitute accomplished the righteous purpose of redemption. Men saw an execution; God saw the Lamb bearing sin. Hell saw a victim; heaven saw a voluntary sacrifice. The devil saw a closed case and apparently neglected to read the prophecy concerning the third day.

Christ’s death was real, substitutionary, and sufficient. First Peter 2:24 says He “bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” Second Corinthians 5:21 declares that God made Him “to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” He did not die merely to provide an example of courage or to demonstrate that love endures suffering. He died for sins. The righteous judgment that guilty men deserved fell upon the sinless Son who willingly took their place. Salvation is therefore not God overlooking sin with a sentimental shrug. At Calvary, justice was satisfied rather than suspended. The cross shows that sin is too terrible for God to ignore and that His grace is great enough for Christ to bear its penalty. Mercy did not climb over justice; it came through a sacrifice that fulfilled it.

3. The Burial Closed Every Door to the Swoon and Fraud Theories

Acts 13:29 says, “they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.” The burial matters because the gospel concerns an actual death followed by an actual resurrection. Joseph of Arimathaea obtained the body from Pilate, and Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloes. They wound the body in linen clothes with the spices and placed it in a new tomb. Christ did not faint upon the cross, revive in the coolness of the sepulchre, unwrap Himself, move the stone, overpower the guards, and then persuade the disciples that He had conquered death. That worn-out invention requires more faith than the resurrection and possesses none of its evidence. Roman executioners understood death. The spear thrust into His side brought forth blood and water. Pilate confirmed the death before releasing the body. The tomb received no recovering patient. It received the crucified Christ.

The chief priests and Pharisees remembered Christ's prediction that He would rise again, even while the disciples struggled to understand it. They asked Pilate to secure the tomb lest the disciples steal the body and claim resurrection. Pilate answered, "Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can." They sealed the stone and set the watch. That final phrase—"as sure as ye can"—deserves to be framed beside the empty tomb. Men did everything human authority could do. They selected the place, secured the entrance, marked the seal, stationed guards, and satisfied themselves that the dead Man would remain where they had placed Him. Rome and religion joined hands to make a grave secure against the Lord of life. It was the most carefully supervised failure in history.

The sealed tomb removed every reasonable opportunity for fraud, while the resurrection exposed the guards and rulers to public embarrassment. When the angel descended, the keepers shook and became as dead men. The living Christ arose while armed soldiers collapsed like corpses outside His tomb. Afterward, the chief priests paid the soldiers to say the disciples had stolen the body while they slept. That explanation limps on both legs. Sleeping witnesses cannot testify to the identity of thieves, and Roman guards who neglected their duty would not normally receive money and protection from the men demanding security. Moreover, terrified disciples were in no condition to overpower soldiers and stage a resurrection. The lie was not produced by lack of evidence; it was produced because the evidence had become intolerable. When unbelief cannot keep Christ inside the tomb, it hires a public-relations department to explain why He is missing.

4. God Raised the Same Jesus Bodily From the Dead

"But God raised him from the dead" describes a bodily resurrection, not the survival of an idea, the continuation of a moral influence, or the disciples' emotional discovery that hope remained. The body laid in the sepulchre came forth glorified. The risen Christ invited His disciples to behold His hands and feet, saying, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." He ate before them and showed the wounds that identified Him as the crucified Jesus. The tomb was empty because the body was no longer there. Christianity was not born from grieving followers inventing a comforting symbol. It was proclaimed by witnesses who ate with Him, touched Him, spoke with Him, and watched Him ascend. The gospel rests upon an event in history, not a religious mood drifting through a disappointed congregation.

Acts 13:31 continues, "And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people." First Corinthians 15 records appearances to Cephas, the twelve, more than five hundred brethren at once, James, all the apostles, and finally Paul. These appearances occurred to individuals and groups, in different places, under different circumstances, over a period of time. The disciples did not

expect resurrection so eagerly that they imagined it into existence. Thomas refused to believe until confronted with the risen Lord. The women initially came to the tomb carrying spices for a dead body, not party decorations for a resurrection celebration. Christ did not rise because the disciples had great faith. The disciples gained faith because Christ rose. Their doubt did not keep Him in the tomb any more than their courage brought Him out.

The resurrection body was continuous with the body buried, yet transformed beyond mortality. Christ could be recognized, touched, and seen eating, while also appearing in rooms whose doors were shut and vanishing from sight. Romans 6:9 says, "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him." Lazarus was restored to mortal life and later died again. Christ arose in the power of an endless life, beyond the reach of death forever. He is therefore "the firstfruits of them that slept." His resurrection is not an isolated curiosity; it guarantees the future resurrection of those who are His. The grave retained every corpse before Him only by temporary permission. When Christ walked out, He carried the title deed to the cemetery. Death still operates, but it operates as a defeated enemy awaiting final removal.

5. The Resurrection Vindicated the Son and Accepted the Sacrifice

During His earthly ministry, Jesus repeatedly identified Himself as the Son of God, forgave sins, received worship, claimed equality with the Father, and declared that He would rise again. His enemies understood enough of those claims to accuse Him of blasphemy. If He had remained dead, they could have pointed to the tomb as the final answer to everything He said. But Romans 1:4 declares that He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." The resurrection did not make Him the Son of God; it declared Him to be what He eternally was. God answered the mockery of Calvary by raising the One whom men had condemned. The rejected stone became the head of the corner, and the verdict of heaven made the Sanhedrin's decision look like the scribbling of children against a mountain.

The resurrection also proves that Christ's payment for sin was accepted. Romans 4:25 says He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." The cross paid the price; the resurrection publicly demonstrates that death had no remaining claim upon the sinless Substitute. If one sin charged to Christ had remained unpaid, the grave would have retained Him. But He cried, "It is finished," and the empty tomb confirms that the statement was not religious optimism spoken in agony. The debt was paid in full. God did not raise a Saviour who had merely attempted redemption; He raised the Saviour who had accomplished it. The resurrection is heaven's receipt stamped across Calvary. Religion keeps presenting instalment plans, sacraments, ceremonies, merits, penance, and human

works because religion cannot bear a finished transaction in which the sinner has nothing to boast of.

Because Christ lives, the believer's standing rests in a living Representative. Romans 8:34 asks who can condemn, then answers that Christ died, rose again, and is even at the right hand of God making intercession for us. Hebrews 7:25 says He is able to save "to the uttermost" those who come unto God by Him, "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Eternal security is not the believer struggling to keep himself attached to a dead founder. It is the saved sinner joined to the living Head, sealed by the Holy Spirit, accepted in the beloved, and kept by divine power. Christ's life cannot fail, His blood cannot lose value, and His intercession cannot be overruled. A salvation dependent upon human performance would die before the sun went down. The believer's hope lives because his Saviour does.

6. The Resurrection Stands at the Heart of the Gospel

Paul defined the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." Remove any part and the message is destroyed. Without His death, sin has no payment. Without His burial, the reality of death is denied. Without His resurrection, the sacrifice has no declared victory and faith is vain. The gospel is not an invitation to copy the ethics of Jesus, admire His courage, or join a religious institution. It is the good news of what God accomplished through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. Man did not climb to God through improvement; God came down in Christ, bore sin, entered death, and arose victorious. Salvation is news to be believed before it is a life to be lived.

In Acts 13, Paul moved from the resurrection to the offer of forgiveness: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." He continued, "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." That is not salvation by religious achievement, moral reform, baptismal machinery, church membership, or sacramental bookkeeping. It is justification through the risen Christ received by faith. The law could expose sin and condemn the sinner, but it could not provide the righteousness needed for justification. Jesus Christ did what the law could never do. The sinner who believes is justified "from all things." Religion dislikes those two words because they leave no unpaid balance for religion to collect.

The resurrection demands a response because it confirms both salvation and judgment. Paul warned his hearers not to despise the work of God and perish in unbelief. Some desired to hear more, while others contradicted and blasphemed when the word spread.

The same risen Christ produced faith in some and fury in others. Evidence does not force a rebellious heart to love the truth. Men may examine the empty tomb, hear the apostolic witnesses, and still reject Christ because accepting the resurrection removes their claim to self-rule. A dead religious teacher can be quoted, revised, managed, and placed on a shelf. A risen Lord commands repentance and faith. Men are comfortable with a Jesus safely framed in stained glass. The trouble begins when He walks out of the tomb and claims authority over their lives.

7. The Risen Christ Is the Returning King

Paul connected the resurrection with the promises made to David. Acts 13:34 cites God's assurance, "I will give you the sure mercies of David," and verse 35 declares, "Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." David died, was buried, and saw corruption. The prophecy therefore reached beyond David to David's greater Son. Jesus Christ rose before corruption touched His body, and He lives as the lawful heir to the Davidic throne. The resurrection guarantees that the King promised to Israel is alive to receive His kingdom. God has not cancelled His covenants with Israel or transferred David's throne to a Gentile religious institution. A throne promised on earth will be occupied on earth when Christ returns. The grave could not abolish the covenant because the promised King walked out of it.

The present Church Age must be distinguished from Christ's future reign over Israel and the nations. Today, Jews and Gentiles who believe the gospel are baptized by one Spirit into one body and possess a heavenly calling in Christ. The Church does not replace Israel, turn Israel's land promises into spiritual metaphors, or convert the Second Advent into an endless religious influence. Christ will first catch away His body before the Tribulation, and afterward He will return visibly and bodily as King of kings and Lord of lords. The resurrection made both expectations certain. The same Jesus who ascended will come again. He did not rise to become an absentee symbol. He rose, ascended, intercedes for His Church, and awaits the appointed hour when His enemies will be made His footstool.

Acts 17:31 declares that God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness" by Jesus Christ, and "hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." The resurrection that comforts the believer warns the unbeliever. The risen Christ is not only Saviour; He is appointed Judge. Men who refuse His grace will not escape His authority. Every tongue that mocked Him will confess Him, every knee that resisted Him will bow, and every ruler who imagined himself beyond accountability will stand before the One Rome crucified. The world may vote against Christ, censor His words, ridicule His Book, and declare His rule outdated. A cemetery

outside Jerusalem has already counted and rejected their ballots. God raised the King, and no election on earth can remove Him.

Conclusion

Acts 13:29–30 places the full weight of human opposition on one side and four triumphant words on the other: “But God raised him.” Men fulfilled the prophecies they did not understand, condemned the Innocent One, obtained Pilate’s sentence, crucified Him publicly, removed His body, laid Him in the tomb, sealed the stone, and guarded the entrance. They had law, politics, violence, death, stone, seal, and soldiers. God had resurrection power. The contest was never close. Human authority ended at the sepulchre because no earthly court can issue legislation to the Author of life. The rulers believed the grave had swallowed the threat to their position. Instead, the grave became the stage upon which God exposed their impotence. They closed the tomb with official confidence; God opened it without requesting a permit.

The resurrection means that the Christian’s faith does not rest upon human philosophy, religious tradition, mystical feeling, or the uncertain testimony of an institution. It rests upon the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ revealed in the infallible words of Scripture. His resurrection declares that the cross accomplished redemption, the Scriptures are true, death is defeated, believers are justified, the Church’s hope is secure, Israel’s King lives, and judgment is coming. Every essential Christian truth stands beneath the light shining from that empty tomb. Take away the resurrection and the whole structure collapses. Leave it where God placed it, and no power in hell or on earth can move the foundation. Christianity is not trying to keep the memory of Jesus alive. Jesus Christ is alive, and He is keeping His people.

The sinner must therefore stop attempting to improve upon the finished work of Christ. No church can add to His blood, no sacrament can complete His sacrifice, and no human merit can strengthen His resurrection. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer must stop living as though the tomb remained occupied. Serve a living Saviour, preach a living gospel, trust a living Intercessor, and expect a living King. Calvary was not the funeral of Christianity; it was the altar of redemption. The sepulchre was not Christ’s permanent address; it was occupied only long enough to fulfil Scripture. Rome sealed the tomb, religion watched the stone, and hell waited for corruption—but God raised the King. That sentence remains heaven’s answer to every grave, every scoffer, every false religion, and every throne that dares to challenge Jesus Christ.

5 of 10: The “But God” Passages – Dead in Sin, Loved by Mercy

Key Passage: Ephesians 2:4–5 — “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)”

Ephesians 2 does not flatter fallen man, polish his religious reputation, or describe him as basically good but temporarily confused. It declares him “dead in trespasses and sins.” That is God’s diagnosis, and heaven does not misread the chart. The sinner possesses physical life, intellectual activity, emotion, personality, religion, ambition, and moral opinions, yet he remains spiritually dead toward God. He may build cities, write books, establish charities, compose music, earn degrees, and deliver speeches about human progress, but none of those activities supplies the life he lacks. A corpse dressed in academic robes is still a corpse, and a dead sinner seated in a church pew is no nearer to spiritual life merely because the upholstery is religious. Man’s condition requires more than instruction, inspiration, reformation, or ritual. He needs life from God.

The first three verses descend through the ruins of human nature until no ground remains for boasting. The sinner is dead in sin, walking according to the world, influenced by the prince of the power of the air, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and mind, and standing by nature as a child of wrath. Then verse 4 breaks through the darkness: “But God.” Those words do not announce that man finally discovered hidden goodness within himself. They announce divine intervention. The sinner did not supply one half of salvation while God supplied the remainder. Man supplied the trespasses, sins, disobedience, lusts, and wrath; God supplied mercy, love, grace, life, resurrection, and a heavenly position in Christ. Salvation does not begin with the worthiness of the dead sinner but with the character of the living God. Mercy entered where judgment was deserved, and grace accomplished what flesh could never perform.

Paul is writing Church truth to saints who are already “in Christ Jesus.” He reminds them what they were, what God did, and what they have become by grace. He is not threatening saved people with the possibility of returning to spiritual death whenever they stumble. The passage speaks in completed terms: God “hath quickened us,” “hath raised us up,” and “made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” The believer’s standing rests upon union with the risen Christ, not upon the unstable record of human performance. This does not excuse sin or make obedience optional. It makes obedience the fruit of life instead of an attempt to purchase it. Religion puts cosmetics on the corpse and calls the improvement salvation. God does something infinitely greater: He gives the sinner life, places him in Christ, and then works through him as a new creature.

1. Dead Men Walking According to the World

Ephesians 2:1 says, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” Spiritual death does not mean nonexistence, unconsciousness, or the inability to perform any activity. Verse 2 immediately says these dead sinners “walked.” They lived, chose, desired, obeyed, rebelled, and followed a course, but they possessed no spiritual life in fellowship with God. When Adam sinned, he did not fall physically dead before the forbidden tree, yet death entered that day exactly as God had warned. Sin separated him from God, corrupted his nature, placed him beneath condemnation, and began the physical process that ended in the grave. Every descendant of Adam enters the world with physical life but without the eternal life found only in Jesus Christ. The sinner is not waiting to become lost; he is born into a fallen race already needing redemption.

Trespasses and sins describe both the violation of God’s boundaries and failure to meet His righteous standard. Man crosses lines God has drawn and falls short of the glory God requires. He sins by action, omission, thought, word, desire, and nature. Romans 3:23 delivers the universal verdict: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Human standards may permit one sinner to appear respectable beside another, but God does not grade corruption on a curve. A man can stand taller than every other corpse in the cemetery only because somebody propped him against the fence. Comparing one sinner with another may comfort pride, but it does not produce righteousness. The question is not whether a man appears cleaner than his neighbour. The question is whether he possesses the perfect righteousness required to stand before a holy God.

The phrase “wherein in time past ye walked” reminds believers that sin was not merely an occasional stumble in their former condition; it was the realm in which they conducted life. The sinner may avoid certain vices through upbringing, fear of consequences, personal discipline, or concern for reputation, but he cannot remove the principle of sin ruling within him. Even his respectable deeds cannot atone for guilt or generate spiritual life. Isaiah 64:6 says, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” The verse does not merely condemn the deeds men admit are wicked; it exposes the righteousnesses they offer to God as payment. Fallen man’s finest religious currency is counterfeit at heaven’s bank. He may impress society, satisfy a congregation, and receive applause from other sinners, but none of that reaches the standard of God’s holiness or erases one trespass.

2. The World, the Devil, and the Flesh Ruled the Old Walk

The lost sinner walks “according to the course of this world.” A course is a direction, pattern, and ordered movement. The world has fashions, ambitions, values, pleasures, loyalties, heroes, and definitions of success that operate in opposition to God. It tells men

what to desire, what to celebrate, what to excuse, and what to hate. Its language changes, its clothing changes, and its technology changes, but its rebellion remains remarkably consistent. First John 2:16 identifies “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” The world can decorate those three old corpses with new slogans, but heaven recognizes them immediately. Modern culture likes to call rebellion progress because “backsliding with confidence” does not look as attractive on the brochure.

Behind the world’s course stands “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” Satan is not a cartoon figure with red clothing and a pitchfork. He is a real spiritual ruler, a deceiver, tempter, accuser, liar, and the god of this world who blinds the minds of unbelievers. His spirit works in the children of disobedience, shaping systems that oppose God while persuading men that they are merely expressing independence. Satan’s masterpiece is not always a man openly worshipping the devil. It is often a man worshipping himself and calling the arrangement freedom. The lost sinner believes he is captain of his destiny while sailing along a course charted by the enemy. The chains feel lighter when the prisoner has been taught to call them jewellery.

The flesh completes this unholy alliance. Paul says, “among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh.” The world supplies the atmosphere, the devil supplies deception, and the flesh supplies the appetite. Fallen man fulfils “the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” Sin is not confined to bodily appetite; the mind has its own pride, malice, imagination, self-righteousness, and rebellion. A man may avoid public scandal while maintaining a private kingdom in which his intellect sits upon the throne. Education can refine the flesh without removing it. Religion can restrain the flesh while secretly feeding its pride. Only the cross tells the flesh the truth: it cannot be improved into acceptability. God does not negotiate a peace treaty with the old man. He places the believer in Christ’s death and calls him to reckon that old man crucified.

3. Children of Wrath With No Pedigree Exemption

Paul includes himself and his Jewish brethren when he says, “among whom also we all had our conversation in times past.” Then he concludes that they “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” The Jew possessed covenants, promises, Scripture, circumcision, temple worship, and historical privilege, but none of those advantages supplied personal salvation apart from faith. The Gentile did not possess Israel’s national privileges, yet Jew and Gentile met beneath the same verdict of sin. Ephesians will later reveal both reconciled unto God in one body by the cross. Before that unity in Christ can be understood, the common ruin must be faced. One group may have had the law and another lacked it, but both needed the same Saviour. Religious pedigree cannot deodorize spiritual death.

“Children of wrath” means that fallen men stand beneath God’s righteous judgment. Wrath is not divine irritation, uncontrolled temper, or an emotional explosion. It is the holy response of God against sin. A God who never judged evil would not be loving; He would be morally indifferent. The same holiness that makes heaven pure requires rebellion to be condemned. John 3:36 says that the wrath of God abides upon the one who does not believe the Son. It is already the sinner’s present condition, not merely a distant possibility. Men object to divine wrath because they measure sin by their own tolerance. The criminal does not acquire authority to rewrite the law because he considers the sentence excessive. God is the Judge, His holiness is the standard, and human opinion does not sit on the court of appeal.

The words “by nature” also prevent man from treating sin as nothing more than learned misbehaviour. Environment influences conduct, examples strengthen habits, and society teaches particular forms of wickedness, but the root lies deeper. A child does not need to attend a seminar to learn selfishness, deceit, anger, or disobedience. Those weeds grow naturally from fallen soil. Romans 5 explains that sin entered the world by one man and death by sin, so death passed upon all men. The race inherited Adam’s fallen condition. This does not excuse individual guilt; every sinner willingly confirms the nature he received by committing his own sins. Fallen man is not a pure creature corrupted only by unfortunate surroundings. Change the surroundings, improve the education, increase the income, and the old nature travels into the improved neighbourhood carrying its furniture.

4. “But God” Introduced Mercy Where Wrath Was Deserved

After three verses describing death, bondage, lust, disobedience, and wrath, Paul writes, “But God.” The subject changes because the sinner could not change his own condition. Had the passage said, “But man improved himself,” religion would have found its national anthem. Had it said, “But the sinner performed enough ceremonies,” every ecclesiastical cashier would have opened another window. Instead, salvation turns upon God’s intervention. He acts according to His nature, purpose, love, mercy, and grace. The sinner contributes the need but not the cure. A drowning man may receive rescue, but a spiritually dead man requires something beyond assistance. He requires quickening. God does not throw a motivational pamphlet into the cemetery. He brings life through union with His risen Son.

God is “rich in mercy.” He does not possess a thin supply rationed reluctantly to deserving applicants. Mercy withholds the judgment sin deserves, while grace bestows blessing the sinner could never deserve. Yet mercy is not God pretending sin did not happen. Every act of saving mercy rests upon the satisfaction accomplished at Calvary. Jesus Christ bore the judgment, shed His blood, died for sins, was buried, and rose again. God can therefore

justify the ungodly who believes without compromising His holiness. Romans 3:26 declares Him “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” At the cross, mercy did not bribe justice or sneak past it after dark. Justice received full payment from the Substitute, opening the righteous channel through which mercy flows to the guilty.

The source is “his great love wherewith he loved us.” God’s love was not awakened by discovering hidden worth in spiritually dead sinners. Romans 5:8 says, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He loved enemies, the ungodly, and those without strength. This love is not sentimental approval of rebellion. It is holy love acting sacrificially to rescue sinners from the ruin they chose. The world defines love as affirming every desire and refusing every judgment. By that definition, a doctor loves disease when he declines to diagnose it. God’s love tells the truth about sin, provides the only remedy, and commands the sinner to receive it by faith. Love that went to Calvary is too serious to pat rebellion on the head and call it harmless.

5. Quickened Together With the Risen Christ

Verse 5 says, “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.” Quickening means the impartation of life. The believer is not merely forgiven and left in his original spiritual condition. He receives eternal life through union with Jesus Christ. First John 5:11–12 declares, “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life.” Eternal life is not stored in a denomination, sacrament, priesthood, ordinance, or moral code. It is in the Son. The sinner who receives Christ receives life because he is joined to the living One. Christianity is therefore not a rehabilitation program for Adam’s fallen nature. God is not repairing the old corpse with religious spare parts. He creates a new man in Christ.

The words “together with Christ” are the doctrinal heart of the passage. What God accomplished for Christ in resurrection power establishes the believer’s new position. Christ died unto sin once and arose beyond death’s dominion. The saved sinner is spiritually identified with His death, burial, and resurrection. Colossians 2:13 says, “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” The believer is not trying to become alive through progressive improvement; he has been quickened. His daily walk should increasingly agree with that life, but his position does not wait upon flawless performance. A newborn child may stumble while learning to walk, but stumbling does not reverse the birth. Life precedes growth, and birth establishes a relationship conduct did not create.

Because the life is in Christ, it is secure. Christ does not die again, and the believer does not move repeatedly between spiritual life and spiritual death as though salvation were a

revolving door operated by human consistency. Jesus said in John 10:28, “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.” Eternal life that can become eternal death after six months was badly named. The believer may grieve the Holy Spirit, lose fellowship, suffer chastening, damage testimony, and lose reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but he cannot undo the new birth or remove himself from the body of Christ. His security does not excuse careless living; it removes the terror of earning sonship and provides the ground from which obedient service grows.

6. Saved by Grace Through Faith, Not by Religious Works

Paul interrupts verse 5 with the declaration, “by grace ye are saved,” then expands it in verses 8–9: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Grace is God’s unmerited favour operating through the finished work of Christ. Faith is the hand that receives the gift, not a work that purchases it. Romans 4:5 makes the matter plain: “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” The sinner is not told to combine faith with law-keeping, sacraments, endurance, charitable giving, church membership, or water baptism to complete salvation. Christ completed the work. The sinner believes the gospel and receives what grace provides.

Religion hates “not of works” because works give man something to measure, display, compare, sell, administer, and boast about. Grace closes the showroom. It places the moralist, criminal, church member, pagan, scholar, and fool at the same bloodstained cross with empty hands. Nobody enters the body of Christ wearing a medal earned in Adam. The respectable sinner may dislike standing beside the publicly disgraced sinner, but the ground is level because both are without righteousness before God. A man cannot boast that he wisely accepted the gift as though faith made him his own saviour. The value lies entirely in the object of faith—Jesus Christ and His finished work. A beggar does not become the baker because he receives bread. He simply stops starving by accepting what another supplied.

Grace also destroys every system that makes continued salvation dependent upon continued human merit. If works cannot obtain salvation, works cannot become the foundation that maintains it. Galatians 3:3 rebukes those who began in the Spirit and imagined they could be made perfect by the flesh. The believer is kept by the same divine power that saved him. That does not make works irrelevant; it puts them in their proper place. Good works belong after salvation as fruit, service, obedience, and evidence of a changed walk. They do not belong before salvation as payment or afterward as insurance premiums against losing eternal life. Religion sends a monthly invoice for a gift God declared paid in full. Grace tears up the invoice and points again to the cross.

7. Raised, Seated, and Created Unto Good Works

God has not only quickened believers; He “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” The language is present and positional. The believer’s body remains on earth, but his standing is already identified with Christ in heaven. Ephesians 1 says Christ is seated at God’s right hand “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion.” The saved sinner is accepted in Him and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. This is distinctively Church truth. Israel possesses literal national, earthly, and kingdom promises that must not be stolen and renamed, while the body of Christ possesses a heavenly calling and position in its risen Head. Right division does not rob either company; it lets God keep every promise exactly where He placed it.

Verse 7 reveals the future purpose: “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” The Church will eternally display what grace accomplished with sinners who were once dead, disobedient, and under wrath. God will not point to redeemed saints as trophies of human potential. He will display them as evidence of His exceeding grace. Every believer in glory will testify that the blood was sufficient, the gospel was true, the Spirit sealed, and Christ kept His word. Heaven will contain no self-made saints polishing their halos and comparing religious résumés. The entire redeemed body will stand as a living demonstration that God can take children of wrath, quicken them with Christ, and seat them in glory without owing salvation to one human work.

Then verse 10 places works correctly: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Believers are not saved by good works, but they are saved unto them. Grace that gives life also establishes a new purpose for living. God has ordained that His children should walk in obedience, holiness, charity, truth, sound doctrine, and useful service. A professing Christian who uses grace as an excuse for sin has confused liberty with rebellion. Good works cannot create the workmanship because they proceed from it. The hammer does not build the carpenter; the carpenter uses the hammer. Likewise, service does not create the new creature; God works through the new creature He has made in Christ. The old walk followed the world, the devil, and the flesh. The new walk should agree with the heavenly life already given.

Conclusion

Ephesians 2 begins in a graveyard and ends in heavenly places. The sinner is dead in trespasses and sins, swept along by the world, influenced by the prince of the power of the air, controlled by fleshly desires, and exposed to righteous wrath. No religious cosmetic

can repair that condition. Education may inform him, discipline may restrain him, law may condemn him, and ceremony may impress him, but none can quicken him. Then come the words upon which the whole passage turns: “But God.” The sinner’s resources ended before salvation began. God entered with rich mercy, great love, exceeding grace, resurrection life, and union with Christ. Man brought nothing to the transaction but the sin that made the transaction necessary. God brought everything required to save.

The passage leaves no room for despairing sinners to say they are too ruined for grace or for proud sinners to say they are too respectable to need it. The same gospel addresses both. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. The sinner who believes on Him is forgiven, justified, quickened, sealed, raised positionally, and accepted in the beloved. He does not wait for a church to manufacture life or for a lifetime of works to earn a verdict. Salvation is received now by grace through faith. The door is low enough to humble the proud but wide enough to admit every sinner who comes through Christ. Mercy has no shortage, the blood has no defect, and the risen Saviour has never lost anyone who trusted Him.

The believer must therefore remember both halves of the chapter: what he was in Adam and what God made him in Christ. Remembering the grave kills pride; remembering the heavenly position kills despair. We were not rescued because God found us spiritually attractive. We were loved when dead in sins and quickened solely through Christ. That truth should produce gratitude, holiness, humility, confidence, and faithful service. The sinner supplied the ruin, but God supplied the remedy. The sinner walked toward wrath, but God intervened with mercy. The sinner lay dead, but God joined him to the risen Son. Religion arrived with instructions for decorating the coffin; God arrived with resurrection life. That is the difference made by “But God.”

6 of 10: The “But God” Passages – When the Cast Down Met the God of All Comfort

Key Passage: 2 Corinthians 7:5–6 — “For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;”

Second Corinthians 7:5 does not present Paul as a religious statue carved from marble, floating above ordinary weakness with a permanent smile fixed upon his face. He writes plainly, “our flesh had no rest.” Trouble met him on every side. Fightings waited outside, fears pressed within, and the apostle found himself cast down. These words come from the

man who received abundant revelations, planted churches, endured persecution, wrote Scripture, and preached Christ across hostile territory. If modern religious advertising had edited the verse, Paul would have been photographed against a bright background and instructed to say that every day was victorious. The Holy Ghost preferred the truth. Spiritual strength does not require a man to lie about the weight he carries. Paul was faithful, but he was tired; courageous, but troubled; called of God, but still made of flesh.

Then the passage turns: “Nevertheless God.” The expression performs the same great work as “but God” throughout Scripture. It interrupts what appeared to be the final condition. Paul had no rest, nevertheless God. Trouble surrounded him, nevertheless God. Fightings raged without and fears worked within, nevertheless God. The Lord did not deny the trouble, rebuke Paul for admitting it, or demand that the apostle pretend the burden was light. He comforted His servant. God’s answer came “by the coming of Titus.” Divine comfort wore the face of a familiar fellow labourer, arrived on human feet, carried news from Corinth, and entered Macedonia at the appointed time. God who rules angels, providence, nations, and seas chose to strengthen Paul through the arrival of one man. Heaven’s greatest interventions do not always come with thunder. Sometimes they knock at the door carrying a report.

The passage exposes two religious errors at once. One error treats every fear, sorrow, weariness, or inward pressure as proof that a believer has failed spiritually. The other turns distress into an excuse for abandoning duty, indulging the flesh, or demanding that everyone orbit around personal feelings. Paul did neither. He admitted the pressure without enthroning it. He continued serving while waiting upon God. Biblical comfort is not denial, and it is not self-worship. It is God supplying strength, encouragement, consolation, and hope so His servant can stand and continue. The God of all comfort did not merely make Paul feel better about remaining cast down. He brought the apostle news that vindicated painful obedience, restored fellowship, and renewed his courage for ministry. God’s comfort does not put the soldier into a rocking chair while the battle continues. It binds his wounds and returns strength to his hands.

1. Macedonia Was Not a Holiday Between Ministry Assignments

Paul’s words belong to a larger account beginning in 2 Corinthians 2. He had expected to meet Titus in Troas and receive news concerning the Corinthian church, but Titus did not arrive. Although a door had been opened unto Paul of the Lord, he wrote, “I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother.” He took leave and went into Macedonia. By the time 2 Corinthians 7 opens the scene again, the burden had not disappeared. Paul was preaching and travelling, yet his concern over Corinth followed him across the water. Geography can change the view without removing the weight. A servant of God may leave

one city while still carrying its people in prayer, memory, and concern. Ministry is not a row of separate appointments erased from the mind when the train departs.

Macedonia was familiar territory, but familiarity did not guarantee ease. Paul had previously been beaten and imprisoned at Philippi, driven through opposition at Thessalonica, and confronted with unrest at Berea. Now he returned while bearing anxiety concerning Corinth and facing fresh troubles. Second Corinthians 7:5 says he was “troubled on every side.” The phrase leaves little room for imagining one manageable inconvenience sitting politely in a corner. Pressure came from several directions. The apostle’s body needed rest, hostile forces required attention, and his heart awaited news that could bring either relief or deeper grief. Trouble rarely consults the calendar before scheduling simultaneous appointments. It is quite capable of filling the morning, afternoon, and evening without leaving a lunch break.

Paul had also endured physical hardship that religious storytelling sometimes smooths into a heroic montage. Second Corinthians 11 records stripes, imprisonments, beatings, stoning, shipwreck, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, journeyings, robbers, and dangers from multiple quarters. He carried “the care of all the churches” in addition to outward affliction. Flesh remains flesh even when it belongs to an apostle. A bruised body hurts, a sleepless night drains strength, and sustained pressure takes its toll. God can enable His servant beyond natural capacity, but He does not require the servant to pretend he has ceased being human. Paul’s honesty gives no support to laziness; it rebukes religious fraud. The man who laboured more abundantly than the rest admitted when his flesh had no rest. Evidently, truthfulness is not a defect in spirituality.

2. Fightings Without and Fears Within

“Without were fightings” points to the external conflicts surrounding Paul. His gospel offended Jewish opposition, pagan idolatry, commercial interests, political order, philosophical pride, and religious tradition. Everywhere he preached that Christ died for sins, was buried, rose again, and justified believers apart from the works of the law, some men rejoiced while others reached for stones. Paul did not create trouble for entertainment, nor did he confuse an abrasive personality with boldness. The offence belonged to the message. The gospel strips the moralist of boasting, the idolater of his gods, the priestcraft of its control, and the sinner of every excuse. A preacher can make peace with the world if he removes enough Bible from the sermon, but then he has made peace by surrendering the battlefield.

Paul also faced conflict within professing Christianity. False apostles challenged his authority, Judaizers corrupted grace, carnal believers questioned his motives, and disorder

threatened churches he had laboured to establish. The Corinthian assembly had tolerated fornication, divided around personalities, abused spiritual gifts, confused doctrine, and permitted some to question the resurrection. Paul had written firmly because love refuses to place a lace cover over corruption and call the room clean. Correcting a church is painful because the preacher knows the medicine may be rejected and the physician accused of causing the disease. Men often thank the flatterer who ignores the infection and resent the servant who brings the knife needed to save the limb. Paul's fightings were not imaginary disputes over personal preference; they concerned truth, holiness, gospel order, and the spiritual welfare of believers.

"Within were fears" reveals the pressure carried inside the apostle. Paul does not say those fears ruled him, drove him into disobedience, or nullified his faith. He says they were present. Courage is not the absence of every trembling sensation; it is obedience to God while danger and uncertainty remain. Paul feared what false teachers might do, what sin might destroy, and how the Corinthians might respond to his severe letter. His concern did not arise from wounded vanity over declining popularity. It arose from pastoral responsibility. A hireling can sleep peacefully while wolves scatter the flock because the sheep do not belong to him. A true shepherd remains troubled because souls matter. Paul did not worship his fears, but neither did he hide them behind a painted grin and a slogan about always feeling wonderful.

3. "Nevertheless God" Overruled the Apparent Ending

The word "nevertheless" acknowledges everything that came before it and refuses to allow those things the final word. Paul's flesh had no rest—nevertheless God. He was troubled on every side—nevertheless God. There were fightings without and fears within—nevertheless God. Scripture does not say the apostle imagined himself into a better mood or discovered untapped strength in his own personality. God acted. The intervention began outside Paul and reached him by providence. This distinction guards the glory. Human determination has its place, but it cannot replace divine supply. A man may grit his teeth until he wears the enamel off and still lack what only God can give. Paul's comfort was not the triumph of willpower. It was the mercy of the God who saw him cast down.

Second Corinthians 1:3 calls the Lord "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." Every genuine comfort has its fountain in Him. He comforts through His word, His Spirit, answered prayer, providential circumstances, remembered promises, faithful believers, and the hope of Christ's coming. The means vary, but the source remains God. Paul did not idolize Titus simply because Titus carried the comfort. He recognized the divine hand behind the human arrival. That is spiritual discernment: receiving help gratefully without transferring worship from the Giver to the instrument. The cup brings water to the thirsty

man, but nobody writes a hymn to the cup. Titus mattered greatly, yet the inspired sentence says, “God...comforted us by the coming of Titus.”

God identifies Himself as the One “that comforteth those that are cast down.” He is not embarrassed by the condition of His servants or unwilling to approach them until they have repaired themselves. Isaiah 42:3 says, “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.” God knows the difference between rebellion needing rebuke and weariness needing comfort. Elijah beneath the juniper tree required correction eventually, but the Lord first supplied rest, food, and care. God is not a clumsy physician prescribing a hammer for every complaint. He can convict the careless, chasten the disobedient, strengthen the weak, guide the confused, and comfort the cast down without confusing one case with another. Religious men often own one bottle of medicine and prescribe it for every patient. God knows the whole heart.

4. Titus Arrived as God’s Appointed Instrument

Titus was not an angel dropping from heaven, a vision appearing in the night, or a miraculous voice speaking from the clouds. He was Paul’s fellow labourer, trusted messenger, and “brother.” His simple arrival became the means of divine comfort. This corrects the strange notion that help becomes less spiritual when it comes through another believer. Some people are so determined to receive everything directly from heaven that they would decline a cup of water unless Gabriel handed it to them. Yet God placed believers into one body and arranged that members should care for one another. The hand serves the eye, the foot carries the body, and one servant strengthens another. Depending upon God does not mean refusing the person God sends. It means recognizing God in the sending.

The timing of Titus’s arrival mattered as much as the fact of it. He came when Paul’s flesh had no rest, trouble pressed from every side, and the uncertainty concerning Corinth weighed heavily. Had he arrived earlier, the circumstances would have been different; had he arrived much later, the burden might have deepened. Providence has a clock. God knew the distance Titus had travelled, the route Paul had taken, the delays along both roads, and the precise place where they would meet. Neither man possessed the full map, yet the Lord governed the intersection. What looks to us like a chance meeting may be an appointment entered upon heaven’s calendar before either traveller packed his belongings.

Titus also came as a man who understood the work and could report it faithfully. Paul did not need vague reassurance from someone ignorant of the situation. He needed truthful news from Corinth. Titus had witnessed the response of the church and could tell Paul of their earnest desire, mourning, and fervent mind toward him. God’s comfort was specific

because Paul's burden was specific. A general statement that "everything will work out" would have been thin soup for a man carrying apostolic concern over a troubled assembly. Titus brought substance. Biblical comfort does not always consist of soft words; sometimes it consists of reliable facts showing that God has answered prayer, used correction, and turned hearts toward obedience.

5. Corinth's Repentance Was the Heart of the Good News

Paul said God comforted him not only by Titus's arrival, "but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you." Titus had himself been encouraged by the Corinthians' response. He then carried that consolation back to Paul. The comfort travelled through the body of Christ: God worked in Corinth, Corinth encouraged Titus, and Titus encouraged Paul. Divine comfort multiplied rather than diminished as it passed from one believer to another. This is the opposite of a self-centred religion in which every man guards his own experience like private property. What God does in one saint may become strength for another hundreds of miles away. A restored church can put courage back into the preacher who corrected it.

Paul's previous letter had caused sorrow because it confronted sin. He admitted that he had regretted sending it for a time, though he no longer regretted it after seeing the result. He did not rejoice merely because the Corinthians felt badly. He rejoiced because they "sorrowed to repentance." Godly sorrow "worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of," while "the sorrow of the world worketh death." Biblical repentance is not emotional theatre, public relations, embarrassment over exposure, or irritation at consequences. It is a changed mind toward sin and God that produces an altered direction. Worldly sorrow cries because the sin became expensive. Godly sorrow agrees with God about the sin and turns from protecting it.

The Corinthians demonstrated repentance through "carefulness," clearing of themselves, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, and revenge. Paul said, "In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." Their response was not a polished statement written to protect the church's reputation while the corruption continued untouched. They dealt with the matter. Modern institutions often hire experts to manage a scandal, revise the vocabulary, and make wickedness sound like an administrative oversight. Scripture demands something less fashionable and more effective: repentance. The comfort Paul received was not that Corinth had improved its image but that believers had responded to truth. Nothing refreshes a faithful preacher like seeing the word of God produce obedience where sin once demanded protection.

6. God's Comfort Strengthens Servants for Continued Ministry

Second Corinthians 1 explains that God “comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.” Comfort is not intended to terminate in the recipient. God strengthens one servant so that servant can carry strength to another. Paul’s experiences of affliction and divine consolation equipped him to minister without speaking like a spectator in a grandstand. He knew the prison, the beating, the sleepless night, the unanswered question, and the timely arrival of help. His words carried weight because they came through scars. A man who has never been wet may describe a storm accurately, but the man who has survived one knows where the roof leaks.

Biblical comfort does not always remove the outward battle. Titus’s arrival did not abolish persecution, silence false teachers, heal every bodily wound, or make all future travel easy. It addressed the immediate burden and restored strength for the road ahead. God may change circumstances, but He often changes the servant’s ability to continue within them. Paul later wrote of the Lord’s answer concerning his thorn: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” The thorn remained, but sufficient grace entered the equation. Christianity is not a promise that every rough sea will turn into glass before the boat reaches shore. It is the assurance that Christ remains aboard and His grace will not run out before the voyage ends.

Comfort must therefore be distinguished from indulgence. God does not comfort a believer by approving sin, excusing rebellion, or removing every consequence of foolish conduct. The same Paul who received comfort also administered rebuke, demanded church discipline, and warned against ungodliness. True comfort agrees with truth. It can sit beside a grieving saint without lying to him, strengthen a weary servant without flattering him, and encourage a fearful believer without pretending danger is imaginary. False comfort says peace where there is no peace. Divine comfort anchors the heart in God’s character, word, and purpose. It does not drug the conscience; it strengthens faith. God’s comfort is not a pillow placed over conviction. It is a firm hand beneath the arm of one who is trying to stand.

7. The Body of Christ Was Designed to Carry Burdens

The coming of Titus demonstrates the practical necessity of Christian fellowship. Believers are members one of another, not disconnected religious customers attending the same weekly program. First Corinthians 12 says the body is one but has many members, and no member can say to another, “I have no need of thee.” Galatians 6:2 commands, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” This burden bearing requires more than friendly words exchanged near a church door. It involves presence, prayer, truthful counsel, material help, patient listening, doctrinal strength, and the willingness to enter

another believer's trouble without making oneself the centre. Titus comforted Paul partly by arriving. Sometimes presence preaches before the mouth opens.

The local church should therefore be a place where saints strengthen one another without turning fellowship into sentimental weakness. The lonely need companionship, the grieving need scriptural hope, the weary need practical relief, the confused need sound doctrine, and the sinful need correction leading to restoration. Not every burden requires the same response. Telling the rebellious man to rest may encourage sin, while rebuking the exhausted servant may crush him unnecessarily. Spiritual maturity learns from Scripture to distinguish the cases. The God who comforted Paul through Titus can guide believers in ministering appropriately to one another. A toolbox containing only a hammer eventually makes every saint look like a nail.

This passage also places responsibility upon the potential Titus. A believer may be praying for God to comfort someone while ignoring the possibility that God intends to send him. Titus had to travel, carry news, speak faithfully, and share Paul's burden. Comfort requires availability. A letter may need to be written, a call made, a visit arranged, a meal provided, a truth spoken, or a prayer offered in another's presence. Such acts do not replace God; they serve Him. The believer should not announce himself as the answer to another man's prayer, but he should be willing to obey when God gives opportunity. Titus probably did not know that his arrival would be recorded forever as evidence of divine comfort. He simply came faithfully, and God placed eternity inside the ordinary act.

Conclusion

Paul's confession remains exactly where the Holy Ghost placed it: "our flesh had no rest." He was troubled on every side. Fightings stood without and fears worked within. Christianity gains nothing by painting over those words until the apostle resembles an emotionless religious statue. The same man who commanded believers to rejoice also knew what it meant to be cast down. His weakness did not disprove his calling, and his honesty did not cancel his faith. The passage honours God precisely because Paul's need was real. A small burden would require small comfort; a crushing burden revealed the sufficiency and timing of the God of all comfort. The darker the Macedonian road became, the brighter those words appeared: "Nevertheless God."

God comforted Paul "by the coming of Titus." He used a fellow servant, a providential meeting, a faithful report, and news of genuine repentance. There was no contradiction between divine comfort and human fellowship because God designed the instrument and governed its arrival. The Lord who could have sent an angel sent Titus. The God who could have spoken from heaven placed the message in a brother's mouth. This is not lesser

providence. It is the ordinary majesty of God working through His body. Heaven often answers prayer through shoe leather, a familiar voice, and a believer willing to make the journey. The supernatural hand may remain invisible while the human messenger stands plainly in the doorway.

When the servant of God is cast down, he must not conclude that God has abandoned him merely because the flesh is tired and the battle is loud. He must continue in truth, refuse self-pity, pray honestly, receive scriptural comfort, and watch for the means God sends. When another believer is cast down, the Christian must not offer hollow slogans from a safe distance and then congratulate himself for ministry. He may need to become a Titus. The battle may have drained the body, fear may have entered the heart, and trouble may have filled every visible road—nevertheless God still knows where His servant is. He knows whom to send, what truth to carry, and when the door must open. The cast down saint is never beneath the reach of the God of all comfort.

7 of 10: The “But God” Passages – The Preacher Planted, but God Made It Live

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 — “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.”

First Corinthians 3:6–7 places every minister, missionary, teacher, evangelist, writer, and local church worker in the proper field and under the proper Owner. Paul planted. Apollos watered. Both laboured, both mattered, and both fulfilled an assigned task. Yet neither man could place life inside the seed, command roots to descend, order shoots to rise, or force fruit to appear. “But God gave the increase.” The passage does not insult labour; it destroys boasting. God uses human servants without surrendering divine glory to them. The planter carries seed, the waterer carries a vessel, but God alone carries the secret of life. A preacher may proclaim the gospel faithfully, explain Scripture clearly, plead with sinners earnestly, and labour until his strength is spent, yet he cannot regenerate one soul. He can sow truth into the ear; only God can make it live in the heart.

The Corinthian church had forgotten this distinction. Believers were attaching themselves to ministerial personalities and forming competing parties around Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and even the name of Christ used carnally. They turned servants into banners, doctrine into team colours, and the local church into a religious contest. Paul did not receive their

admiration as a harmless compliment. He called it carnality. When Christians exalt preachers into rival centres of loyalty, they do not prove their maturity; they advertise their spiritual infancy. The issue was never whether Paul or Apollos possessed genuine gifts. Both did. The problem was that the Corinthians treated God's instruments as though the instruments created the result. A hoe may be useful in the garden, but only a fool holds a banquet in honour of the hoe while ignoring the owner of the field.

The words "but God" rescue ministry from two opposite errors. They rescue the successful servant from pride by reminding him that increase came from God. They rescue the discouraged servant from despair by reminding him that increase was never his power to manufacture. Faithfulness belongs to the worker; life belongs to God. The preacher must sow the right seed, the teacher must water with sound doctrine, and the church must labour in prayer and obedience. Yet after every sermon, lesson, tract, conversation, and act of service, the result rests with the Lord. Religious machinery may gather a crowd, stir emotion, create excitement, and produce impressive reports. It cannot give spiritual life. Men can inflate numbers the way a child inflates a balloon, but one small pin of truth usually reveals how much substance was inside.

1. Corinthian Hero Worship Was Evidence of Carnality

Paul opened the chapter by telling the Corinthians that he could not speak unto them as spiritual but "as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ." They were saved people, addressed elsewhere as sanctified in Christ Jesus, yet their conduct was fleshly. Salvation had placed them in Christ, but their walk had not matured in agreement with that position. Paul had fed them with milk because they had not been able to bear meat, and they remained unable because envy, strife, and divisions continued among them. Spiritual infancy is natural at the beginning of Christian life. Remaining proudly in the nursery while arguing over which servant holds the best bottle is another matter entirely.

Their party slogans exposed the problem: "I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos." Paul asked, "are ye not carnal?" The Corinthians probably imagined that attachment to a gifted minister made them discerning. Paul said it made them fleshly. One group preferred the founding apostle, perhaps admiring his authority and pioneer labour. Another preferred Apollos, "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures." Differences in personality, gift, emphasis, and manner became fuel for pride. Instead of receiving profit from both servants, the Corinthians used one to diminish the other. Carnality can turn a Bible teacher into a mascot and doctrinal conviction into an excuse for vanity. A man may shout the right preacher's name for entirely wrong reasons.

The fault did not lie in appreciating faithful ministers. Scripture commands believers to esteem those who labour among them and to remember those who have spoken the word of God. Gratitude is biblical; idolatry is not. A faithful preacher should be honoured for his work without being treated as the source of truth, life, or spiritual power. Paul refused the throne his admirers attempted to build. He knew that a servant enlarged beyond biblical proportion eventually blocks the congregation's view of Christ. The preacher who enjoys becoming indispensable has forgotten that graveyards are full of men once considered essential. God buries His workmen and continues His work. The pulpit is a place of service, not a throne from which a personality rules his admirers.

2. Ministers Are Servants Through Whom Men Believe

Paul asked, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" He did not ask "what" they were but "who," stripping away the exaggerated identities created by party spirit. They were ministers—servants performing work assigned by another. They did not invent the gospel, supply its power, purchase redemption, or become the objects of saving faith. The Corinthians believed through their ministry, "even as the Lord gave to every man." The Lord assigned the opportunities, gifts, fields, and measures of service. Paul and Apollos were not competing owners of religious franchises. They were servants sent into the same field under the command of the same Master.

A minister's authority is therefore derived and limited by the word of God. He possesses no permission to revise the gospel, correct the King James Bible, invent doctrine, manipulate consciences, or build a kingdom around his name. His task is to preach the word, rightly divide it, reprove, rebuke, exhort, and point sinners to Jesus Christ. When a messenger begins treating the message as private property, he has mistaken the mailbag for the crown jewels. Paul preached "not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." The preacher is not the Saviour, the Holy Ghost, or the head of the body. A minister who forgets that eventually expects from people the devotion belonging only to Christ.

The phrase "by whom ye believed" also shows the dignity God places upon preaching. Ministers are nothing as independent sources of life, but their assigned service is not nothing. Romans 10 asks, "how shall they hear without a preacher?" God chose to communicate His gospel through spoken and written words carried by human servants. That arrangement does not glorify man; it glorifies God's ability to use weak vessels. Second Corinthians 4:7 says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." The vessel matters because it carries treasure, but nobody should confuse the clay jar with the treasure inside it. A cracked pot boasting about the light would be comical if pulpits had not made the performance so common.

3. Paul Planted the Incorruptible Seed

Paul said, “I have planted.” In Corinth, he entered a pagan city dominated by idolatry, immorality, commerce, philosophy, and human pride. He did not arrive with entertainment designed to imitate Corinth’s culture or a marketing survey identifying which doctrines might test poorly. He preached “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Acts 18 records that he reasoned in the synagogue, testified that Jesus was Christ, and then continued teaching the word of God among the Gentiles. Planting meant introducing the gospel where it had not taken root and laying the foundation of Jesus Christ. Paul scattered no seed of self-improvement, religious ritual, or philosophical speculation. He planted the word that announces Christ’s death for sins, burial, and bodily resurrection.

First Peter 1:23 says believers are born again “by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” The seed must therefore be genuine. A preacher cannot substitute human wisdom, inspirational storytelling, political enthusiasm, or emotional manipulation and expect spiritual fruit. Plastic seed may look clean in a display bag, but no amount of watering will make it germinate. The gospel must be proclaimed accurately: all have sinned, Christ died for our sins, He was buried, He rose again, and salvation is received by grace through faith apart from works. Remove sin and the cross loses its necessity. Remove the blood and redemption loses its price. Remove the resurrection and faith becomes vain. Change the seed and the crop changes—or never appears at all.

Planting also requires the seed to leave the bag. A church may possess a perfect doctrinal statement, a sound Bible, and shelves of excellent material while failing to carry the gospel beyond its walls. Seed stored indefinitely produces no harvest. Paul travelled, spoke, reasoned, testified, suffered opposition, and remained in Corinth because God told him, “I have much people in this city.” He did not know in advance which hearers would believe, but he knew what message they needed. The servant’s responsibility is not to identify secretly elect-looking faces in the crowd. It is to preach the gospel “to every creature.” God knows the heart; the preacher knows the commission. The farmer who refuses to sow until the field guarantees results will spend harvest season admiring an unopened sack.

4. Apollos Watered What Another Man Had Planted

Apollos came after Paul and watered the work already established. Acts 18 describes him as eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, and diligent in teaching what he knew. After Aquila and Priscilla expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly, he travelled to Achaia and “helped them much which had believed through grace.” He mightily convinced the Jews publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. Apollos did not need to replant the field under his own name to prove his value. He strengthened what

another servant had begun. Mature ministry does not require every preacher to tear down the previous work so he can pose beside a new cornerstone.

Watering represents continued teaching, exhortation, correction, encouragement, and discipleship. Conversion begins life; sound doctrine nourishes it. New believers need to learn their position in Christ, the difference between law and grace, Israel and the Church, the Rapture and the Second Advent, standing and state, salvation and service. They need instruction concerning the local church, holiness, prayer, giving, witness, family, spiritual warfare, and the Judgment Seat of Christ. A shallow ministry may celebrate births while leaving spiritual infants unattended. A maternity ward is necessary, but nobody expects the babies to remain there for twenty years arguing over pacifiers. Watering labours toward growth.

Apollos's service was different from Paul's without being contrary to it. One planted and another watered, yet both served the same purpose. God does not distribute identical gifts, personalities, burdens, or fields to every servant. One man may excel in evangelism, another in detailed teaching, another in pastoral care, and another in missionary labour. Difference is not division until pride turns assignment into competition. The planter should thank God for the waterer, and the waterer should honour the planter's earlier labour. A church impoverishes itself when it demands that every useful servant sound, move, and work exactly alike. The body has many members because one enormous ear would make a poor-looking church and an even worse body.

5. Only God Can Give the Increase

After naming both forms of labour, Paul gives the decisive explanation: "but God gave the increase." Seed contains life because God placed it there, soil receives it under conditions God established, water serves a purpose God designed, and growth proceeds by power no farmer creates. The spiritual reality is greater still. The preacher can present truth to the mind and conscience, but he cannot produce the new birth. He cannot forgive sins, justify the ungodly, place a believer into the body of Christ, seal him with the Holy Spirit, or create spiritual understanding. Salvation is of the Lord. The servant announces the terms; God performs the work when the sinner believes the gospel.

This truth exposes the religious methods used to manufacture visible results. Music can manipulate emotion, repeated pressure can wear down resistance, carefully staged invitations can move bodies, and persuasive sales techniques can obtain decisions. None of these guarantees regeneration. A crowd can be assembled through promotion, kept through entertainment, and counted through creative arithmetic without one ounce of spiritual increase. Men can build a swelling organization the way yeast swells dough, but

size is not the same as life. God's increase produces conviction of sin, faith in Christ, hunger for Scripture, love for truth, separation from evil, and endurance under testing. Flesh can imitate some outward features for a season, but only God can root life beneath the surface.

The same principle governs growth in believers. A teacher can explain doctrine faithfully, but only God can open understanding and drive truth into the life. Paul prayed for believers to receive spiritual wisdom and enlightened understanding because information alone does not guarantee maturity. Some Corinthians possessed knowledge and spiritual gifts while remaining carnal. The goal is not merely to fill notebooks but to produce saints whose walk agrees with truth. God gives increase as the word is received, believed, and obeyed. The preacher must never claim credit for fruit that grew by divine power. A rooster may crow before sunrise, but only a remarkably proud rooster assumes he raised the sun.

6. Planter and Waterer Are One, Yet Labour Will Be Rewarded

Paul says, "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one." They are one in purpose, message, field, ownership, and dependence upon God. This does not erase individual identity or make every method equally sound. Paul still planted, Apollos still watered, and each remained accountable for his assigned work. Their unity rested upon service to the same Lord, not upon a vague agreement to avoid doctrine. Biblical unity is not achieved by removing every truth sharp enough to divide right from wrong. Paul and Apollos were one because both laboured upon the foundation God established and directed glory away from themselves.

The verse continues, "and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." God gives the increase, yet He rewards faithful labour. The reward is not eternal life, which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. It concerns service by saved men and will be manifested at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God does not reward one servant according to another man's numbers. He judges motive, faithfulness, doctrine, sacrifice, opportunity, and obedience with perfect knowledge. The missionary who labours in hard soil may see fewer visible results than the preacher who inherits a fruitful field, yet heaven's accounting will not confuse harvest size with personal faithfulness. God knows who cleared the ground, who planted through tears, who watered unnoticed, and who merely arrived in time for the photograph.

This protects the servant from both pride and jealousy. If God gives increase, the fruitful preacher cannot boast as though his brilliance created life. If God rewards labour, the less-visible preacher need not envy another man's harvest. Each servant should remain faithful to his assignment. One may plant where another will reap years later. John 4:37 says, "One

soweth, and another reapeth.” The reaper enters into labour he did not begin, while the sower may enter glory before the crop appears. Religious celebrity culture awards trophies to whoever stands nearest the fruit when cameras arrive. God has watched the entire field from the first furrow and will not misplace one reward.

7. The Field and Building Belong to God

Paul says, “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” Labouring together with God does not make ministers equal partners with the Almighty, as though heaven needed additional shareholders to meet production goals. They are workers operating under His authority, using His seed, in His field, for His purpose. The church at Corinth belonged to God. Paul did not say, “Ye are my husbandry,” and Apollos did not arrive to rename the field after himself. Every local church should remember who owns the property in the spiritual sense. Pastors serve Christ’s people; they do not possess them.

Paul then changes the picture from agriculture to construction. As a wise masterbuilder, he laid the foundation, and another built thereon. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Ministry does not begin with a personality, denomination, trend, movement, or program. Christ is the foundation. The warning follows: “But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” It is possible to build upon the right foundation with wrong materials—wood, hay, and stubble instead of gold, silver, and precious stones. Activity alone does not guarantee approved service. A man can be extremely busy constructing something Christ will burn at the inspection.

The day will declare every man’s work because “it shall be revealed by fire.” This is the Judgment Seat of Christ for saved believers, not the Great White Throne judgment of the lost. The worker may suffer loss while “he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” Salvation remains secure because it rests upon Christ, but reward can be lost because service is tested. Public reputation will not shield inferior material. Attendance reports, publicity campaigns, flattering introductions, social influence, and framed certificates burn rapidly when divine fire reaches them. God will examine what was built, why it was built, and whether it agreed with His word. The Judgment Seat will reduce every ministry to its actual

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 — “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.”

First Corinthians 3:6–7 places every preacher, teacher, missionary, evangelist, and local church worker in his proper place. Paul planted. Apollos watered. Both laboured, both mattered, and both fulfilled assignments given by the Lord. Yet neither man could command the seed to germinate, manufacture spiritual life, or produce fruit by human power. “But God gave the increase.” The planter carried the seed, the waterer tended the field, but life came from God. This is not an excuse for lazy ministry or careless preaching. It is the death sentence upon ministerial pride. God uses human labour without surrendering divine glory. A preacher may open the Bible, proclaim the gospel, warn sinners, teach saints, pray, visit, and labour until his strength is spent, but he cannot reach into a dead soul and create life. Only God gives the increase.

The immediate problem at Corinth was not agricultural technique but carnal hero worship. Believers had gathered around the names of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and even Christ in a divisive spirit. They had turned gifted servants into competing banners. Paul therefore asked, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?” They were instruments, not sources; servants, not saviours. Corinth had confused the man carrying the message with the Lord who gave it power. That confusion still fills churches, conferences, publishing houses, and religious platforms. A preacher’s name becomes a brand, his personality becomes the attraction, and his followers begin acting as though the kingdom of God would file for bankruptcy if their favourite voice went silent. God buried Moses and continued the journey. He can survive the retirement of any modern celebrity.

The verse corrects both the idolized preacher and the preacher who enjoys being idolized. The congregation must not attribute divine power to a human vessel, and the vessel must not drink praise that belongs to God. Paul refused to accept ownership of the Corinthian believers. He had not died for them, and they had not been baptized in his name. He understood that fruit in ministry does not prove the labourer possesses personal greatness. God can use a plain vessel because the treasure supplies the value. Second Corinthians 4:7 says, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” The vessel may be useful, clean, prepared, and faithful, but it remains earthen. When a clay pot begins demanding worship because it carried living water, somebody needs to remind it where mud comes from.

1. Carnality Turned Ministers Into Rival Banners

Paul began 1 Corinthians 3 by telling the church that he could not speak unto them as spiritual but “as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” They possessed spiritual gifts, biblical instruction, and apostolic ministry, yet their conduct remained immature. Carnality does not always appear as public immorality. Sometimes it enters church carrying a notebook, quoting preachers, and arguing over which personality deserves the largest following. The Corinthians’ divisions revealed that flesh had dressed itself in religious clothing. One said, “I am of Paul,” another, “I am of Apollos,” and their party spirit proved they walked as men. They had converted the local assembly into a collection of fan clubs and mistaken sectarian enthusiasm for spiritual discernment.

Paul did not rebuke them because Paul and Apollos taught different gospels. Both men served the same Lord and preached the same Christ. The problem lay in carnal believers using faithful ministers as excuses for division. Apollos was eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures. Paul carried apostolic authority and had founded the Corinthian work. Their differing gifts should have benefited the church, not fractured it. God did not make every servant identical because a body needs more than one member. Carnality sees variety and demands competition; spirituality sees variety and gives thanks for supply. A hammer and saw perform different tasks, but only a fool organizes a lumberyard debate over which tool should receive all the glory for the house.

Personality worship eventually corrupts doctrine because loyalty shifts from Scripture to the man. Followers begin defending whatever their chosen leader says, excusing what they would condemn in another, and treating honest biblical correction as personal betrayal. The minister becomes the interpretive authority, and the Bible is quietly demoted to supporting evidence. Paul cut that corruption at the root. “Who then is Paul?” The question deliberately reduces the inflated image. He was an apostle, but still a minister. Apollos was powerful in preaching, but still a minister. The word means service, not royalty. The pulpit is not a throne, the congregation is not a private kingdom, and sheep do not bear the preacher’s brand. They belong to the Chief Shepherd.

2. Ministers Are Servants Through Whom Men Believe

Paul describes himself and Apollos as “ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man.” Their ministries were channels through which the Corinthians heard and believed the gospel, but the Lord assigned the work and supplied the opportunity. Paul’s calling, Apollos’s ability, the open doors, the receptive hearers, and the resulting faith all stood beneath divine government. This does not eliminate human response. The Corinthians heard the gospel and believed it. It eliminates boasting as though either preacher created the saving message or generated its power. Romans 10:17 says, “So then

faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The preacher gives voice to the word; he does not give the word its life.

A minister’s authority therefore remains entirely subordinate to Scripture. He is not commissioned to invent truth, improve the gospel, correct the Bible, or replace preaching with religious entertainment. His duty is to take what God has said and deliver it faithfully. First Corinthians 4:1–2 says ministers are “stewards of the mysteries of God,” and “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” A steward manages another man’s property. He has no right to renovate the Master’s message because the neighbourhood finds it unfashionable. The modern pulpit often behaves like a restaurant asking customers which doctrines should remain on the menu. A faithful steward does not conduct a survey before serving what the Master ordered.

Because ministers are servants, their value is measured first by faithfulness rather than visibility. One man may preach to hundreds, another teach a small class, another witness to a neighbour, and another labour for years in a difficult place with little outward response. God knows the assignment He gave each servant. Human statistics cannot reveal motives, opportunities, resistance, or the quality of the work. A crowded building may contain shallow soil, while one faithful conversation may bear fruit for generations. This does not make numbers meaningless; Acts records conversions and church growth. It means numbers are not sovereign. A minister can count attendance, offerings, baptisms, publications, and responses, but he cannot count accurately what only eternity will reveal.

3. Paul Planted the Incorruptible Seed

Paul said, “I have planted.” He entered Corinth preaching “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Acts 18 records his reasoning in the synagogue and testifying that Jesus was Christ. When opposition arose, he turned to the Gentiles and continued teaching the word of God among them. Planting required carrying the seed into unploughed ground, confronting unbelief, enduring resistance, and establishing a local church where no such assembly had existed. Paul did not plant personal philosophy, Jewish tradition, Greek speculation, or Roman morality. He planted the gospel revealed by God. A planter who substitutes gravel for seed may work energetically, sweat impressively, and produce beautiful reports, but the field will remain barren.

The seed is connected throughout Scripture with the word of God. First Peter 1:23 says believers are born again “by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” The word exposes sin, reveals Christ, communicates the gospel, and supplies the truth faith receives. The power does not lie in theatrical delivery, emotional manipulation, carefully manufactured atmosphere, or the preacher’s ability to produce a visible reaction. Those

devices may move feelings without reaching the conscience. The incorruptible seed does not need improvement from corruptible showmanship. It needs to be planted plainly. A preacher who spends forty minutes decorating the seed bag and never opens it has performed agriculture only in his imagination.

Planting also demands confidence that the seed possesses life even when immediate growth is unseen. The word may remain in a hearer's memory long after the preacher departs. One verse learned in childhood may return with convicting force years later. A gospel witness apparently dismissed may become the truth a sinner remembers when every false refuge collapses. The planter does not control the season or know every condition beneath the soil. Ecclesiastes 11:6 says, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand." Faithful ministry scatters truth without demanding advance knowledge of which conversation will produce visible fruit. The farmer who refuses to sow until guaranteed a harvest has guaranteed only an empty field.

4. Apollos Watered What Another Man Had Planted

Apollos entered Corinth after Paul and watered the work already begun. Acts 18 describes him as "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures." After Aquila and Priscilla expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly, he helped believers and "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ." His ministry strengthened what Paul had established. He did not resent arriving after another man had planted, nor did he tear up Paul's work so the field could display his own name. He watered. Spiritual maturity rejoices to continue a work begun by someone else because the field belongs to God.

Watering includes teaching, discipleship, exhortation, correction, encouragement, and repeated exposure to sound doctrine. A convert needs more than a memory of the day he believed. He needs the whole counsel of God, instruction in his position in Christ, guidance in Christian conduct, grounding in the local church, and protection from false teaching. The Great Commission involves teaching as well as evangelizing. A church obsessed with decisions but indifferent to discipleship may produce rows of seedlings left unattended beneath a hot sun. Counting births while neglecting children is not successful parenting, and counting professions while refusing to teach believers is not complete ministry.

The waterer must use the same truth as the planter. Human tradition, motivational chatter, and doctrinal novelty do not nourish spiritual growth. Paul later warned that some teachers build with wood, hay, and stubble. Activity is not automatically edification. A watering ministry that dilutes Scripture until no doctrine remains may keep people damp without making them strong. Plastic plants require dusting, not watering, and artificial Christianity

requires constant entertainment because it has no living root. Sound teaching establishes believers in grace, strengthens discernment, corrects conduct, and turns attention continually toward Jesus Christ. The goal is not dependence upon the teacher but maturity under the word.

5. God Alone Gave the Increase

The decisive clause is “but God gave the increase.” Seed and water are necessary means, yet neither contains authority to command life. The farmer can prepare the soil and perform every responsible task, but he cannot reach beneath the ground and order germination. Likewise, preachers proclaim, teach, pray, and labour, but God brings spiritual results. Only the Holy Spirit can use the word to convict, illuminate, regenerate, sanctify, and produce fruit that remains. Religious machinery can attract crowds, stir excitement, and generate decisions under pressure. It can manufacture movement. It cannot manufacture life.

This truth protects ministry from despair as well as pride. If increase depended entirely upon the preacher’s ability, every barren season would prove personal worthlessness and every fruitful season personal greatness. Paul removes both conclusions. The labourer must examine his faithfulness, doctrine, conduct, and methods honestly, but he must not assume sovereignty over results. Noah preached righteousness in a corrupt generation without producing a national revival. Jeremiah warned Judah while the nation continued toward judgment. Their hearers’ rejection did not turn truth into failure. Success begins with obeying the assignment. God decides how, when, and where the increase appears.

God-given increase also carries qualities human imitation cannot sustain. Genuine conversion produces a new creature, not merely a religious customer. Genuine growth yields love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. It develops hunger for Scripture, hatred of sin, love for brethren, and faithfulness under pressure. Counterfeit growth may expand a mailing list while leaving the old man comfortably enthroned. A church can grow numerically by removing every offensive doctrine, just as a restaurant can attract customers by serving nothing but dessert. The crowd grows, the appetite expands, and the body becomes weaker. God’s increase possesses life because it comes through truth.

6. The Planter and Waterer Are One, Yet Each Will Be Rewarded

Paul writes, “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one.” They are one in purpose, allegiance, message, and service under Christ. This does not erase distinctions in gift or assignment. Paul remained Paul and Apollos remained Apollos, but neither had a legitimate interest opposed to the other. Their labour converged upon the same field.

Competition between faithful ministers is therefore carnal because one servant's success advances the same cause. If a nearby church preaches the true gospel, teaches the KJV faithfully, and sees souls saved, another sound church has no reason to mourn as though heaven misdirected a shipment.

Yet the verse continues, "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." Unity does not eliminate individual accountability. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, each believer's work will be examined. Reward is connected to faithful labour, quality, motive, and obedience, not merely outward results. One plants and another waters, but God can reward both even when the visible increase appears after one labourer has departed. No servant loses reward because another man receives public recognition for fruit growing from earlier seed. Heaven keeps accurate records after earthly publicity departments have gone home.

The Judgment Seat is not the Great White Throne and does not determine whether a believer remains saved. First Corinthians 3:15 says a man's work may be burned, "but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." Salvation rests upon Jesus Christ, the only foundation. Reward concerns the believer's service upon that foundation. Gold, silver, and precious stones endure; wood, hay, and stubble burn. The fire will not be impressed by attendance graphs, promotional photographs, honorary titles, or glowing introductions. Newspaper clippings make excellent kindling. What was done faithfully for Christ according to truth will survive when every human reputation has turned to smoke.

7. The Field and the Building Belong to God

Paul says, "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." Labouring together with God does not place ministers on equal footing with the Almighty. It means God graciously employs them in work He owns, directs, empowers, and evaluates. The field belongs to God. The building belongs to God. The labourers belong to God. He supplies the seed, rain, life, foundation, gifts, opportunities, and reward. Man supplies obedience and receives the privilege of participation. A farmhand who begins signing his name over the owner's deed has misunderstood the employment arrangement.

As a wise masterbuilder, Paul laid the foundation, and that foundation is Jesus Christ. No minister may lay another. Churches are not built spiritually upon personality, heritage, political influence, entertainment, social activism, or denominational machinery. Those things may produce institutions, but only Christ supports the Church. The gospel of His death, burial, and resurrection establishes the sinner in grace. Once the foundation is laid, every teacher must take heed how he builds. False doctrine does not become sound

because it was added enthusiastically, and shallow work does not become precious because it attracted attention. God inspects materials, not advertisements.

The practical command is therefore to labour hard, remain humble, preach the word, and leave increase with God. Plant without demanding applause. Water without resenting the planter. Rejoice when another servant is used. Refuse to manipulate people in order to improve statistics. Pray for real fruit rather than an impressive report. The preacher cannot make Scripture live; it already lives. He cannot regenerate the sinner; God does. He cannot sanctify a believer by personality; the Spirit works through truth. Ministry becomes sane when the servant stops pretending to be the source and returns to being a faithful channel.

Conclusion

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” The sentence recognizes labour without worshipping labourers. Paul did not minimize planting, and Apollos did not waste his time watering. God ordained both tasks. Yet the life appearing in the field belonged entirely to Him. This balance destroys laziness on one side and pride on the other. The servant cannot excuse neglect by saying God gives increase, because God commanded him to sow. He cannot claim the harvest as a personal creation, because only God gives life. The preacher carries the seed; he does not manufacture the resurrection taking place beneath the soil.

The local church must therefore stop treating ministry like a tournament of personalities. Faithful servants differ in voice, gift, temperament, experience, and assignment. One may break hard ground, another sow patiently, another water for years, and another gather fruit whose history he barely knows. God sees the whole field. The congregation honours ministers properly by receiving biblical truth, praying for them, testing all teaching by Scripture, and refusing to place any man where Christ alone belongs. Appreciation is biblical; idolatry is carnal. A useful preacher remains useful partly because he remembers that he is replaceable.

When genuine fruit appears, let the glory rise where it belongs. The sinner believed because the living word presented the crucified and risen Christ. The saint grew because the Spirit used truth. The church endured because God sustained it. The labourers may receive reward, but the Lord receives glory. Men can design programs, build platforms, purchase equipment, and publish impressive numbers. They can even produce a crowd large enough to block traffic. But they cannot breathe eternal life into one dead sinner or produce one ounce of spiritual fruit apart from God. The preacher planted, the teacher watered, the church laboured—but God made it live.

8 of 10: The “But God” Passages – When God Chose the Foolish to Confound the Wise

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 — “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

The world keeps a polished guest list. It honours credentials, influence, wealth, social position, intellectual reputation, physical power, celebrity, and approval from recognized institutions. God walks past the velvet rope. First Corinthians 1 declares that He deliberately chooses foolish, weak, base, and despised things to confound what the world calls wise and mighty. He does not do this because ignorance is holy or incompetence is virtuous. He does it so no flesh can stand in His presence holding a résumé and claiming credit for divine work. God will use human ability when it is surrendered, but He will not share His throne with it. The world asks whether the vessel has prestige. God asks whether it is available, clean, believing, and obedient.

The centre of the chapter is “the preaching of the cross.” To those who perish, that message is foolishness. A crucified Jewish Saviour does not satisfy the pride of the religious sign-seeker or the intellectual appetite of the philosophical Greek. Yet “unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” The same message dismissed by worldly wisdom accomplishes what worldly wisdom has never achieved: it saves believing sinners. Philosophy can rearrange questions, politics can rearrange power, education can rearrange information, and religion can rearrange ceremonies. None can forgive sin, impart eternal life, or justify the ungodly. The cross reaches where every human ladder falls short because God came down when man could not climb up.

Paul directs the Corinthians to examine their own calling. Their congregation did not consist primarily of the recognized elite. “Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” The text does not say “not any.” God saved educated Paul, eloquent Apollos, prominent Crispus, and others possessing ability or standing. The emphasis lies upon “not many.” The kingdom of God does not depend upon recruiting society’s celebrated names before it can operate. God can save a ruler, but He does not need one. He can use a scholar, but the scholar must bow before the Book like everyone else. Grace enters no man through the door marked VIP.

1. Corinth Admired the Wisdom God Had Already Rejected

Corinth stood within a culture impressed by rhetoric, philosophy, status, and public performance. Speakers were judged by eloquence, arguments by intellectual fashion, and men by their social rank. That spirit had entered the church. Believers aligned themselves behind Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ as competing banners. They judged ministry through the habits of the world rather than the mind of Christ. Paul therefore refused to preach “with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” He would not decorate Calvary until proud men could admire the wrapping while rejecting the sacrifice inside.

The problem was not clear reasoning or careful speech. Paul reasoned from Scripture, answered objections, and communicated profound doctrine. The problem was “wisdom of words” used to display the speaker and remove the offence of the cross. A preacher can discuss Christ in such polished language that nobody realizes he is a guilty sinner under condemnation. He can convert the gospel into a lecture, Calvary into a metaphor, and resurrection into inspiration. Everyone leaves impressed with the speaker and untouched by the message. That is not apostolic preaching. It is a funeral director applying cosmetics to unbelief.

God had already written His verdict upon autonomous human wisdom: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Human wisdom excludes God, rejects revelation, and begins with fallen man as the final authority. It may produce technological wonders while remaining unable to answer why man sins, where he goes after death, or how guilt can be removed. It can measure distant objects while refusing to look honestly into the human heart. The fool’s telescope reaches far enough to increase his pride but never high enough to find the throne he denies.

2. The Cross Is Foolishness Only to Those Who Are Perishing

First Corinthians 1:18 divides humanity by its response to the cross: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” The message does not change; the hearers’ condition explains the different verdicts. The perishing man sees weakness, shame, blood, and death. The saved man sees the Lamb of God bearing sin, satisfying justice, defeating death, and opening the only way to God. Unbelief does not expose foolishness in the gospel. The gospel exposes foolishness in unbelief.

The cross insults human pride because it announces that man cannot save himself. If education, morality, ceremony, philosophy, law, or social improvement could reconcile sinners to God, Christ died needlessly. Calvary declares that the condition was so hopeless only the blood of God’s sinless Son could meet it. Every human achievement

must stop at the foot of the cross. The professor, labourer, ruler, prisoner, millionaire, and beggar enter salvation through the same door. Religion keeps trying to install a private entrance for distinguished sinners, but heaven issued one address: Jesus Christ.

The message also offends because it presents salvation as a finished gift received by faith. Men prefer a system that allows measurement and boasting. Give them steps, ceremonies, pilgrimages, payments, or moral achievements, and flesh will begin polishing a trophy. Tell them Christ died for their sins, was buried, rose again, and saves completely those who believe, and pride loses its occupation. Grace makes the sinner a receiver, not a partner negotiating his percentage of the credit. The cross does not request man's assistance. It demands that he abandon every competing confidence.

3. God Asked the Wise Men to Produce Their Results

Paul challenges the age: "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" Let them enter the witness box and display what their wisdom accomplished concerning sin and salvation. After centuries of speculation, man remained guilty, mortal, corrupt, and estranged from God. Greece produced philosophers but no Saviour. Rome produced law but no justification. Israel's scribes possessed Scripture but rejected the Christ standing before them. Human wisdom had discussed everything except the answer God provided.

"The world by wisdom knew not God." Man could observe creation, conscience, order, and power, yet he turned revelation into idolatry. Romans 1 says men became vain in their imaginations and changed God's glory into images of creatures. Intelligence did not cure rebellion; it often equipped rebellion with a larger vocabulary. The educated sinner can construct a more elaborate excuse than the ignorant sinner, but both excuses collapse before judgment. A longer rope remains a rope when a man uses it to hang himself.

God then chose "the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The verse does not say foolish preaching. God is not endorsing error, laziness, or empty noise. The foolishness belongs to the world's estimate of the ordained method. One man stands with an open Bible and proclaims a crucified and risen Saviour. No philosophical maze, theatrical spectacle, or priestly machinery is required. The world calls it foolish because it cannot patent, control, or take credit for the power. God calls it preaching and saves believers through it.

4. Foolish and Weak Things Display Divine Power

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." God often selects instruments lacking the features men consider indispensable. Moses protested that he was not eloquent. Gideon belonged to a poor family and called himself least in his

father's house. David was the overlooked shepherd boy. The apostles were dismissed as "unlearned and ignorant men," yet their enemies recognized that they had been with Jesus. God enjoys placing treasure in earthen vessels because the cracks prevent anyone from mistaking the pot for the treasure.

He also chooses "the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." Weakness does not mean moral compromise or refusal to prepare. It means the instrument possesses no natural power adequate to explain the result. Gideon's army was reduced before victory so Israel could not claim, "Mine own hand hath saved me." David faced Goliath without Saul's armour. Paul's thorn remained so Christ's strength could rest upon him. God removes the human explanation before displaying divine sufficiency. He trims the army until the statisticians begin composing the obituary, then wins the battle.

This truth does not command believers to glorify ignorance. Paul was highly educated, Apollos was eloquent, Luke was a physician, and Moses was learned in Egypt's wisdom. Ability surrendered to God can serve truth. Ability trusted instead of God becomes an idol. The educated man must place his education beneath Scripture; the eloquent man must use eloquence to clarify truth rather than display himself. God does not object to a sharp tool. He objects when the tool begins claiming ownership of the Carpenter's work.

5. Base and Despised Things Leave No Room for Boasting

God chose "base things of the world, and things which are despised." The world assigns value through reputation, wealth, appearance, position, and cultural approval. God is not bound by that price list. He can take a former persecutor and make him an apostle, a despised publican and make him a Gospel writer, or ordinary fishermen and make them witnesses before rulers. Grace does not ask society which sinners are worth saving. Christ died for the ungodly, and the ungodly possess no impressive class distinctions at the cross.

God also chooses "things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." He can use what the world ignores to overthrow what the world considers established. A small congregation preaching truth possesses more eternal substance than a religious empire built upon error. One obscure believer with a King James Bible may understand more saving truth than a hall filled with scholars explaining why the Bible cannot mean what it says. Numbers can amplify a voice; they cannot convert falsehood into truth. Ten thousand zeroes still add up to zero unless something possessing value stands before them.

The world despises God's instruments because it despises God's standards. It calls biblical preaching narrow, holiness extreme, faith naïve, and separation unloving. Yet the world's approval is a weather vane mounted on a collapsing barn. It turns with every cultural wind while the building rots beneath it. The believer must not adjust doctrine to

gain applause from men who will stand under the same judgment. The goal is not to become deliberately crude or obnoxious. It is to remain faithful when truth costs reputation.

6. No Flesh Will Glory in God's Presence

The declared purpose is “that no flesh should glory in his presence.” Salvation excludes boasting because grace supplies everything. Christ became sin's Substitute, shed the blood, endured judgment, rose from the dead, and offers eternal life. The sinner contributes guilt and receives mercy. Faith does not become a meritorious work because it rests entirely upon another's accomplishment. Romans 3:27 asks, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded.” Heaven will contain redeemed sinners praising the Lamb, not applicants explaining how wisely they assisted Him.

Ministry also excludes boasting because God gives the increase. The preacher did not write the Bible, invent the gospel, convict the sinner, regenerate the believer, or create spiritual fruit. He delivered what he received. If God uses him greatly, the result proves the greatness of divine grace, not the natural magnificence of the vessel. Nebuchadnezzar boasted of great Babylon and was soon eating grass. God knows how to move flesh from the platform to the pasture when it becomes confused about ownership of glory.

No flesh will glory “in his presence.” Men may boast before one another because audiences see only fragments. They can display statistics, publications, degrees, buildings, followers, and titles while concealing motives and compromises. God sees the whole work. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, every believer's service will be manifested by fire. Publicity cannot protect wood, hay, and stubble. The divine inspection will not ask how many people were impressed; it will reveal what was truly done for Christ. Heaven's light is hard on artificial gold.

7. Christ Is Everything the Believer Needs Before God

Paul turns from what believers are not to what Christ has become unto them: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus.” Their position originates in God's action, not social status or intellectual achievement. They are “in Christ Jesus,” joined to the One who possesses every perfection they lack. Christianity is not the gradual construction of a better standing in Adam. It is God placing the believing sinner in Christ. The least celebrated saint possesses a position no earthly title can approach.

Christ “is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” He is God's wisdom against the world's speculation, righteousness for the guilty, sanctification for the unclean, and redemption for those sold under sin. The believer does not look within for these treasures as natural qualities. He possesses them in Christ.

Human wisdom says develop yourself until God is impressed. The gospel says receive the Son in whom God is eternally pleased. One system builds ladders; the other reveals the Door.

Therefore, “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” The saved scholar glories in Christ, not scholarship. The gifted preacher glories in Christ, not influence. The wealthy believer glories in Christ, not resources. The obscure saint glories in Christ, not obscurity. Even humility can become a costume for pride if a man begins admiring himself for appearing small. True humility forgets the vessel because the treasure fills the view. The answer to ministerial vanity is not constant self-condemnation but Christ-centred glory.

Conclusion

God has never needed the world’s approval to accomplish His work. He did not submit the cross to philosophers for review, ask rulers to authorize the gospel, or wait for society’s elite to certify the apostles. He chose a message the world called foolish, vessels it considered weak, and people it despised. Through them He confounded wisdom, exposed might, and brought proud things to nothing. The method ensures that honest observers must look beyond the instrument for the explanation.

This does not release believers from study, preparation, discipline, or excellence. A preacher should labour in Scripture, communicate clearly, guard his conduct, and sharpen every ability God has given. But all preparation must kneel before dependence upon the Holy Ghost and submission to the Book. Credentials may open an earthly door, but they cannot open a dead heart. Eloquence may hold attention, but it cannot regenerate. Intelligence may organize truth, but it cannot manufacture its power. The vessel must be ready while remembering that readiness is not resurrection power.

Let the world keep its applause, rankings, celebrity lists, and intellectual coronations. God can take a despised Book, place it in the hands of an unimpressive servant, and use the preaching of a crucified Saviour to save a soul whom philosophy left condemned. When that sinner enters glory, no flesh will receive credit. The wise will have been confounded, the mighty humbled, the despised vindicated, and Christ exalted. Men may laugh at the instrument, but they will not laugh when God displays what He accomplished through it.

9 of 10: The “But God” Passages – Temptation Drew the Trap, but God Made a Door

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 10:13 — “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above

that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

First Corinthians 10:13 does not promise the Christian a life without temptation. It promises something better: the faithfulness of God within it. Temptation comes with a sales pitch. It argues that the pressure is unique, resistance is useless, surrender is inevitable, and obedience is no longer reasonable. Then Scripture interrupts the argument: “but God is faithful.” The verse places confidence not in the believer’s natural strength, willpower, experience, or religious reputation, but in the unchanging character of God. The flesh may be weak, the bait may be attractive, and the circumstances may press hard, but God has not abandoned His child inside the trap. He governs the boundary, provides a way of escape, and enables the believer to endure without surrendering to sin.

The promise does not excuse sin by teaching that temptation becomes irresistible after reaching a certain intensity. God declares that He “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.” The Christian may feel surrounded, but the Lord has already measured the trial and restricted its reach. Satan does not possess unlimited access, the world does not possess unlimited power, and the flesh does not possess an unquestionable right to rule. The believer can still choose wrongly, ignore the exit, and gratify sinful desire; but he cannot accuse God of leaving obedience impossible. Every temptation arrives with a divinely guarded limit and an available path of faithfulness. Sin may build the courtroom defence before committing the crime, but “I had no choice” will not survive the testimony of this verse.

The context makes the warning sharper. Paul has just marched Israel’s wilderness history before the Corinthian church. A privileged generation passed beneath the cloud, crossed the sea, ate spiritual meat, drank spiritual drink, and experienced the mighty works of God. Yet many fell through lust, idolatry, fornication, tempting Christ, and murmuring. Their bodies were overthrown in the wilderness, and their failures were written for the admonition of Church Age believers. First Corinthians 10:13 is therefore not a soft pillow placed beneath presumption. It is mercy attached to a warning. God is faithful, but the believer must take heed. The door exists, but he must use it. Grace provides escape; it does not convert carelessness into safety.

1. Israel’s Privileges Did Not Prevent Israel’s Fall

Paul begins the chapter by refusing to let the Corinthians remain ignorant concerning Israel. “All our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.” They witnessed the judgment of Egypt, the opening of the Red Sea, and the destruction of Pharaoh’s army. They were “baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” identifying

publicly with the deliverer God had appointed. They ate the same spiritual meat and drank the same spiritual drink, “for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” Their privileges were real, visible, and extraordinary. Yet privilege did not eliminate personal responsibility. A man can stand in the shadow of a miracle and still lust after Egypt.

“With many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” The ground that received manna also received graves. Their history proves that outward participation in divine blessings does not make rebellion harmless. They had Moses, the cloud, the sea, the rock, the tabernacle, and daily provision, but they still provoked the Lord. Modern churchgoers imagine that attendance, baptism, family heritage, biblical knowledge, and years of religious activity form a spiritual bulletproof vest. Israel had privileges that would make a modern conference look rather plain, yet the wilderness filled with tombstones. Light rejected increases accountability; it does not decrease danger.

Paul applies Israel’s history without confusing Israel and the Church. The wilderness generation belonged to God’s dealings with a literal nation under Moses. The Church is the body of Christ, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles saved by grace in this present dispensation. Israel’s covenant standing and the believer’s position in Christ are not identical. Nevertheless, the events “were our examples” and “are written for our admonition.” A saved person cannot lose eternal life, but he can fall into serious sin, endure severe chastening, destroy his testimony, harm others, lose reward, and even suffer physical judgment. Eternal security is not immunity from consequences. The believer is safe in Christ, but he is not safe while playing with sin.

2. Five Wilderness Sins Mark the Road to Ruin

The first warning concerns lust: “we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” Sin begins by persuading desire that God has withheld something necessary. Israel despised manna and craved the food of Egypt. The problem was not that onions possessed demonic power. Their appetite became rebellion against God’s provision and government. The flesh always believes satisfaction lies somewhere beyond the boundary God has drawn. It advertises Egypt’s menu while conveniently omitting Egypt’s chains. Memory under the control of lust can turn a slave camp into a holiday resort.

The next warnings concern idolatry and fornication. Israel sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play before the golden calf. At Baal-peor, sexual corruption joined false worship, and judgment fell. Idolatry and fornication remain close companions because false worship eventually rewrites morality to accommodate the flesh. Once man replaces God, he soon replaces God’s rules. Corinth understood both dangers. Pagan temples combined

idol feasts, social pressure, and sexual immorality. Paul was not discussing remote history for archaeological interest. Israel's wilderness sins had opened shops in Corinth and changed the signs over the doors.

Paul then warns against tempting Christ and murmuring. Some Israelites tested divine patience, challenged God's provision, and were destroyed of serpents. Others complained against His order and perished by the destroyer. Murmuring appears respectable beside idolatry or fornication, but God places it in the same warning passage. It is the low growl of unbelief against divine government. The murmurer says God has mismanaged the road, chosen the wrong leaders, provided the wrong food, and arranged the wrong circumstances. He may never erect an idol, because he has already installed his own judgment in God's chair. A complaining tongue can turn daily mercy into evidence for the prosecution.

3. Self-Confidence Is the Lobby Outside the Fall

After presenting Israel's failures, Paul writes, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The danger begins with a man's estimate of his own stability. He "thinketh" he stands. He may possess years of Christian experience, extensive Bible knowledge, public ministry, a respected name, or victory over previous temptations. None of those blessings makes the flesh trustworthy. Paul did not tell the strong man to admire his balance. He told him to take heed. The believer nearest the edge is often the one explaining that he could never fall from it. Pride blindfolds a man and then compliments him on his vision.

Taking heed requires honest recognition of weakness. Romans 13:14 commands believers to "make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." A man does not demonstrate spirituality by keeping temptation close enough to admire while boasting that he has not touched it. He demonstrates foolishness. If a place, conversation, relationship, device, habit, or private opportunity repeatedly feeds sin, wisdom removes the provision. The Christian who stores gunpowder beside the fireplace and then holds prayer meetings against explosions has confused faith with presumption. God promises an escape, not protection for a believer determined to redesign the trap as a living room.

Self-confidence also neglects dependence upon prayer and the word. Jesus warned His disciples, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Peter's boast that he would never deny Christ sounded courageous until the courtyard fire exposed it. He trusted the volume of his promise more than the warning of the Lord. The flesh can make impressive speeches before midnight and collapse before a servant maid by dawn. Watchfulness believes God's warning. Prayer confesses

dependence. The word identifies the danger. Humility uses all three before the rooster begins clearing his throat.

4. Temptation Is Common, Not Unique and Unanswerable

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” Temptation tries to isolate its target by whispering that nobody else understands and no one has faced pressure this severe. The lie serves sin because uniqueness appears to excuse surrender. Scripture tears off that disguise. The particular details may differ, but the underlying appeals remain the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The devil has updated the packaging, increased the speed of delivery, and placed temptation upon glowing screens, but the merchandise inside the box is ancient.

Calling temptation “common to man” does not minimize the believer’s struggle. It places the struggle within a field where God has already given instruction, examples, warnings, and victories. Joseph faced sexual temptation and fled. Daniel faced pressure to defile himself and purposed in his heart. David faced opportunities to kill Saul and refused to seize the throne through sin. Jesus Christ answered the tempter with, “It is written.” The believer does not stand in an unexplored wilderness without a compass. Scripture has marked the trails, identified the predators, and recorded where careless men left their bones.

James 1 explains the inward operation: “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” Satan tempts, the world advertises, and circumstances may supply opportunity, but the flesh contains an appetite ready to answer the bait. Blaming the devil for every sin gives the flesh an alibi it does not deserve. A fisherman does not tempt a rock because there is no appetite inside it to respond. The bait succeeds when desire welcomes the offer. Victory therefore requires more than complaining about outward pressure. The believer must reckon the old man dead, refuse provision for the flesh, and yield himself unto God.

5. God’s Faithfulness Sets the Boundary

The central assurance is “but God is faithful.” The verse does not say the believer is always faithful. Peter failed, David failed, Israel failed, and Corinth repeatedly stumbled. God remains faithful. His character does not shift with the temperature of the trial. He will not abandon the believer, forget His promises, or permit temptation to operate outside divine restraint. Second Thessalonians 3:3 says, “But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.” The Christian faces temptation from a place of dependence upon an unchanging God, not confidence in an unchanging self.

God “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.” The word “suffer” means permit. Temptation does not arrive with sovereign authority to determine its own limits. The Lord knows the believer’s frame, circumstances, knowledge, maturity, and available means of grace. He places a boundary around what is permitted. This truth does not mean every trial feels light. Paul experienced pressure so severe that he despaired even of life, yet learned to trust “in God which raiseth the dead.” Ability may consist not in natural confidence but in divinely supplied grace. God does not always reduce the load; sometimes He strengthens the shoulders beneath it.

God’s restraint also means Satan remains a creature under authority. The book of Job reveals an adversary who could not cross the line God established. He needed permission and received limits. Satan is dangerous, subtle, and malicious, but he is not God’s equal, opposite, or rival sovereign. The devil has never operated an independent kingdom beyond divine reach. He may draw the snare, but he cannot close it beyond what God permits. The believer should neither mock him carelessly nor fear him as omnipotent. Resist the devil steadfastly in the faith. His roaring is loud, but his leash remains in God’s hand.

6. The Way of Escape Must Be Taken

God “will with the temptation also make a way to escape.” The way exists alongside the temptation. It may appear as a clear command remembered from Scripture, an opportunity to leave, a providential interruption, a faithful warning, a brother’s counsel, exposure of a lie, or strength to refuse. The escape is not always dramatic. It often looks like ordinary obedience performed quickly. Joseph’s escape from Potiphar’s wife was a doorway reached at a run. He left his garment rather than remain to negotiate. A man serious about purity would rather lose a coat than keep an appointment with sin.

The immediate context supplies one unmistakable escape route: “Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.” Paul did not tell them to study how close they could stand, prove their maturity by lingering, or transform an idol feast into a witnessing opportunity. He said flee. Elsewhere Scripture says, “Flee fornication” and “flee also youthful lusts.” Some battles are won by standing; others are won by running. The armour of God includes no decoration for loitering inside a brothel, idol temple, or deliberately cultivated fantasy. When God points toward the exit, staying behind to examine the wallpaper is not courage.

The word of God is another essential means of escape. Christ answered each wilderness temptation with Scripture accurately applied. Psalm 119:11 says, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” A Bible closed on the shelf is a sword left in the scabbard while the enemy enters the room. Prayer, watchfulness, fellowship, confession, and separation from corrupt influences also strengthen resistance. None

earns victory apart from God; they are means God has provided. The escape door is labelled with biblical commands. Pride keeps searching for a secret passage while obedience points to the obvious handle.

7. Escape May Mean Endurance Rather Than Immediate Removal

The verse says God makes a way to escape “that ye may be able to bear it.” Escape does not always mean the temptation or trial disappears instantly. God may provide grace to remain obedient while pressure continues. Paul asked three times for his thorn to depart, but the Lord answered, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” The thorn remained; sufficient strength arrived. The escape was not the removal Paul requested but sustaining grace that prevented the burden from defeating God’s purpose. Sometimes God opens the prison door. Sometimes He gives songs at midnight while the feet remain in stocks.

This distinction prevents believers from accusing God when difficult circumstances continue. A prolonged trial does not prove there is no escape. The escape may be freedom from sinning within the trial rather than freedom from the trial itself. A hostile workplace, painful household, bodily affliction, financial pressure, or season of persecution may continue while God supplies patience, wisdom, courage, and purity. The believer can endure without surrendering to bitterness, deceit, compromise, fornication, idolatry, or unbelief. Grace does not always remove the furnace; it can preserve the servant while the fire burns.

The promise also removes every excuse for yielding. God has limited the temptation, supplied sufficient grace, and made an obedient path. If the believer sins, he must confess it rather than blame pressure, upbringing, exhaustion, loneliness, provocation, or another person’s behaviour. Those factors may explain the battlefield, but they do not convert rebellion into obedience. First John 1:9 provides cleansing and restored fellowship when believers confess their sins. Confession agrees with God. It does not submit a revised report in which the trap committed the sin and the believer happened to be nearby.

Conclusion

First Corinthians 10:13 stands between presumption and despair. To the proud man who thinks he cannot fall, the context says, “take heed.” To the discouraged man who thinks he cannot stand, the verse says, “God is faithful.” One needs warning; the other needs assurance. Both need dependence upon the Lord. Israel’s wilderness graves prove that privilege does not make sin safe. God’s promise proves that temptation does not make obedience impossible. The believer must neither swagger toward the trap nor collapse before reaching it. He must watch, pray, believe the word, and take the escape God provides.

Temptation will continue as long as the believer lives in mortal flesh within a present evil world. The Rapture will one day remove the Church from this scene and change the believer's vile body to be fashioned like Christ's glorious body. Until then, the world appeals, the flesh desires, and the devil seeks advantage. But none can separate the believer from Christ or force him to obey sin. The indwelling Holy Spirit, the living word, access to prayer, fellowship of the saints, and the faithfulness of God provide more than empty encouragement. They provide an actual path of obedience.

When temptation draws the trap, do not stand admiring its craftsmanship. Look for the door God promised, and take it. It may require running, refusing, confessing, separating, switching off the screen, ending the conversation, calling a faithful brother, quoting Scripture, or enduring pressure without compromise. The exit may bruise pride, cost pleasure, or require sacrifice, but it remains better than the chain waiting behind the bait. Satan prepares the lure, the flesh leans toward it, and circumstances tighten around it—but God is faithful. No trap closes without an obedient road remaining open.

10 of 10: The “But God” Passages – The Grave Takes the Body, but God Redeems the Soul

Key Passage: Psalm 49:15 — “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.”

Psalm 49 summons the whole world to attend a funeral where earthly distinctions are buried beside the corpse. “Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world.” The psalm addresses low and high, rich and poor, because death respects none of the fences men build between themselves. Wealth can improve the house, lengthen the table, hire the physician, and purchase the finest casket in the catalogue, but it cannot command the soul to remain when God requires it. The rich man and poor man may travel to the cemetery in different vehicles, yet both arrive at ground charging the same entrance fee. Titles, influence, reputation, property, and applause stop at the grave. Death is the one appointment at which the world's most exclusive guest list loses every reservation.

The psalmist does not deny the power of death. He describes men placing confidence in wealth, naming lands after themselves, leaving possessions to others, and entering graves that become their houses for generations. He sees the apparent finality. The body returns to dust, earthly glory fades, and another man possesses what the dead spent his life gathering. Yet Psalm 49 does not end beneath the shadow of the cemetery. Verse 15 interrupts the rule of death with the words, “But God.” No man can redeem his brother, but

God can redeem the soul. Riches cannot pay the price, but God has provided redemption. The grave can receive the body, but it cannot force the redeemed soul beyond God's reach. Death has power, but it does not possess sovereignty.

The final clause is as personal as it is triumphant: "for he shall receive me." The psalmist's hope was not merely that some doctrine called redemption existed. His confidence rested in a God who would receive him. He looked beyond possessions, reputation, bodily decline, and the grave to divine reception. The world writes an obituary and calls the story finished; faith looks past the final paragraph printed by men. Mourners close the casket, workers lower the body, and earth covers what remains, but God has not misplaced the person. The grave holds a deposit awaiting resurrection; it does not own the redeemed. Death speaks loudly because men hear the closing soil strike the casket. God speaks finally because He holds the keys of hell and of death.

1. The Psalm Calls Every Class to the Same Grave

Psalm 49 deliberately addresses "both low and high, rich and poor, together." The low are not exempt because they possess little, and the high cannot purchase exemption because they possess much. Death does not check a man's social rank before entering the house. It has removed kings from thrones, scholars from desks, merchants from accounts, labourers from fields, and preachers from pulpits. Men may spend their lives climbing above one another, only to discover that every ladder rests upon the same earth that will receive their bodies. The grave has no balcony seating for nobility. Dust has never learned proper social etiquette.

The psalmist announces that his mouth will speak wisdom and his heart will meditate upon understanding. True wisdom measures life in the light of death and death in the light of God. Foolishness measures life only by what can be accumulated, displayed, enjoyed, or remembered on earth. A man may understand markets, governments, machines, medicine, and human behaviour while remaining a fool concerning his own end. Psalm 90:12 prays, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Numbering days does not mean living in panic. It means refusing to treat a limited earthly life as though it were the whole of existence.

The psalm also asks, "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about?" The rich oppressor may appear secure while the righteous man faces pressure, but death will expose the temporary nature of the advantage. A believer does not need to envy the man who possesses great earthly power and no eternal hope. Psalm 73 wrestles with the same appearance until the writer enters God's sanctuary and understands the wicked man's end. Prosperity without redemption is a decorated

carriage travelling toward judgment. The upholstery may be comfortable, but the destination remains unchanged.

2. No Man Can Purchase Another Soul

“They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches” encounter an absolute limit: “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.” Money purchases human labour, property, influence, education, comfort, medicine, and legal representation. It can persuade men to alter schedules and change decisions. But God does not sell redemption at any price man can pay. The wealthiest sinner cannot transfer one dollar into eternity’s account and reduce his guilt. Heaven has no cashier receiving donations in exchange for acquittal.

The psalm explains why: “For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever.” The price exceeds every human resource. A sinner cannot redeem his brother because he cannot redeem himself. Both stand under sin and death. One debtor cannot cancel another debtor’s account by presenting his own unpaid bill. Good works, religious observances, family heritage, charitable giving, and moral improvement possess no value as ransom for the soul. They may benefit neighbours or improve conduct, but they cannot erase sin. When religion offers salvation for payment, penance, ceremony, or institutional loyalty, it is selling counterfeit receipts for a debt it never paid.

Verse 9 states the impossible goal of human ransom: “That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.” Riches cannot secure immortality. Men may purchase treatments that extend life, procedures that improve its quality, and elaborate arrangements for preserving a body after death. None has written a cheque that forced corruption to retreat. Modern man can refrigerate the corpse, seal it, embalm it, cremate it, study it, or place it beneath polished stone. He cannot give it life. The funeral industry can improve the presentation, but it has never cancelled the funeral. A gold-plated coffin remains a box carrying a dead man.

3. Earthly Monuments Cannot Manufacture Immortality

The psalmist observes that wise men die, and “the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others.” Intellectual ability does not rescue the body from death. The wise may understand the process more accurately, while the fool refuses to consider it, but both eventually leave their possessions behind. Death does not require its victims to understand what is happening. The scholar cannot argue his pulse back into motion, and the fool cannot remain by ignoring the appointment. Wisdom without God may describe mortality in impressive language while providing no deliverance from it.

“Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations.” Man seeks permanence through what he builds. He establishes homes, businesses, institutions, foundations, and estates bearing his name. He imagines that if the sign remains after he dies, some portion of him has defeated death. Yet a name carved in stone is not a redeemed soul. Buildings change owners, businesses collapse, foundations abandon their original purpose, and descendants forget the person who accumulated the property. Earthly memorials are echoes, not resurrection. A man may name half a county after himself and still awaken in eternity without owning one square foot.

Psalms 49:12 concludes, “Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.” The comparison concerns the earthly end of bodily life, not the annihilation of the human soul. Man possesses honour, reason, property, and social position, yet his body dies and returns to the earth. Ecclesiastes observes the same visible destination of men and beasts under the sun, while Scripture elsewhere clearly reveals conscious existence beyond death and future judgment. The honoured man’s body does not negotiate a superior arrangement with decay. A royal robe makes poor armour against worms. Earthly honour ends where bodily corruption begins.

4. Death Feeds Upon Those Who Follow Folly

“This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings.” One generation watches another trust wealth, live for possessions, ignore eternity, and die. Then the next generation applauds the same philosophy and repeats the journey. The cemetery stands full of evidence, but folly keeps excellent business hours. Sons inherit lands and also inherit the lie that lands create security. They quote the successful dead, imitate their priorities, and rarely ask whether those men were prepared to meet God. Human tradition can preserve foolishness longer than granite preserves a name.

Verse 14 says, “Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them.” The image strips away man’s pretence of control. Sheep are gathered and placed where another directs them. Men spend life choosing paths, exercising authority, and arranging possessions, but death eventually gathers them into the grave. The body that demanded comfort and received constant attention becomes food for corruption. Beauty fades, strength collapses, and the flesh returns to dust. Death is a harsh shepherd, and its flock includes every class that rejected the Shepherd who gives eternal life.

Yet the same verse looks ahead: “the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning.” Night does not last forever. Scripture repeatedly associates morning with divine intervention, deliverance, and resurrection hope. The wicked may flourish temporarily, while the righteous suffer and die, but God’s final order will reverse earthly appearances.

The grave may seem to silence the upright, yet resurrection will demonstrate that death only interrupted his earthly service. The body sleeps in the dust awaiting God's call; the conscious soul is not extinguished. Death controls a temporary night. God owns the morning.

5. "But God" Breaks the Power of the Grave

After describing the grave's reach, the psalmist declares, "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave." He does not say wealth will redeem, personal righteousness will redeem, or remembrance by future generations will redeem. God must act. The phrase "but God" places divine power against an enemy no human being can defeat. Death has prevailed over armies, kingdoms, physicians, philosophers, and fortunes. God requires no assistance from any of them. The One who created life can redeem it, preserve the soul, and raise the body.

The psalmist speaks of "my soul," distinguishing the person from the body laid in the grave. Death separates body and soul; it does not erase the individual. Soul sleep confuses bodily sleep with unconsciousness of the soul. Scripture describes the rich man and Lazarus as conscious after death in Luke 16. Moses appeared and spoke with Christ upon the mount. Jesus told the believing thief, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Revelation records souls speaking before bodily resurrection. The body sleeps because it rests awaiting resurrection; the soul remains conscious. A sleeping body in a cemetery does not mean a sleeping soul in eternity.

The promise continues, "for he shall receive me." Redemption is not merely rescue from something; it is reception by Someone. The believer's hope is the Lord Himself. The psalmist did not possess the full revelation later given through Paul concerning the body of Christ, the Rapture, and the believer's heavenly position, but he trusted the God who could receive him beyond death. Old Testament saints looked forward according to the light God had revealed. Their confidence rested not in wealth or human ransom but in the Lord's ability to redeem. Faith may not know every future detail while still knowing the One who governs it.

6. Christ Paid the Price No Rich Man Could Supply

The New Testament reveals the precious ransom Psalm 49 declares beyond human payment. First Peter 1:18–19 says believers were not redeemed "with corruptible things, as silver and gold," but "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Money fails because redemption requires a sinless Substitute. Jesus Christ possessed the life no fallen man could offer and shed the blood no earthly fortune could

replace. The price was not paid to the devil. It satisfied God's righteous judgment against sin. Calvary accomplished what every treasury on earth could never begin.

Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. His resurrection broke death's claim and proved the sacrifice accepted. Acts 2 says it was not possible that He should be holden of death. The grave received Him but could not retain Him. He arose bodily, victorious, and beyond death's dominion. Revelation 1:18 records His declaration: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore," possessing "the keys of hell and of death." The enemy may operate the prison temporarily, but Christ holds the keys. Death does not determine when redemption's prisoners remain or depart.

The sinner receives this redemption by grace through faith, not through personal wealth, religious works, sacraments, or moral achievement. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." The true riches belong to God. The earthly rich man may die spiritually bankrupt, while a poor believer possesses redemption, forgiveness, eternal life, and an inheritance incorruptible. Bank statements cannot record those assets, and death cannot seize them. A saved beggar carried by angels is richer than an unbelieving king carried beneath banners.

7. The Church Awaits Redemption of the Body at the Rapture

For the Church Age believer, death means being "absent from the body" and "present with the Lord." Paul desired "to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." These verses destroy the doctrine that the saved soul enters unconscious sleep or remains confined within the grave. The body returns to dust if death occurs before the Rapture, but the believer himself goes to be with Christ. Salvation does not leave the redeemed soul wandering between worlds or waiting in darkness. The Lord who purchased him receives him.

The body still awaits redemption in its final manifested sense. Romans 8:23 speaks of "the redemption of our body." First Thessalonians 4 reveals that when the Lord descends from heaven, "the dead in Christ shall rise first." Living believers will then be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. This is the pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church, distinct from Christ's later visible return to earth in judgment and kingdom glory. The Church is caught up before the Tribulation; Israel's prophetic program continues; and Christ afterward returns as King of kings. Right division preserves each promise without forcing the Church into Israel's appointed time of trouble.

First Corinthians 15 describes the change: "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." The body sown in weakness is raised in power; the

natural body is raised a spiritual body. Then the written victory will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” The Christian does not merely hope to exist forever as a disembodied soul. God will complete redemption by raising and transforming the body. Christ’s resurrection is the firstfruits and guarantee. The grave may retain dust for centuries, scatter it through soil, or lose every visible marker, but the Creator does not need a headstone to locate what belongs to Him.

Conclusion

Psalms 49 reduces earthly glory to its proper size. Wealth cannot redeem a brother, purchase immortality, prevent corruption, or accompany its owner beyond death. Houses continue under different names, lands pass to other hands, and monuments outlive the men they fail to save. Rich and poor, wise and foolish, honoured and obscure all face the same bodily sentence. The grave takes no bribe and recognizes no social class. Everything man trusts beneath the sun eventually reaches the limit announced by death. Then faith speaks two words human power cannot produce: “But God.”

God redeems because Christ paid the precious price. God receives because the believer belongs to Him. God raises because death cannot retain what has been joined to the risen Son. For the saved person, the funeral is not the destruction of the soul or the cancellation of God’s promise. The body is committed to the ground in hope, while the believer is present with the Lord. At the Rapture, the dead in Christ will rise, living saints will be changed, and the whole body of Christ will meet the Lord in the air. Death’s apparent victory will become the setting for its public defeat.

This final passage gathers the message of the whole series. Men planned evil, but God meant good. Saul hunted David, but God withheld him. The fool promised himself years, but God required his soul. Men buried Christ, but God raised Him. Sinners were dead, but God quickened them. Paul was cast down, nevertheless God comforted him. Ministers planted and watered, but God gave increase. The world despised the foolish, but God chose them. Temptation drew the trap, but God made an escape. Finally, the grave receives the body—but God redeems the soul and promises resurrection. Man writes the obituary; God writes the last word.

Conclusion: When Man's Sentence Ends, God Has the Final Word

We have now walked through ten passages where man reached the end of his strength, wisdom, planning, authority, righteousness, courage, ministry, reputation, resistance, and mortal life—and in every case, God had not reached the end of anything. Men saw the pit and called it burial. Saul saw the wilderness and called it capture. The rich fool saw full barns and called it security. Religious rulers saw a sealed tomb and called it victory. The sinner saw religion and called it improvement. Paul saw trouble on every side and admitted he was cast down. Corinth saw eloquent ministers and began attaching glory to men. The world saw the cross and called it foolishness. Temptation saw the appetite of the flesh and called surrender inevitable. Death saw the body descend into the grave and called it permanent. Then Scripture opened the next line with heaven's interruption: "but God."

Those words do not erase what came before them. Joseph's betrayal remained evil. David's danger remained real. The rich fool's death arrived that night. Christ truly suffered and died. Fallen men truly stand dead in trespasses and sins. Paul's flesh truly had no rest. Planting and watering still required labour. The world still despises the things God chooses. Temptation still presses upon the believer. The grave still receives the bodies of men. Biblical faith is not a religious paintbrush used to cover ugly facts with a brighter colour. God tells the truth about ruin before He reveals the reach of redemption. The Bible does not minimize the enemy in order to magnify the Lord. It displays the enemy at full size and then shows that Almighty God is larger.

The first lesson was written in Joseph's tears. His brethren thought evil against him, and Scripture refused to rename their crime. They hated, conspired, sold, lied, and allowed their father to grieve. Yet Joseph eventually stood before them with authority, grain, wisdom, and the power to preserve life. "But God meant it unto good." That statement did not convert betrayal into obedience or wickedness into virtue. It declared that human intention does not possess final authority over divine purpose. The brothers dug the pit, but they could not make it Joseph's grave. They selected the caravan, but they did not understand the destination. They sold a slave while providence transported a governor. Men may place a price upon the servant of God, but they cannot price the purpose travelling with him.

The believer must carry that truth without turning providence into fatalism. God did not compel Joseph's brethren to hate him and then punish them for obeying a hatred He planted. James 1:13 says, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." Men choose wickedly and remain responsible. God governs history without becoming the author of sin. That is greater than the shallow alternatives offered by human philosophy. A God who causes evil would not be holy, while a God unable to overrule evil would not be

sovereign. The Bible presents a holy God who condemns sin, judges sinners, permits human choice, and remains infinitely wise enough to make wrath praise Him without ever calling wrath righteous. The devil can throw stones into the machinery; he cannot seize the controls.

David's wilderness taught the same truth beneath a different shadow. Saul possessed the throne, army, spies, weapons, and authority of government. David possessed caves, rocks, and a promise. Saul sought him every day, "but God delivered him not into his hand." The king could organize the hunt but could not determine its outcome. Every report, betrayal, military movement, and narrowing escape remained beneath divine restraint. The Ziphites could reveal David's location, and Saul could march toward it, but information did not grant possession. No enemy can seize what God has determined to preserve until God's purpose has been fulfilled. Saul wore the crown and lacked the future. David wore wilderness dust and carried the covenant line.

That passage does not promise that every Church Age believer will escape bodily harm, persecution, prison, or martyrdom. David occupied a unique place within God's dealings with Israel and the royal line leading to Jesus Christ. Right division does not allow us to steal his historical position and turn it into a guarantee that every Christian fugitive will become a king on earth. Nevertheless, the God who preserved David remains faithful to every promise given to the body of Christ. The saved believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption, accepted in the beloved, and kept by the power of God. Men may touch his possessions, reputation, liberty, and body. They cannot reach through Christ, reverse the new birth, and drag a sealed member out of the body of the risen Lord.

The rich fool then reminded us that prosperity is not providence's certificate of approval. His fields produced, his goods increased, and his plans stretched into "many years." He spoke to his soul as though grain could satisfy it, barns could preserve it, and money had purchased the future. "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." The world saw expansion; God saw presumption. The man knew how to increase storage but not how to prepare for judgment. He owned enough goods to support the body for decades and lacked what his soul needed to survive the night. His calendar was filled with future pleasure, but heaven had already marked the final appointment.

Men still commit the same folly with better buildings, electronic accounts, retirement plans, medical technology, and legal documents. They insure the house, automobile, business, valuables, and vacation, then leave the soul exposed to the judgment of God. They schedule tomorrow as though breath were property rather than mercy. They plan funerals without preparing for what follows them. Nothing is wrong with honest work, responsible saving, wise provision, or lawful enjoyment of God's gifts. The sin lies in

trusting gifts while ignoring the Giver. Wealth is a useful servant and a merciless god. It can purchase a softer mattress but not peaceful sleep, a finer physician but not immortality, a handsome casket but not redemption. When God says, "This night," every long-range plan becomes yesterday's paper.

The resurrection passage brought the series to its centre. Men fulfilled all that was written of Christ, took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. "But God raised him from the dead." Calvary appeared to be the victory of religion, Rome, Satan, and death. Jerusalem rejected the King, Pilate approved the sentence, soldiers performed the execution, a stone closed the grave, and guards watched the entrance. Men did everything human power could do to end the claims of Jesus Christ. Then God raised Him. Rome had authority to execute; it had none to prevent resurrection. Religion could seal the tomb; it could not bind the Prince of Life. Death received Christ and discovered it had swallowed the One who would destroy its dominion.

Without the resurrection, preaching is vain, faith is vain, the apostles are false witnesses, dead believers have perished, and sinners remain in their sins. But Christ arose bodily, visibly, historically, and victoriously. He did not survive as an idea in the memories of disappointed disciples. He walked, spoke, ate, showed His wounds, appeared to many witnesses, and ascended into heaven. His resurrection declared Him to be the Son of God with power, vindicated every claim He made, and proved His sacrifice accepted. The empty tomb is heaven's receipt stamped across Calvary. Religion keeps issuing instalment plans because it cannot tolerate a transaction Christ declared finished. God raised the One who cried, "It is finished," and the grave has never produced an unpaid balance.

That resurrection power explains the fifth passage: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us... hath quickened us together with Christ." Ephesians 2 removes every possibility of human boasting. The sinner is dead in sins, walking according to the world, obeying the prince of the power of the air, fulfilling fleshly desires, and standing as a child of wrath. Religion arrives with ceremonies for the corpse. Education arrives with instructions. Philosophy arrives with questions. Psychology arrives with labels. God arrives with life. The sinner does not assist in his own quickening by demonstrating potential. He believes the gospel and receives eternal life through the risen Son.

Salvation is by grace through faith, "not of works, lest any man should boast." It cannot be earned before conversion, maintained afterward by the flesh, or completed through religious machinery. Jesus Christ completed the payment. The sinner who trusts His death, burial, and resurrection is justified, forgiven, quickened, sealed, and placed into Christ. Eternal security is not the believer boasting that he can hold tightly enough to keep himself saved. It is the believer resting in the grip of the One who said, "they shall never perish." A

salvation that depends upon human consistency would die before sunset. Our life is secure because it is hidden with Christ in God, and Christ is not returning to the tomb.

Paul's trouble in Macedonia taught us that divine strength does not require a servant to lie about human weariness. His flesh had no rest. Fightings were without, fears were within, and he was cast down. "Nevertheless God" comforted him by the coming of Titus. The Lord did not accuse Paul of weak faith because another believer's arrival encouraged him. God had designed the body of Christ so members could strengthen one another. Titus's presence, report, and fellowship became the appointed means of divine comfort. Heaven's answer came walking down the road in ordinary clothing, carrying news from Corinth.

The church must recover that truth in an age where fellowship is often reduced to sitting in the same building while knowing almost nothing about one another's burdens. A believer may pray for God to comfort someone while ignoring the possibility that God intends to send him. A call, visit, letter, meal, gift, prayer, warning, or truthful conversation may become the very instrument the Lord uses. This does not replace God with man. It recognizes God in the sending. The cup does not create the water, but it carries water to a thirsty man. Titus did not become the God of all comfort. He became the faithful vessel through whom that comfort reached a weary apostle.

Paul and Apollos then placed all ministry ambition beneath the statement, "but God gave the increase." Paul planted. Apollos watered. Neither assignment was meaningless, optional, or effortless. Yet neither man possessed the power to make spiritual life appear. The farmer can place seed in prepared ground and supply water, but he cannot crawl inside the seed and command germination. The preacher can proclaim truth, warn sinners, teach doctrine, pray, labour, and weep. He cannot regenerate one soul. God alone gives the increase. Religious machinery can manufacture noise, motion, crowds, emotional responses, and impressive reports. It cannot produce eternal life.

That truth should humble the preacher without making him lazy. Because God gives increase, the servant must plant the right seed and water faithfully. Because God gives increase, the servant must stop acting like fruit proves personal greatness. A church is not a fan club, a pulpit is not a throne, and a minister is not a substitute mediator standing between Christ and His body. God may use one man to begin a work and another to strengthen it. The labourers are one in purpose, while every man will receive his own reward according to his labour. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, publicity will not turn wood, hay, and stubble into gold, silver, and precious stones. Press clippings burn very well.

The passage concerning foolish things continued the assault upon fleshly glory. The world trusts wisdom, might, nobility, reputation, wealth, credentials, and institutional

recognition. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." He chooses weak, base, and despised things so no flesh can glory in His presence. God does not require man to become stupid before being useful. He requires intelligence to stop pretending it is divine. Paul had education, Apollos had eloquence, Moses had learning, and Luke had medical training. Their abilities became useful when submitted to God. A sharp tool serves the Carpenter well until it starts demanding credit for the house.

The preaching of the cross will always appear foolish to men determined to save themselves. It tells the scholar that intellect cannot forgive sin, the moralist that character cannot erase guilt, the politician that government cannot regenerate, and the religionist that ceremonies cannot raise the dead. It leaves every sinner standing empty-handed before the same crucified and risen Saviour. The world despises that arrangement because grace closes the trophy shop. No man will walk through heaven explaining how Christ supplied most of redemption and he contributed the final percentage. The redeemed will glory in the Lord because the Lord did the saving.

Temptation brought the series from public pride to private battle. It whispers that no one has faced this particular pressure, that surrender is unavoidable, and that circumstances have removed personal responsibility. Scripture answers, "but God is faithful." God will not permit temptation beyond the limit He governs and will make a way of escape so the believer can bear it. The promise does not say temptation is imaginary, nor does it excuse the Christian who ignores the escape and enters the trap willingly. Grace provides the door; obedience must use it. A man cannot remain in the room, nail the exit shut, and then blame God for failing to rescue him.

Sometimes the way of escape is a command to flee. Joseph left his garment in Potiphar's house. Paul told believers to flee fornication, idolatry, and youthful lusts. The Christian who keeps temptation close enough to study while boasting of strength has enrolled in a course taught by the flesh, and the tuition is usually paid in ruin. Watch, pray, hide the word in the heart, make no provision for the flesh, confess sin honestly, and separate from what repeatedly supplies the bait. God never promised to make sin unattractive while a believer feeds the appetite. He promised sufficient grace and an obedient path.

Finally, Psalm 49 stood beside the grave and watched wealth lose its voice. No man can redeem his brother or give God a ransom for him. The redemption of the soul is precious. Rich men die, poor men die, wise men die, fools die, and the property over which they laboured passes to hands they cannot control. Then the psalmist says, "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me." Death is powerful, but it is not sovereign. The grave receives the body; it does not acquire ownership of the redeemed person.

Jesus Christ paid the price silver and gold could never supply. The believer is redeemed by His precious blood. If death comes before the Rapture, the body sleeps in the earth while the conscious soul is present with the Lord. At the pre-Tribulation Rapture, the Lord will descend, the dead in Christ will rise first, living saints will be changed, and together the Church will meet Christ in the air. Corruption will put on incorruption, mortality will put on immortality, and death will be swallowed up in victory. The cemetery contains deposits, not abandoned property. Christ knows the location of every particle belonging to His saints, and resurrection does not require the assistance of a grave marker.

These ten passages therefore reject the shallow belief that faith means everything will become easy by tomorrow afternoon. Joseph spent years away from home. David remained hunted. The rich fool died. Christ suffered the cross. Paul endured trouble. Ministers laboured. The despised remained despised by the world. Temptation required resistance. Believers still entered graves. "But God" does not promise immediate comfort according to human preference. It promises that God's purpose, mercy, truth, and final victory remain greater than the visible condition. Faith does not dictate the method of deliverance. It trusts the Deliverer.

The phrase also rejects the opposite error of despair. The pit is not sovereign. Saul is not sovereign. Wealth is not sovereign. Rome is not sovereign. Sin is not sovereign. Trouble is not sovereign. Preachers are not sovereign. Intellectual opinion is not sovereign. Temptation is not sovereign. Death is not sovereign. God alone is God. The enemy may operate within permitted limits, but he cannot write beyond the margin heaven has drawn. He may bruise the servant, delay the answer, darken the road, and gather evidence for defeat. He still cannot climb onto the throne.

The unsaved reader must not admire these passages while remaining outside the salvation they proclaim. "But God" is not a charm attached to human optimism. God's intervention in salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone. The sinner must stop trusting religion, baptism, morality, heritage, charity, church membership, or good intentions. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The same grace that quickened dead sinners in Ephesians 2 remains sufficient. The door is open now, but the rich fool reminds us that "many years" can become "this night" before a man finishes making excuses.

The saved reader must stop living as though circumstances have removed God from the passage. Stand upon the word when the pit is deep, the wilderness narrow, the calendar uncertain, the battle exhausting, the labour unnoticed, the world mocking, the temptation strong, and the grave nearby. Do what God has commanded. Refuse bitterness, revenge, compromise, pride, presumption, and unbelief. Let the enemy say what he intends, and let

the visible facts testify honestly. Then place the whole case beneath the character of God. He remains wise, holy, merciful, faithful, powerful, and true.

When this series closes, the phrase remains open. It waits beside every human limit as the reminder that God has not surrendered His throne to circumstances. Men may mean evil, but God can mean good. A king may hunt, but God can withhold. A fool may plan years, but God can require the soul tonight. Men may bury Christ, but God can raise Him. Sinners may be dead, but God can quicken. Servants may be cast down, nevertheless God can comfort. Preachers may plant and water, but God gives increase. The world may despise the weak, but God chooses them. Temptation may tighten, but God makes an escape. The grave may claim the body, but God redeems the soul.

So let men write their verdicts, let religion issue its decrees, let governments display their power, let philosophers congratulate one another, let the devil prepare his paperwork, and let death close the casket. None of them possesses the last word. The final word belongs to the One who stood before Genesis, speaks through Revelation, raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and will one day make all things new. Man may finish his sentence with ruin, judgment, weakness, sorrow, failure, and death—but God still holds the pen.

FROM
RUIN
TO REDEMPTION
BY
BUT GOD

Man reaches the end of strength, wisdom, righteousness, and hope; then God intervenes according to His purpose, mercy, faithfulness, and power. “But God” never denies the ruin—it declares that ruin does not have the final word.

THE DEAD QUICKENED
EPHESIANS 2:4-5



- Sinners were dead in trespasses and sins.
- God acted from rich mercy and great love.
- Grace joined believers to the risen Christ.

THE ESCAPE PROVIDED
1 CORINTHIANS 10:13



- Wealth cannot ransom one soul.
- God redeems from the power of the grave.
- He receives the redeemed and will raise the body.

**GOD ALONE
GLORIFIED**



THE
SAME GOD
TODAY
TOMORROW
FOREVER

- Providence rules.
- Mercy saves.
- Resurrection power conquers.
- God's faithfulness keeps.

Read the condition honestly. Refuse self-salvation. Trust God's word. Take the obedient path He provides. Give Him all the glory.

VERSEQUEST
MINISTRIES