

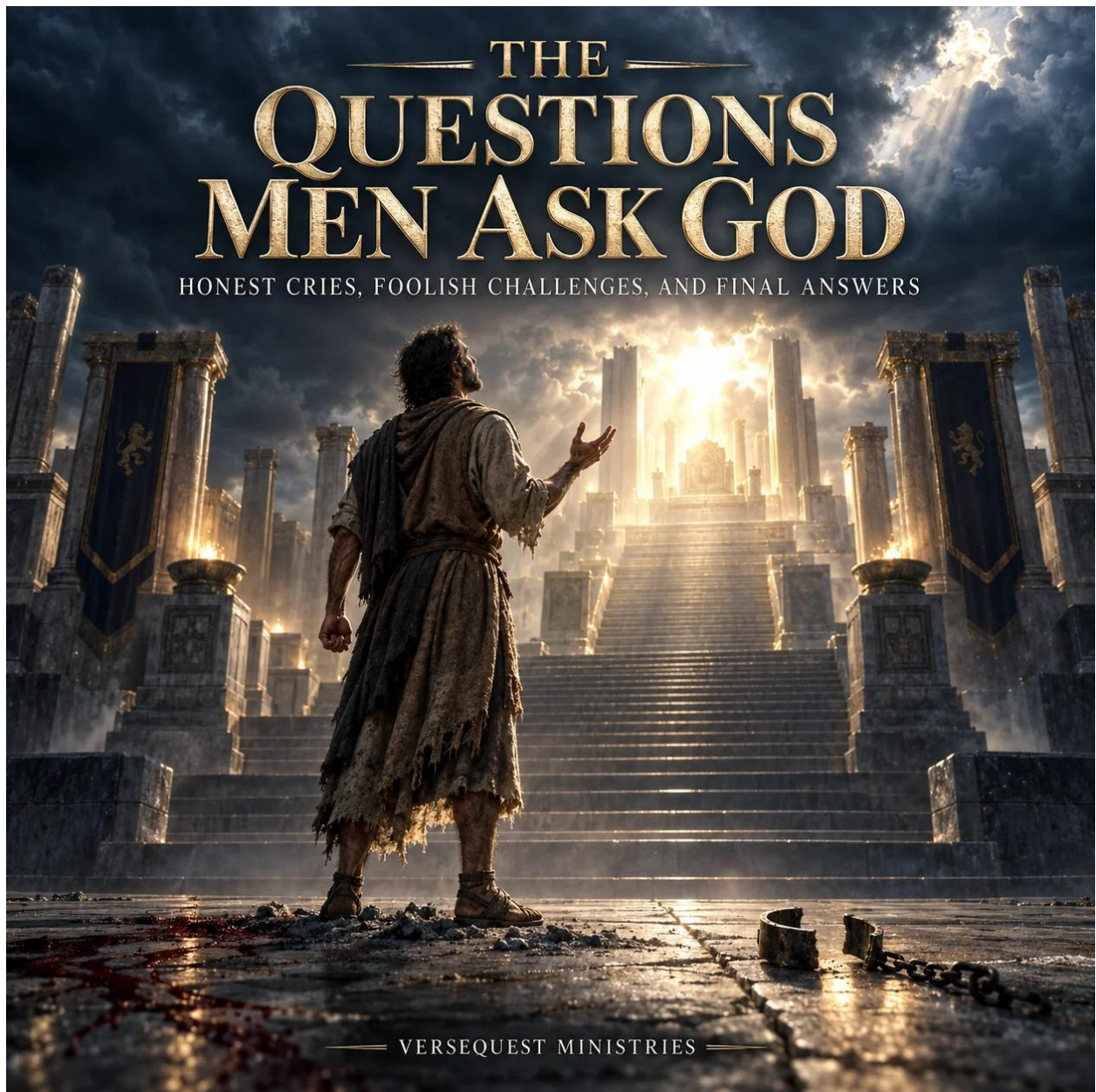
The Questions Men Ask God

Honest Cries, Foolish Challenges, and Final Answers

Series 1-10

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VerseQuest Ministries





THE QUESTIONS MEN ASK GOD

Honest Cries, Foolish Challenges, and Final Answers

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The Questions Men Ask God

Honest Cries, Foolish Challenges, and Final Answers

Introduction

Men have been asking God questions since sin entered the world, but every question does not come from the same kind of heart. Some questions rise from faith seeking light. Others crawl out of rebellion looking for an excuse. Some are prayed through tears by men who still trust God even though they cannot trace His hand. Others are thrown toward Heaven by men who have already rejected the truth and merely want God to appear before the court of human opinion. One man asks because he wants to obey; another asks because he wants permission not to obey. One approaches the throne as dust and ashes; another drags in a folding chair and acts as though the Almighty has been waiting for his evaluation. The words may end with the same punctuation mark, but God hears the heart behind every syllable. Heaven knows the difference between a wounded saint asking for light and a proud sinner demanding that the Light explain why it shines.

God is not threatened by questions. He cannot be surprised, confused, cornered, cross-examined, or forced to request additional time to prepare an answer. Psalm 147:5 declares, "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite." Romans 11:34 asks, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" God never learned anything from a man's question, never revised His character after hearing an objection, and never discovered a weakness in His government because a rebel raised his voice. The omniscient God knows the question before the tongue frames it, the motive before the mouth disguises it, and the answer before the world containing the questioner was made. A man may shake his fist at Heaven, but he cannot make the throne tremble. The only trembling taking place will eventually be on the side of the fist.

The Bible records these questions because questions reveal men. They uncover faith, fear, ignorance, pride, grief, compassion, unbelief, spiritual hunger, and prophetic expectation. A question can function like a window opened into the soul. Cain's "Am I my brother's keeper?" revealed defiance after murder. Abraham's "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" revealed reverent confidence in God's character. Moses asked for God's name because he needed divine authority for an impossible commission. Job cried from the ashes because suffering had stripped away every comfortable explanation. David asked "How long?" because Heaven appeared silent while his enemy remained exalted. The wording changed, the circumstances changed, and the dispensational setting changed, but each question placed the condition of the questioner beneath the light of God's answer.

This series is not an exercise in placing God inside the witness box while fallen man adjusts his spectacles and pretends to preside over the universe. The Judge of all the earth does not answer to the criminal standing before His bar. Yet neither will these studies dismiss every painful question as rebellion. The Bible does not treat Abraham, Job, David, and Habakkuk as atheists because they asked God to explain what they could not understand. Honest faith can hurt. It can become confused, press its face against a closed door, and ask why no answer has come. Faith is not the absence of every question; it is the refusal to abandon God while the question remains unanswered. Unbelief walks away from God because it dislikes the darkness. Faith keeps calling His name in the darkness because it knows no other source of light.

The first question examined comes from Cain, who stood before God with his brother's blood crying from the ground. When the LORD asked, "Where is Abel thy brother?" Cain lied, "I know not," and then added, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God did not need Cain's assistance in locating Abel. He was giving the murderer an opportunity to confess. Cain answered mercy with perjury and omniscience with sarcasm. He had already rejected God's prescribed way of worship, hated the brother whose sacrifice was accepted by faith, and silenced Abel's testimony with violence. Then he attempted to bury responsibility beside the body. Cain represents the man who does not ask because he lacks information. He asks because he resents authority. His question placed the Judge on trial, but the Judge answered by calling the blood beneath Cain's feet to testify.

Abraham's question came from an entirely different spirit. Standing before the LORD while Sodom awaited judgment, he asked, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham did not excuse Sodom's abominations, accuse God of cruelty, or demand that divine justice surrender its sword. He appealed to the character of God: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Beginning with fifty righteous people and descending to ten, Abraham pleaded persistently while repeatedly acknowledging his place as "dust and ashes." He spoke boldly because he trusted God, and he spoke humbly because he knew he was not God. The answer came through history. Sodom was destroyed because its guilt was full, but Lot was removed before the fire fell. Abraham asked whether God would distinguish the righteous from the wicked, and Lot's escape answered before the smoke finished rising.

Moses asked, "What is his name?" from the backside of the desert where a bush burned without being consumed. He was about to return to Egypt, confront Pharaoh, address the enslaved children of Israel, and announce that the God of their fathers had come down to deliver them. Egypt possessed a crowded warehouse of gods, priests, idols, temples, rituals, and sacred animals. Moses needed more than a generic religious label. God

answered, "I AM THAT I AM." The name revealed the self-existent, eternal, uncreated, independent God who borrows life from no one and supplies life to everything. Moses approached the bush with a question and departed bearing the name before which Egypt would burn. Pharaoh later asked, "Who is the LORD?" and received his answer through blood, frogs, lice, flies, death, darkness, Passover night, and a sea that closed over the remainder of his argument.

Job's question came from the ash heap. He had lost possessions, servants, children, health, dignity, and the companionship of people capable of understanding his suffering. His friends arrived to comfort him and soon promoted themselves to prosecutors, armed with enough misapplied truth to make the wounds deeper. Job asked, "Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?" He could not reconcile his condition with what he knew of God. The reader sees Satan's accusation in Heaven, but Job received no transcript explaining the conflict. He felt the blows without seeing the machinery behind them. When God finally answered from the whirlwind, He did not explain every calamity. He revealed the difference between Job's limited sight and divine wisdom. Job wanted the storm explained; God stepped out of it and reminded him who commands the morning, the sea, the stars, Behemoth, and Leviathan.

David's repeated question, "How long?" came from a believer watching trouble continue beyond his expected limit. "How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever?" He felt that God had hidden His face, left him trapped in the counsel of his own soul, permitted daily sorrow to occupy his heart, and allowed the enemy to remain exalted. Yet David carried those fears to the God he feared had forgotten him. That act itself was faith. He began Psalm 13 with four cries of "How long?" and ended by singing because he had trusted in God's mercy. The psalm contains no announcement that the enemy had fallen or the circumstances had changed. David's vision changed when prayer moved his attention from present silence to divine mercy. Heaven's clock had not stopped merely because David could not see its hands moving.

Habakkuk looked across Judah and saw violence, grievance, strife, contention, paralyzed law, and wrong judgment. He asked, "Why dost thou shew me iniquity?" because Heaven appeared to be watching national corruption without intervening. God answered, but the answer created a larger difficulty: He was raising the brutal Chaldeans to judge Judah. Habakkuk wanted the courthouse repaired; God announced that an army was coming to tear through the city. The prophet then asked how the Holy One could use a nation more wicked than Judah as the instrument of correction. God directed him to the watchtower, told him to write the vision plainly, and declared, "the just shall live by his faith." Habakkuk

began by questioning God's government and ended rejoicing in God's salvation even if the fig tree, vine, olive, field, flock, and stall all stood empty.

Nicodemus came to Christ by night carrying religion's finest credentials. He was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, and "a master of Israel." He possessed education, ancestry, morality, authority, Scripture knowledge, and a respectable position. Yet Jesus told him, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?" because the natural mind attempted to force a spiritual truth into a physical framework. Religion had trained his head without imparting life to his spirit. Christ did not tell him to become a better Pharisee, collect another ceremony, or polish Adam's fallen nature. He took Nicodemus past religious achievement, back to the serpent Moses lifted in the wilderness, and forward to the Son of man lifted upon the cross. God does not rehabilitate a corpse. He gives life to the dead.

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" while Truth incarnate stood bound before him. The question sounded philosophical, cautious, and sophisticated, but Pilate did not wait for an answer. John records, "And when he had said this, he went out again." He had already heard Christ's testimony and would repeatedly declare, "I find in him no fault at all." His wife warned him concerning "that just man." Herod found nothing worthy of death in Christ. Pilate recognized the envy of the accusers and possessed authority to release the Prisoner, yet he surrendered innocence when the crowd threatened his standing with Caesar. His problem was not insufficient evidence. His problem was sufficient cowardice. He washed his hands before the multitude, but water could not cleanse the blood from the verdict. A basin is cheaper than courage, which explains why religion and politics keep plenty of them nearby.

The Philippian jailer asked the question eternity cannot afford to leave unanswered: "What must I do to be saved?" His prison had shaken, the doors had opened, the prisoners' bands had fallen away, and he had drawn his sword to kill himself. Paul stopped him, and the trembling man fell before Paul and Silas. Their answer was neither complicated nor uncertain: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." They did not tell him to keep the law, join a denomination, submit to a priesthood, receive a sacrament, promise perfect conduct, endure to the end, or begin making religious payments upon Calvary. They pointed him to Christ. The jailer asked what he must do, and the gospel directed him to what Jesus Christ had already done through His death, burial, and resurrection. Religious pickpockets have spent centuries trying to slip human works back into the pocket grace emptied.

The disciples asked the final question upon the Mount of Olives: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Their question opened Christ's great prophetic discourse concerning deception, false Christs, wars, famines, pestilences, persecution,

the abomination of desolation, great Tribulation, cosmic upheaval, and the visible coming of the Son of man. Here right division becomes absolutely necessary. Christ addressed Jewish disciples concerning Jerusalem, Judaea, the temple, Daniel's prophecy, the sabbath, Israel's elect, and the end of Daniel's seventieth week. The Church is not waiting for an abomination to stand in a Jewish temple. It is waiting for the Lord Himself to descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. The disciples wanted signs; the Church awaits a summons.

These ten questions stretch from the blood-soaked ground outside Eden to the promised return of the King. They take us through worship, murder, intercession, revelation, suffering, delayed prayer, national corruption, spiritual birth, political cowardice, salvation, and prophecy. They were asked by a murderer, a patriarch, a deliverer, a sufferer, a king, a prophet, a religious ruler, a Roman governor, a trembling jailer, and disciples awaiting a kingdom. Some questions received immediate verbal answers. Others were answered through judgment, deliverance, revelation, Calvary, or the unfolding of God's prophetic program. Together they demonstrate that God's answers are always sufficient, though they are not always comfortable. The Almighty does not shape truth to fit the questioner's preferences. He answers according to His character, His word, and His eternal purpose.

The series also reveals that God sometimes answers a man's question by asking one of His own. Cain asked whether he was his brother's keeper, but God had already asked, "Where is Abel thy brother?" Job demanded an audience, and the LORD answered from the whirlwind, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Nicodemus asked how a man could be born again, and Christ asked, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" Divine questions do not gather missing information. They strip away excuses. God's question is a mirror held before the soul, and fallen man generally dislikes the reflection. He asks God to explain providence; God asks him to explain unbelief. He asks why Heaven is silent; Heaven asks why the Bible is closed. He asks what truth is; Truth asks why he refuses to hear His voice.

Right division must govern every study. These questions were not all asked under the same covenant, within the same dispensation, or by members of the same spiritual body. Abraham lived before the Mosaic law. Moses confronted Egypt as God prepared to redeem His covenant nation. David and Habakkuk spoke from within Israel's history under the law. Nicodemus addressed Christ before Calvary and before the Church was formed. The Philippian jailer received the Pauline gospel within the present dispensation of grace. Matthew 24 concerns Israel, the Tribulation, and the Second Advent rather than the Rapture of the Body of Christ. Scripture can provide spiritual application across these settings, but application must never erase doctrine. The Bible is not a blender, and "rightly

dividing the word of truth” does not mean pressing every verse into the same religious liquid.

The questions further expose the bankruptcy of modern man’s favorite refuge: perpetual uncertainty. The world congratulates itself for asking questions but becomes offended when God supplies final answers. It enjoys searching as long as nobody discovers anything. It praises dialogue, inquiry, nuance, and open-mindedness until Jesus Christ says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Suddenly the open mind slams shut hard enough to shake the hinges. Men claim they want evidence while refusing the testimony of Scripture, creation, conscience, Calvary, and the empty tomb. Their search for truth often resembles a thief searching for a police station—he hopes not to find it. An honest question follows evidence toward the answer. A foolish challenge keeps moving the standard because surrender was never part of the plan.

God’s final answer to man is not found in human philosophy, religious tradition, scientific speculation, political power, or the inner voice of fallen flesh. It is found in His written word and supremely revealed in His Son. Jesus Christ answers man’s guilt with His blood, man’s death with His resurrection, man’s blindness with His light, man’s bondage with His redemption, and man’s uncertainty with His truth. He is the living Redeemer Job anticipated, the salvation in which Habakkuk rejoiced, the lifted-up Son shown to Nicodemus, the Truth Pilate abandoned, the Lord upon whom the jailer believed, and the returning King for whom the disciples asked. The questions vary, but every road of revelation eventually reaches Him. God has not left mankind staring into an empty sky with nothing but speculation. The Word became flesh and spoke.

There will be moments in these studies when the answer comforts, moments when it corrects, and moments when it strikes human pride directly between the eyes. That is exactly what the Bible is supposed to do. Hebrews 4:12 calls the word of God “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword.” A sword is not defective because it refuses to behave like a feather duster. Scripture comforts the brokenhearted, but it does not tuck rebellion into bed and tell it to rest peacefully. It welcomes the honest cry while exposing the foolish challenge. It tells the sufferer that God remains sovereign and tells the rebel that God is not on trial. The same light that guides a willing traveller blinds the man determined to stare at it in defiance.

The central issue, therefore, is not whether men have questions. They will continue asking them until the last human tongue falls silent before the throne. The issue is whether they will receive God’s answers. Cain heard judgment and went out from the presence of the LORD. Abraham heard and trusted the Judge. Moses heard and returned to Egypt. Job heard and repented in dust and ashes. David prayed until sorrow gave way to singing. Habakkuk

waited upon the watchtower and learned to live by faith. Nicodemus moved from darkness toward identification with the crucified Christ. Pilate heard the Truth and chose Caesar. The jailer heard the gospel and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. The disciples heard prophecy and carried the testimony of Christ into the world.

Every reader will find himself somewhere among these questioners. There are sins to confess, people for whom to intercede, commissions requiring God's authority, sufferings that remain unexplained, delays that test patience, injustices that trouble the conscience, religious assumptions that cannot produce life, truths that demand courage, a salvation that must be received, and a coming King for whom the believer must watch. The Bible does not promise an answer shaped according to every human preference. It promises something better: the true answer from the God who cannot lie. Sometimes He explains the situation. Sometimes He exposes the questioner. Sometimes He commands him to wait. Sometimes He points him to the cross. Sometimes He answers with fire. But God never runs out of truth.

The questions men ask God will finally end when every secret thing is brought into judgment and every mouth is stopped. Cain's bloodstained defiance, Pilate's polished skepticism, and the scoffer's mockery of Christ's coming will not survive the presence of the Judge. Philippians 2 declares that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. On that day, nobody will ask whether God has the right to judge, whether truth can be known, or whether the King intends to return. The answers will be standing before them in unveiled glory. The wise man opens the Book now, asks honestly, believes what God has spoken, and bows while mercy is still calling. The fool keeps questioning the Judge until the courtroom doors close and the time for questions is over.

1 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “Am I My Brother's Keeper?": The Murderer Who Tried to Question the Judge

Key Passage: Genesis 4:9

“And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?”

Introduction

The first recorded question asked by a man after the fall was Adam's cowardly excuse disguised as an accusation, but the first question a man hurled back at God after

committing murder came from Cain. Genesis 4:9 records the exchange with the cold simplicity of a courtroom transcript: “And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother’s keeper?” There is no trembling confession, no broken plea, and no sorrow over a brother whose blood was soaking into the earth. Cain lied first and then added sarcasm, as though insolence could reinforce perjury. He had murdered the witness, concealed the crime, and now attempted to cross-examine the Judge. Sin always develops nerve after it sheds blood. A guilty conscience that refuses repentance will eventually become a smart mouth, because rebellion would rather insult the authority questioning it than answer the question honestly. Cain did not lack information. He lacked submission. He knew exactly where Abel was, and God knew exactly what Cain had done.

God’s question was not an investigation prompted by ignorance. The omniscient God who “knoweth the secrets of the heart” did not need Cain to help Him locate a missing shepherd. When God asked Adam, “Where art thou?” in Genesis 3:9, He knew Adam was hiding among the trees. When He asked Eve, “What is this that thou hast done?” He knew what had transpired at the tree. Likewise, when He asked Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother?” He was not gathering evidence; He was presenting the guilty man with an opening to confess. God’s questions are often doors of mercy before they become declarations of judgment. Cain could have fallen upon his face. He could have admitted the hatred, the ambush, and the bloodshed. Instead, he slammed the door and leaned against it with a lie. God asked one plain question, and Cain answered with two sins: “I know not” was falsehood, and “Am I my brother’s keeper?” was defiance. The murderer’s hands were bloody, but his tongue was still looking for an alibi.

This account is not merely the ancient record of the first murder outside Eden. It is the inspired unveiling of how rebellion thinks, speaks, hides, and hardens itself when confronted by God. Cain’s question survives wherever men deny responsibility, despise correction, resent divine authority, and pretend that Heaven has no right to inspect their conduct. It appears in the home when selfishness refuses duty, in the pulpit when hirelings abandon souls, in the nation when innocent blood is renamed and forgotten, and in the individual heart when a sinner demands that God explain Himself while refusing to explain his own disobedience. Cain’s question was foolish because it assumed God could be diverted by attitude. But sarcasm is poor armor when the Judge can summon blood from the ground as a witness. Cain tried to bury the matter beneath denial, yet the earth itself entered testimony for the prosecution. The guilty man said, “I know not,” while the blood beneath his feet cried, “He knows.”

1. Two Brothers, Two Offerings, and One Dividing Line

Genesis 4 does not begin with murder but with worship. Cain was “a tiller of the ground,” while Abel was “a keeper of sheep.” In process of time, Cain brought “of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD,” and Abel brought “of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.” The passage then states, “And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.” Modern religion immediately sympathizes with Cain because it believes sincerity should obligate God to accept whatever man places on the altar. Cain worked hard, grew the produce, arranged the basket, and probably thought the presentation looked respectable. The difficulty was not that Cain brought nothing; it was that he brought what he wanted instead of what faith required. Religion has been polishing Cain’s basket ever since. It changes the ribbon, improves the lighting, hires a praise band, and then becomes offended when God still requires what He said.

Hebrews 11:4 supplies the divine explanation: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” Abel’s offering was not superior because shepherds are automatically more spiritual than farmers. It was “more excellent” because it was offered “by faith,” and Romans 10:17 tells us, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Abel acted upon divine revelation. Cain substituted human effort for revealed truth. After Adam and Eve sinned, God clothed them with “coats of skins,” teaching at the threshold of fallen history that guilt could not be covered by fig leaves and that death stood between sin and acceptance. Abel approached with the firstlings of the flock and the fat thereof. Cain approached with produce from the ground God had cursed. One came by faith through a slain substitute; the other came carrying the impressive results of his own labor. Abel brought what God demanded. Cain brought what Cain admired. That is the difference between revelation and religion.

First John 3:12 removes every sentimental excuse: “Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” Cain did not murder Abel because Abel injured him. He murdered Abel because Abel’s accepted sacrifice exposed Cain’s rejected worship. The righteous man’s presence became an accusation without Abel needing to deliver a speech. False religion can tolerate almost anything except a man accepted by God on God’s terms. It will discuss love until truth enters the room, preach tolerance until righteousness stands beside it, and praise brotherhood until an Abel receives respect from Heaven. Then the smile tightens and the knife comes out. Jude 11 calls this rebellion “the way of Cain.” That way begins with self-made worship, continues through resentment of God’s verdict, and ends with hatred toward the man whose faith exposes the fraud. Cain could not strike God, so he struck the brother God accepted.

2. The Countenance That Fell Before the Brother Did

Genesis 4:5 says that when God had no respect unto Cain and his offering, “Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.” Before Abel’s body fell in the field, Cain’s countenance had already fallen before the altar. Murder did not suddenly leap into an otherwise clean heart. It grew from rejected correction, wounded pride, envy, and anger allowed to sit upon the throne. God confronted that inward rebellion before it produced outward bloodshed: “Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?” Again, God was not confused. He was forcing Cain to face the real issue. Cain’s anger was not righteous indignation against injustice. God had done him no wrong. His fury arose because God refused to pretend that a faithless offering was acceptable. Proud men call every verdict against them unfair because they have quietly appointed themselves chairman of the standards committee. Cain wanted God’s approval without God’s authority, which is the basic creed of apostasy in every age.

The Lord continued, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” That question destroyed Cain’s excuse before Cain committed the murder. The way of acceptance was not hidden, the standard was not crooked, and the opportunity had not been withdrawn. Cain was not a helpless victim of divine favoritism. God placed the matter plainly before him: do well and be accepted. But Cain did not want correction; he wanted vindication. He preferred to remove Abel rather than repair his own approach to God. This is how envy reasons. It does not ask, “What must I change?” It asks, “Whom can I blame?” Instead of looking at his rejected offering, Cain looked at his accepted brother. Instead of judging his own unbelief, he judged God’s judgment. A man who will not humble himself before the altar will eventually become dangerous in the field. Pride is not a harmless wrinkle in the personality. Given time, opportunity, and an injured ego, pride can turn a place of worship into the road to a grave.

God warned Cain, “And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” The warning came before the crime, proving that Cain was neither surprised nor coerced by what followed. Sin waited at the entrance like a crouching beast, but Cain opened the door and fed it. James 1:14–15 later describes the same progression: “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Cain’s envy conceived hatred, and hatred delivered murder. The devil did not need to drag Cain screaming into the field; Cain walked there under the power of a desire he refused to judge. Men like to describe sin as an unfortunate accident, as though iniquity slipped on a wet floor and landed in their lives. The Bible describes conception, growth, and birth. Cain entertained the thing at the door until it entered the house. What he refused to master within himself soon mastered him.

3. The Field Where False Brotherhood Shed True Blood

Genesis 4:8 says, “And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.” The Holy Ghost repeats “his brother” because the relationship intensified the crime. Abel was no stranger, invading enemy, or armed threat. He was Cain’s own flesh and blood, raised under the same parents outside the same barred garden, acquainted with the same account of the fall and the same promise concerning the seed of the woman. Cain talked with him before killing him, demonstrating that murder can wear a conversational face until the chosen moment arrives. A friendly voice is not proof of a faithful heart. Judas later kissed the Lord Jesus while delivering Him into murderous hands. Sin has always appreciated a respectable entrance. It prefers the field away from witnesses, the kiss that conceals betrayal, and the smooth sentence that keeps suspicion asleep until the blow falls.

Jesus said in John 8:44 that the devil “was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.” Cain displayed both family traits: murder and falsehood. First John 3:12 says he “was of that wicked one,” not because Satan physically fathered him, as some imaginative doctrinal carnival barkers have claimed, but because Cain manifested the spiritual character and works of the devil. Christ told unbelieving religious leaders, “The lusts of your father ye will do.” Spiritual parentage reveals itself through conduct. Cain rejected God’s word, hated righteous Abel, shed innocent blood, and then lied to the Lord’s face. He bore the devil’s likeness more accurately than a coin bears the image stamped upon it. The first child born into the fallen world became the first murderer, showing what Adam’s nature could produce without needing centuries of cultural corruption. Man did not slowly evolve upward from savagery. He fell from fellowship with God and began spilling his brother’s blood before human history had collected enough people to fill a small town.

The field also exposes the emptiness of outward religion without inward submission. Cain had stood at an altar and brought an offering, yet soon afterward he stood over his brother’s body. The distance between religious ceremony and bloodshed is shorter than men imagine when the heart rejects God’s word. History is filled with men who wore vestments while persecuting saints, kissed relics before lighting fires, repeated prayers while sharpening political knives, and spoke of humanity while destroying human beings. Cain established the pattern early: worship without faith, anger without cause, conversation without sincerity, and violence without repentance. An altar does not sanctify rebellion merely because a religious man stands beside it. God had no respect to Cain’s offering because God saw the worshipper behind the produce. Men inspect the arrangement on the platform; God inspects the heart approaching it. Cain’s vegetables

could not hide his unbelief, and his conversation could not hide his hatred. Heaven is not deceived by either bouquets or vocabulary.

4. “Where Is Abel Thy Brother?”—The Question That Opened the Trial

After the murder, the LORD asked, “Where is Abel thy brother?” Every word pressed upon Cain’s conscience. “Where” demanded an account. “Abel” identified the victim. “Thy brother” established Cain’s relationship and responsibility. God did not say, “Where is that inconvenient fellow whose offering I accepted?” He placed the bond Cain had violated directly inside the question. The Lord’s words were not loud in the text, but omniscience does not need to shout. Cain stood before the One who had watched the anger form, heard the conversation in the field, seen the hand rise, and received the blood into the ground. Proverbs 15:3 declares, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” Darkness never lowered a curtain over a crime, secrecy never locked God outside a room, and buried evidence never became invisible to Him. Men hide sin from other men and then congratulate themselves as though they had blinded God.

God’s question also reveals His mercy. Before announcing judgment, He gave Cain an opportunity to speak truth. The same God who sought Adam among the trees sought Cain behind his denial. The Lord’s questions bring concealed things into the light, not because He needs a confession to complete His knowledge, but because the sinner needs confession to abandon his lie. Proverbs 28:13 says, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Cain could not undo Abel’s death, but he could have ceased fighting the truth. Instead, he chose concealment. The human heart imagines that confession creates guilt, when confession merely agrees with the guilt already present. A physician does not cause a disease by naming it, and God does not create sin by exposing it. Cain treated God’s question like a prosecutor’s trick because he had no intention of becoming honest. Mercy opened the witness box; pride climbed in and committed perjury.

There is a solemn pattern throughout Scripture in God’s judicial questions. He asked Adam, “Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” He asked Elijah, “What doest thou here?” Christ asked Judas, “Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?” Each question placed the sinner’s act beside God’s word and demanded moral recognition. At the Great White Throne, however, the age of evasive answers will be over. Revelation 20:12 says, “The books were opened,” and the dead will be “judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” No clever reply will confuse those records. No lawyer will discover a procedural error in omniscience. God’s present questions are merciful alarms before the final verdict. The man who resents conviction today should remember that being questioned is better than being sentenced.

Cain heard, “Where is Abel?” before he heard, “Now art thou cursed.” He wasted the interval.

5. “I Know Not”—The Lie Told to an Omniscient God

Cain answered, “I know not.” Those three words were as absurd as a candle denying the existence of the sun. Cain knew where the encounter occurred, knew what his hands had done, and knew why Abel would not return. His denial was not a failure of memory but a deliberate contradiction of reality. Sin first promises secrecy and then requires lying to preserve the illusion. One lie becomes the bodyguard of another until the sinner must maintain an entire regiment of falsehoods around the original offense. Yet Cain’s lie was particularly foolish because it was spoken to the LORD. Psalm 139:1 declares, “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.” Hebrews 4:13 says that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” Cain’s mouth denied what God’s eyes had witnessed. He was trying to close the courtroom by switching off a lamp while the noonday sun shone through the roof.

The lie also revealed Cain’s hardness. He did not say that the killing was accidental, plead provocation, or express horror over what he had done. He erased Abel with a sentence: “I know not.” That is what rebellion eventually does to its victims. It first removes them physically and then removes them morally, refusing even to acknowledge their existence. Innocent blood becomes a statistic, an inconvenience, a political term, or a subject polite society prefers not to discuss. Jeremiah 17:9 warns, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” The desperately wicked heart can commit evil and then edit the dictionary so the act sounds harmless. Murder becomes choice, perversion becomes identity, greed becomes ambition, cowardice becomes tolerance, and apostasy becomes progress. Cain lacked modern public-relations experts, but he had already mastered their central technique: deny the plain fact, resent the question, and behave as though indignation were evidence of innocence.

Every unrepentant sinner repeats Cain’s folly when he imagines he can conceal himself from God. Men may delete messages, alter records, close doors, intimidate witnesses, and carry secrets to the grave, but the grave is not a vault against resurrection. Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” This does not teach that a saved member of Christ’s body will stand at the Great White Throne; the believer is justified by faith, eternally secure in Christ, and will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ concerning service. It does teach that no deed escapes the appropriate judgment of God. The lost man will answer for his works, and the saved man should not trifle with a Father who chastens His children. Grace

does not make lying respectable. The blood of Christ cleanses confessed sin; it was never given as upholstery for Cain's seat of defiance.

6. "Am I My Brother's Keeper?"—Defiance Wearing a Question Mark

Cain's second statement was framed as a question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" He was not requesting a definition of family responsibility. He was mocking the very idea that Abel's whereabouts concerned him. The sarcasm may have played upon Abel's occupation as "a keeper of sheep," as though Cain were saying, "Abel kept sheep; was I appointed to keep Abel?" If so, the remark was colder than the blood on the ground. Cain reduced brotherhood to an unwanted job assignment and acted as though responsibility existed only where a formal title had been issued. Sin loves that defense. The father neglects his home because no one handed him a printed schedule. The pastor abandons the flock because their wounds interrupt his conference calendar. The Christian watches another stumble and says it is none of his concern. Cain's spirit always requests paperwork before performing duty. It cannot find responsibility in "thy brother" because it has already decided that self-interest is the only commandment worth keeping.

Scripture does not teach that one man can believe, repent, or be saved in another man's place. Romans 14:12 says, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Abel's faith could not justify Cain, and Cain's unbelief could not condemn Abel. Each soul bears personal responsibility before God. Yet personal accountability does not abolish moral duty toward others. Under the law, Israel was commanded, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." In the present Church Age, Galatians 6:2 instructs believers, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Philippians 2:4 says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." A Christian is not another man's redeemer, Holy Ghost, or final judge, but he is forbidden to use individual responsibility as an excuse for selfish indifference. Cain's question tried to turn a legitimate distinction into a hiding place for murder.

The answer to Cain's question is therefore plain: he was not Abel's owner, saviour, or substitute, but he was certainly obligated not to hate, deceive, attack, and murder his brother. Before asking whether he had to keep Abel, Cain might have begun by not killing him. The sarcastic question attempted to leap over the obvious command and start an abstract argument about the boundaries of responsibility. Sinners still employ that maneuver. Confront a man with plain wrongdoing, and he may suddenly become a philosopher. Ask about the lie, and he wants to debate language. Ask about the betrayal, and he wants to discuss everyone else's failures. Ask about the blood, and he asks whether society can define brotherhood. A fog machine is useful when a man dislikes the furniture in the room. Cain filled the conversation with fog, but God kept His finger upon Abel. The

issue was not whether Cain had completed every possible duty to his brother. The issue was that he had murdered him.

7. The Blood That Testified and the Judgment That Followed

The LORD answered Cain's challenge with another question: "What hast thou done?" Then came the testimony Cain could neither threaten nor contradict: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." Abel's mouth had been silenced, but his blood had acquired a voice before God. The earth that received the evidence did not conceal it from Heaven. Numbers 35:33 later declares that blood "defileth the land," and that the land cannot be cleansed of shed blood "but by the blood of him that shed it." Human courts may fail, witnesses may disappear, and murderers may die in comfortable beds, but innocent blood is never inaudible to God. Heaven maintains records that cannot be burned, bribed, hacked, sealed, or lost in a government basement. Cain thought the field was empty because no human eye stood nearby. He learned that creation itself can testify when its Creator calls the court to order.

God pronounced the sentence: "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand." The ground Cain cultivated would no longer yield unto him her strength, and he would become "a fugitive and a vagabond" in the earth. The punishment fitted the crime. Cain had used the field as the scene of bloodshed, so the field would resist his labor. He had removed his brother from the land of the living, so he would lose settled rest in the land. Yet Cain's response still centered upon himself: "My punishment is greater than I can bear." He lamented the burden of judgment without confessing the wickedness that brought it. False repentance weeps over consequences, not sin. It mourns the lost reputation, damaged comfort, public exposure, and painful sentence while never grieving that God was defied and another person was injured. Cain was sorry that judgment had found him, not that his hand had found Abel.

Even in judgment, God placed a mark upon Cain lest anyone finding him should kill him. This was restraint and temporal mercy, not evidence that Cain had been spiritually justified. God spared his earthly life while leaving the curse in force. Cain then "went out from the presence of the LORD" and built a city, naming it after his son Enoch. Though sentenced to wander, he attempted to manufacture permanence without fellowship with God. His line produced cattle culture, music, metalworking, and eventually Lamech's boastful violence. Civilization advanced while conscience decayed. Cain's descendants could forge brass and iron but could not repair the heart; they could compose music but could not tune the soul to God. Human progress without divine truth merely gives fallen

men finer instruments with which to express the same rebellion. Cain built a city east of Eden, but no wall can keep out the curse a man carries within him.

Conclusion

Cain's question reveals the anatomy of rebellious questioning from beginning to end. It begins when a man rejects God's prescribed way, grows angry at the acceptance of righteousness, refuses correction, nourishes envy, attacks the innocent, denies the deed, and finally challenges God's right to ask about it. "Am I my brother's keeper?" was not an honest cry like David's "How long?" or the jailer's "What must I do to be saved?" It was a foolish challenge thrown upward by a guilty man. God welcomes the question that seeks truth, pleads for mercy, confesses ignorance, or cries from genuine pain. He is not intimidated by inquiry. But He is under no obligation to flatter a rebel who puts the Judge in the witness box while blood drips from his hands. There is a vast difference between asking God for light and demanding that God answer to darkness. One kneels before the throne; the other tries to subpoena its Occupant.

The account also places a searching question before every reader: where is thy brother? Where are those entrusted to your care, influenced by your example, instructed by your words, or wounded by your selfishness? No man can save another soul, but every believer can speak the gospel of Christ. No parent can believe for a child, but a parent can teach the Scriptures, maintain a godly home, and refuse to sacrifice the family upon the altar of convenience. No pastor can force spiritual growth into a congregation, but he can feed the flock instead of entertaining the goats and counting the offering. Ezekiel's watchman was required to sound the warning, though each hearer remained responsible for his response. Christian duty does not mean playing the Holy Ghost in another man's life. It means refusing Cain's convenient fiction that another person's spiritual danger, suffering, or destruction is never any concern of ours.

Abel's blood cried for judgment, but Hebrews 12:24 speaks of "Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Abel's blood testified that a murderer was guilty. Christ's blood declares that a believing sinner can be justified. Abel's blood cried from the ground; Christ's blood answers from Heaven. The first exposed sin, while the second provides the only cleansing for sin. Cain attempted to hide behind a lie, but no sinner needs to hide when the Lord Jesus Christ has died, was buried, and rose again. The proper response to God's question is not sarcasm, evasion, religion, or self-defense. It is honest confession and faith in the finished work of Christ. Cain asked whether he was his brother's keeper. God's final answer is a crucified and risen Brother who is able to keep every soul that comes to Him by faith. The murderer fled God's presence; the wise sinner runs toward the blood that speaks better things.

2 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “Wilt Thou Also Destroy the Righteous with the Wicked?”: Abraham’s Plea Before the Fires Fell

Key Passage: Genesis 18:23–25

“And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Introduction

There are questions asked because faith is seeking light, and there are questions asked because rebellion is looking for a fight. Cain asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” with Abel’s blood testifying against him from the ground. Abraham asked, “Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” while standing before the LORD and pleading for lives inside a doomed city. The punctuation may look similar, but the hearts behind the questions stood on opposite sides of eternity. Cain questioned God to escape responsibility; Abraham questioned God because he understood responsibility. Cain attempted to put the Judge on trial; Abraham appealed to the known righteousness of the Judge. One question was insolence wearing a question mark, while the other was intercession clothed in humility. God is not threatened by either kind, but He does not answer them alike. Heaven knows the difference between a rebel shaking his fist and a believer stretching out empty hands. The throne is never intimidated by a question, but it always judges the spirit in which that question is asked.

Genesis 18 places Abraham on holy ground between fellowship and fire. The LORD had visited him in the plains of Mamre, confirmed that Sarah would bear the promised son, and then turned His attention toward Sodom and Gomorrah. The chapter moves from a meal beneath Abraham’s tent to a judicial announcement concerning cities whose sin had cried up to Heaven. Abraham was not reading a newspaper report or listening to rumors carried by desert travelers. The Judge Himself disclosed the coming investigation and destruction. Lot, Abraham’s nephew, lived inside Sodom with his household, and Abraham understood that the sentence involved more than buildings, streets, and wicked magistrates. People he loved stood within the radius of judgment. Abraham therefore “stood yet before the LORD,” drew near, and began to plead. He did not deny Sodom’s guilt or rename its corruption. He did not organize a committee to explain that the brimstone might damage the city’s self-esteem. He faced the reality of judgment and interceded before it fell.

Abraham's question reaches far beyond the plains of Mamre. It reveals the character of biblical intercession, the certainty of divine justice, the distinction God makes between the righteous and the wicked, and the pattern of deliverance before wrath. Abraham did not bargain with an uncertain deity whose moral position might be adjusted through pressure. He pleaded with the unchanging God upon the ground of God's own righteousness. He spoke boldly, yet remembered that he was "but dust and ashes." He persisted, yet repeatedly asked that the Lord not be angry. He requested mercy, but never accused God of wrongdoing if mercy were withheld. And when the fire finally fell, the answer to Abraham's question did not arrive as a theological essay written across the sky. It walked out of Sodom on two feet. Lot was removed before the brimstone descended. God demonstrated in history what Abraham confessed in prayer: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

1. The Friend to Whom God Revealed the Coming Judgment

Genesis 18:17 records the LORD saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" That statement reveals the extraordinary fellowship Abraham enjoyed with God. James 2:23 later calls him "the Friend of God." Friendship with God did not mean that Abraham advised the Almighty, corrected His plans, or occupied an equal seat at the council table. Modern religion enjoys speaking of God as a casual companion until it forgets which One created the universe and which one arrived from dust. Abraham's friendship rested upon faith, obedience, and the covenant purposes of God. The LORD had called him from Ur, promised him a seed and a land, and declared that through him all nations of the earth would be blessed. Because Abraham occupied a place within God's revealed program, the Lord disclosed what He was about to do. Divine friendship never lowers God to man's level; it lifts man into the privilege of hearing God's word.

The LORD continued, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him." God's confidence in Abraham was connected to his responsibility as a spiritual leader. Abraham would not merely collect revelation like a religious antique and display it inside his tent. He would command his household to "keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment." That statement belongs to Abraham's historical setting before the Mosaic law and must not be carelessly flattened into Church Age doctrine, but its practical force remains sharp. A man who receives truth is responsible to teach it. God did not reveal coming judgment so Abraham could boast about possessing secret information. He revealed it to a man expected to order his house according to divine truth. The average modern father wants the title of spiritual leader with approximately the same enthusiasm he has for reading an appliance warranty. Abraham was expected to command his household, not merely make vague suggestions while the world disciplined his children.

Revelation carries responsibility, and the knowledge of judgment should produce intercession. Abraham did not hear that Sodom was marked for destruction and respond with smug satisfaction. He did not polish his halo, thank God that his tent stood at a safe distance, and begin selling tickets for the explosion. He drew near to plead. There is something spiritually diseased about a professing believer who can discuss hell, wrath, and judgment with accurate terminology while possessing no burden for those approaching them. Biblical preaching never apologizes for the fire, but biblical intercession never delights in the death of the wicked. Ezekiel 33:11 declares, “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” Abraham accepted that judgment was righteous while asking whether mercy could still operate before it arrived. A man is not prepared to preach judgment properly until he can warn without softening it and weep without denying it.

2. The Cry of Sodom and the Certainty of Judgment

The LORD said, “Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous.” Sodom’s destruction was not an impulsive heavenly outburst over a minor cultural disagreement. Its sin was great, grievous, public, and persistent. Genesis 13:13 had already declared, “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.” Ezekiel 16:49–50 later identifies pride, fulness of bread, abundance of idleness, neglect of the poor and needy, haughtiness, and abomination. Genesis 19 then displays the city’s violent sexual corruption when the men of Sodom surrounded Lot’s house and demanded his visitors. The Bible does not stutter about Sodom, though modern apostasy develops a remarkable hearing problem whenever the text becomes inconvenient. God did not destroy those cities because they failed to recycle properly or lacked a municipal kindness campaign. Their wickedness had ripened until its cry reached the courtroom of Heaven.

Sin has a voice before God even when society silences its victims and celebrates its perpetrators. Abel’s blood cried from the ground. Israel’s oppression in Egypt came up before God. The hire of laborers kept back by fraud “crieth,” according to James 5:4. Sodom’s corruption also produced a cry. Men imagine that when legislatures approve an abomination, corporations sponsor it, entertainers applaud it, and religious hirelings sprinkle it with theological perfume, Heaven must update its standards. But unanimous rebellion does not repeal one syllable of Scripture. A city may rename sin, license it, subsidize it, parade it, and punish anyone rude enough to quote God about it, yet the cry still rises. Wickedness does not become righteousness by gaining a majority vote. If every citizen of Sodom had raised his hand in favor of iniquity, God would still have possessed

the only vote that mattered. The smoke rising the next morning demonstrated that divine holiness had not been defeated in committee.

Genesis 18:21 says, “I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it.” This language does not mean omniscience had received an incomplete report and needed to conduct field research. God speaks judicially, demonstrating that His judgment is deliberate, exact, and based upon perfect knowledge. The Judge who came down to inspect Babel also came down concerning Sodom. He does not sentence upon gossip, guesswork, prejudice, or manipulated evidence. Abraham’s question therefore rested upon the certainty that God knew the difference between the righteous and the wicked. Human courts may confuse the two because witnesses lie, evidence disappears, and judges can be corrupt. God is never forced to squint through fog. Second Timothy 2:19 says, “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” When fire fell upon Sodom, not one righteous person was accidentally overlooked because an angel misplaced the paperwork. Omniscience never commits collateral injustice.

3. Abraham Drew Near Instead of Running Away

Genesis 18:23 begins, “And Abraham drew near.” Those three words describe the first movement of true intercession. Abraham did not draw near because God was weak, uninformed, or reluctant to act justly. He drew near because God had opened the matter before him. Hebrews 4:16 later tells Church Age believers to “come boldly unto the throne of grace,” but boldness is not brashness, and access is not equality. The blood-bought believer may approach the throne confidently because Christ is his great high priest, yet the throne remains a throne. Abraham possessed neither the believer’s present position in the Body of Christ nor our access through the finished work of Calvary, but he understood reverent nearness. He did not shout demands from a distance. He approached the LORD and spoke. Prayer is not man climbing into God’s chair to rearrange providence. It is man drawing near enough to have his desires corrected, enlarged, and governed by the character of God.

Abraham’s first words were, “Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” He did not say, “Sodom is misunderstood,” or, “Surely the reports have been exaggerated.” Abraham had already rescued Lot and the people of Sodom after the invasion recorded in Genesis 14. He knew what kind of place stood in the plain. His intercession did not depend upon pretending the wicked were righteous. He asked whether the righteous would share the judicial destruction appointed to the wicked. That distinction is central to his plea. Soft-headed religion imagines that compassion requires denying guilt, while hard-hearted religion imagines that preaching guilt requires abandoning compassion. Abraham did neither. He called the wicked wicked by implication and pleaded for the righteous explicitly.

Real intercession does not doctor the diagnosis to make the patient comfortable. It carries the terminal case to the only Physician who can do anything about it.

The believer must learn to draw near before the fires fall. Once judgment arrived, Abraham did not negotiate with the flames. The season of intercession preceded the sentence's execution. Noah preached before the Flood, Moses interceded before wrath consumed Israel, Samuel prayed before national collapse became irreversible, and Paul warned men before shipwreck. Prayer is not a substitute for witness, obedience, or action, but neither are those things substitutes for prayer. The Christian who discusses everyone's condition except before God may possess information without intercession. He becomes a religious newsreader announcing disasters from a safe studio. Abraham stood before the LORD with Sodom upon his heart. The cities were guilty, the judgment was deserved, and the danger was immediate. Those facts did not discourage prayer; they created its urgency.

Intercession is faith standing between revelation and execution, asking what mercy may yet be shown without demanding that justice surrender its sword.

4. "Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do Right?"

Abraham's plea reached its doctrinal foundation in Genesis 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He did not appeal to a standard higher than God, because no such standard exists. He appealed to God's own immutable righteousness. Abraham knew that the Judge could not contradict His character, confuse innocence with guilt, or commit moral error. Deuteronomy 32:4 later declares, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment." Psalm 19:9 says, "The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether." God does not become righteous by conforming to man's opinion of fairness; righteousness is defined by who God is. Fallen men often sit in judgment upon God while borrowing their very concept of justice from the conscience He gave them. The clay climbs onto a soapbox, lectures the Potter about equality, and expects Heaven to take notes. Abraham possessed greater sense. He appealed from God's announced judgment to God's perfect character, not from Scripture to human sentiment.

The question answers every charge that God is unjust in judgment. The destruction of Sodom, the Flood, the conquest of Canaan, eternal hell, and the coming Tribulation are not stains upon God's character. They are revelations of His holiness against sin. Men protest divine judgment because they minimize human evil and magnify human entitlement. They picture sinners as basically innocent customers filing complaints against Heaven's management. The Bible pictures men as rebels who have broken God's law, rejected His light, worshipped the creature, and loved darkness rather than light. Romans 3:4 settles the issue: "Let God be true, but every man a liar." If a man's moral calculations conclude that the Judge of all the earth has acted wrongly, the error is not in the throne's arithmetic. God

never owes mercy. Mercy, by definition, is not a debt. The wonder is not that Sodom burned; the wonder is that God warned, investigated, listened to Abraham, and delivered Lot.

Abraham's confidence in divine justice also meant he could accept an answer he did not control. He asked boldly, but the outcome remained with God. Biblical prayer does not place the Almighty beneath contractual obligation to perform whatever a believer words passionately enough. Faith is not a lever by which man moves an unwilling God. It is confidence that God hears, God knows, God can act, and God will always do right. First John 5:14 gives the Church Age standard: "If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." Prayer anchored in God's will can be fervent without becoming presumptuous. Abraham did not threaten to stop believing if Sodom fell. He did not announce that God's reputation depended upon satisfying his request. He placed his appeal before the Judge and trusted the Judge's character. The strongest prayers are not those that tell God what He must do; they are those that know He cannot do wrong.

5. From Fifty to Ten—Persistence Without Presumption

Abraham began with fifty righteous persons: "Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?" The LORD answered, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Abraham then proceeded from fifty to forty-five, from forty-five to forty, from forty to thirty, from thirty to twenty, and finally from twenty to ten. The exchange is not an oriental market scene in which Abraham outbargained God over the price of mercy. God was not reluctant at fifty and gradually worn down by a persistent customer. At every stage, the LORD willingly answered according to the number Abraham named. The conversation revealed God's patience as much as Abraham's persistence. Six times Abraham spoke; six times God granted the stated request. Mercy did not have to be dragged from God with tongs.

Why did Abraham stop at ten? Scripture does not explicitly tell us, so there is no virtue in filling the silence with confident imagination. Abraham may have counted Lot's household and hoped the total would reach ten, but that remains an inference rather than an inspired statement. What Scripture makes plain is that Abraham progressively tested the breadth of the mercy he sought while growing increasingly conscious of his own smallness. At forty-five he said, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." At thirty he pleaded, "Oh let not the Lord be angry." At twenty he repeated the request, and before naming ten he asked to speak "but this once." Abraham's boldness never became swagger. The closer he came, the lower he bowed. A man truly acquainted

with God does not become impressed with his own prayer vocabulary. Nearness to the throne cures spiritual strutting.

Persistence in prayer is not unbelief when it rests upon God's character and submits to God's will. Christ taught His disciples that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Paul besought the Lord thrice concerning his thorn, yet accepted the answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Repetition becomes vain when men imagine that multiplied phrases earn divine attention, but repeated intercession can express continuing dependence. Abraham did not chant, perform, or attempt to hypnotize Heaven with religious noise. Each petition was specific, intelligible, and reverent. Some modern prayers travel for ten minutes without arriving at a request, circle the airport of religious vocabulary, and finally land nowhere. Abraham knew whom he addressed, what judgment threatened, and for whom he pleaded. His prayer had doctrinal backbone and personal burden. He asked repeatedly because lives stood in danger, not because he enjoyed hearing himself speak.

6. Lot Removed Before the Fire Descended

Sodom did not contain ten righteous persons, and the city was not spared. Yet Abraham's central concern received an unmistakable answer. Genesis 19:29 states, "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." That verse explicitly connects Lot's deliverance with Abraham's intercession. Abraham had asked whether God would destroy the righteous with the wicked, and God removed the righteous man before destroying the wicked city. Lot's escape was not a reward for an exemplary testimony. His life in Sodom was compromised, his influence was feeble, his family was fractured, and his later conduct was disgraceful. Nevertheless, Second Peter 2 calls him "just Lot" and refers to "that righteous man." His standing before God was better than his walk before men. Scripture does not call him righteous because his behavior deserved applause; it calls him righteous because God knew his standing.

Lot's condition provides a sharp picture of a righteous man entangled in a wicked world. Second Peter 2:7 says that he was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked," and verse 8 says he "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." Lot was distressed by Sodom, yet he remained inside it until angels took him by the hand. He sat in Sodom's gate, possessed a house there, had family ties there, and hesitated when commanded to leave. Genesis 19:16 says, "And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand." That is grace dragging a reluctant saint out of the judgment zone. Lot had enough righteousness to be vexed by Sodom but not enough separation to move away from it. Many believers have duplicated the arrangement: miserable in the world, ineffective against it,

and too invested to leave it. They pitch toward Sodom, move into Sodom, sit in Sodom, and then wonder why Sodom lives in their children.

The angels told Lot, “Escape for thy life,” and warned that they had been sent to destroy the city. When Lot requested permission to flee to Zoar, the angel answered, “Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither.” The statement is astonishingly exact. Judgment waited until Lot reached safety. The fire did not begin while he was halfway out, nor did God ask him to survive part of the brimstone to prove his sincerity. “The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire.” First removal, then wrath. First separation, then destruction. The order is not hidden beneath a theological hedge. God knows how to place a difference between those appointed to judgment and those delivered from it. The Judge of all the earth did right down to the timing of the first falling flame.

7. A Prophetic Picture of Deliverance Before Wrath

Lot’s removal provides a striking prophetic picture of God delivering His own before the outpouring of wrath. A biblical type must never be made the foundation of doctrine by itself, but when it agrees with direct revelation, it illustrates the truth with remarkable force. The doctrine of the Church’s pre-Tribulation Rapture rests upon the plain Pauline revelation of First Thessalonians 4:13–18, First Corinthians 15:51–53, and related passages. The Church is waiting for the Lord Himself to descend from Heaven, for the dead in Christ to rise, and for living believers to be “caught up together with them in the clouds.” First Thessalonians 1:10 says that Jesus “delivered us from the wrath to come,” while First Thessalonians 5:9 declares, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath.” Genesis 19 does not create that doctrine, but it certainly does not resemble a post-wrath evacuation plan.

The Lord Jesus Himself connected the days of Lot with His future revelation. Luke 17:28–30 says that men “did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded,” until “the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.” The decisive expression is “the same day that Lot went out.” The separation occurred before the destruction, though normal life continued until the hour judgment arrived. Men were not necessarily hiding in caves or staring upward in terror. They were conducting business, planning meals, buying property, and building tomorrow as though tomorrow belonged to them. Sodom had a full calendar and no future. The world always mistakes God’s patience for God’s absence. It hears no thunder, sees no fire, and concludes that judgment has lost the address. But the Judge’s silence is not surrender, and the final ordinary morning can become the first day of irreversible wrath.

Lot's deliverance also illustrates that removal rests upon God's recognition of His own, not upon the believer achieving sinless perfection. If deliverance from wrath required every Christian to attain Lot-proof spiritual performance, Lot himself would have missed the appointment. The Church is raptured because its members are in Christ, not because every member has maintained an equally faithful walk. That truth does not excuse carnality; the Judgment Seat of Christ will expose service, motive, loss, and reward. But the believer's security rests upon Christ's righteousness, not his own religious mileage. Lot escaped the fire yet suffered terrible loss in his family and testimony. Likewise, a saved man may be delivered from eternal condemnation while watching his wood, hay, and stubble burn before Christ. Grace guarantees that the believer will not be condemned with the world. It never guarantees that a wasted life will look respectable when examined by fire.

Conclusion

Abraham's question was answered in both principle and history. The LORD declared that He would spare the city if the required righteous persons were found, and when they were not found, He still removed Lot before the overthrow. God neither confused the righteous with the wicked nor treated their final appointments as identical. Abraham looked toward Sodom the next morning and saw "the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace." He could not see Lot from that distance, but Genesis records what faith had to trust: "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out." Intercession did not preserve Sodom, because Sodom's guilt had ripened and the righteous number was absent. But intercession was not wasted. Prayer is not unsuccessful merely because God does not preserve everything the intercessor hoped to save. Abraham asked whether the Judge would distinguish the righteous from the wicked, and somewhere beyond the smoke Lot was alive because God had done exactly that.

This passage teaches believers how to stand before God concerning a condemned world. We must never defend the world's sin, dilute God's warnings, or accuse the Judge of cruelty. Neither should we retreat into cold prophetic pride and discuss coming wrath as though lost men were pieces on a chart. Abraham knew Sodom deserved judgment, yet he pleaded before the fire fell. The Christian possesses an even clearer message: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day." The door of grace remains open, and every sinner who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is justified freely and delivered from condemnation. The Church's business is not to negotiate a peace treaty between God and unrepentant rebellion. God has already established the only terms of peace at Calvary. Our business is to proclaim those terms faithfully while there is still time to flee the wrath to come.

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Yes, He shall, and yes, He always has. He did right when He heard Sodom’s cry, right when He investigated its sin, right when He listened to Abraham, right when He removed Lot, and right when He rained fire upon the cities of the plain. He will do right when Christ catches away His Church, right when the seals open, right when the nations are judged, and right when the dead stand before the Great White Throne. No saint will discover an error in His verdict, and no sinner will overturn His sentence on appeal. Abraham approached boldly because he trusted God’s character, and he bowed humbly because he knew his own place. That is the proper posture of intercession: close enough to plead, low enough to submit, and certain enough to know that when the last argument has been spoken and the final fire has fallen, the Judge of all the earth will still have done right.

3 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “What Is His Name?”: Moses at the Bush That Burned but Was Not Consumed

Key Passage: Exodus 3:13–14

“And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”

Introduction

Moses asked, “What is his name?” because he was about to walk into Egypt carrying a message no slave empire wanted to hear: “Let my people go.” He would stand before Israelites whose backs had been bent beneath bondage and before Pharaoh, a ruler worshipped within a religious system crowded with false gods. Moses was not seeking a decorative title for a new denomination, a mysterious syllable for religious experts, or a spiritual password to make him appear important. He needed to know whose authority stood behind the commission. Egypt had names for the sun, the river, the beasts, the dead, and nearly everything else except the living God who created them. Its temples were full, its priests were employed, and its idols were polished, but Heaven was not impressed. A warehouse of deities does not become divine through inventory. Moses needed more than personal courage when confronting that counterfeit empire. He needed the name of the One before whom Egypt’s entire religious establishment was painted lumber, carved stone, and overdressed darkness.

God answered, “I AM THAT I AM.” The reply did not merely supply Moses with identification; it revealed the absolute self-existence, eternity, sufficiency, and independence of the living God. He did not say, “I was,” as though His greatness belonged to history, or “I will become,” as though He were moving toward completion. He is. Everything else receives life, place, power, and continuation from Him, but God borrows existence from no one. He does not draw strength from creation, require recognition from worshippers, depend upon angels for defense, or wait for theologians to define Him properly. Before the first star appeared, He was. If every nation rejected Him, He would remain unchanged. If every idol vanished, He would lose no competition because He never had any. “I AM” reaches backward beyond creation, stands sovereign over the present, and extends beyond every imaginable tomorrow. The name did not place God inside Moses’ understanding. It shattered the walls of that understanding and revealed the One whom no wall can contain.

That name also reaches directly to the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus declared in John 8:58, “Before Abraham was, I am,” He did not stumble over grammar or offer a poetic way of saying He was unusually old. The Jews understood the claim and “took up stones to cast at him.” The One speaking to Moses from the flame and the One standing before Israel in human flesh belong to the same eternal identity. The Word “was God,” the Word “was made flesh,” and the Word walked among men bearing the name Jesus. Satan therefore fights relentlessly over God’s identity. He conceals it beneath idols, dilutes it with generic religious talk, corrupts it through false doctrine, and presents “another Jesus” acceptable to fallen men. Moses approached the bush asking for a name. He left commissioned by the I AM. Pharaoh later asked, “Who is the LORD?” and received his answer in ten installments, followed by a final demonstration at the Red Sea.

1. The Bush That Burned on Holy Ground

Exodus 3 begins with Moses keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, on “the backside of the desert.” Forty years earlier Moses had stood in Pharaoh’s world, learned Egypt’s wisdom, and supposed that his own strength could deliver Israel. Acts 7:25 says, “For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them.” Instead, the deliverer fled after killing an Egyptian and spent four decades tending sheep. Egypt had educated Moses, but the desert emptied him. Human training may fill a man’s head while leaving his confidence so inflated that God cannot use him without first letting the air out. Moses once acted before being sent; now he would hesitate after being called. God found him far from palaces, committees, and applause, because divine commissions are not issued according to the seating chart at Pharaoh’s banquet. Heaven often prepares its instruments where the world has stopped looking for them.

“The angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush,” yet the passage says, “when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush.” The messenger is identified with the LORD and with God. The flame burned, but “the bush was not consumed.” That sight arrested Moses because fire normally feeds until its fuel disappears. Here the flame rested upon the bush without destroying it. The picture suited Israel’s condition. Egypt had become an iron furnace, yet Israel had not been consumed. Pharaoh had ordered the Hebrew sons destroyed, multiplied their burdens, and attempted to crush their future, but the covenant people remained. The fire could afflict the bush, but it could not erase what God had chosen to preserve. When God dwells in the midst, the flame must obey its Maker. The bush did not survive because it was strong; it survived because the One in the fire was stronger.

When Moses turned aside, God said, “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” The desert dirt was not naturally holier than Egyptian stone. The presence of God made the place holy. Moses could approach, but he could not approach carelessly. The same chapter that reveals divine nearness establishes divine separation. Modern religion wants a God who is nearby enough to provide comfort but never holy enough to command reverence. It strolls into worship with the manners of a customer entering a department store, evaluates God according to personal preference, and leaves a poor review when conviction appears. Moses learned that the I AM is not summoned, managed, marketed, or handled. Shoes that had walked common ground came off before holy fire. A man who asks God’s name must be prepared to learn that God is not merely greater than man. He is separate from everything fallen man naturally is.

2. The God Who Heard Israel’s Cry

Before revealing His name, God identified Himself according to covenant history: “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” He was not a newly arrived desert deity introducing Himself to compete for space in Egypt’s pantheon. He was the God who called Abraham, provided Isaac, preserved Jacob, and brought Joseph into Egypt ahead of the famine. His dealings with Moses were rooted in promises made generations earlier. Exodus 2:24 says, “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” God did not “remember” because the covenant had slipped His mind. The expression means that He moved to perform what He had promised. Men forget commitments because time weakens memory, circumstances change, and convenient excuses appear. God’s promises do not fade in storage. Four centuries cannot turn divine certainty into expired paperwork.

The LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry.” He had seen the taskmasters, heard the groaning, known their sorrows, and come down to deliver them. Israel may have wondered whether Heaven had gone silent, but divine silence is not divine blindness. God was not late. He had told Abraham in Genesis 15 that his seed would be a stranger in a land that was not theirs, would be afflicted four hundred years, and afterward would come out “with great substance.” Egypt’s oppression had not surprised God or canceled the promise. The clock of prophecy was running while Israel’s chains rattled. When the appointed hour arrived, God called His man. The slave empire thought Israel belonged to Pharaoh because Pharaoh held the whip. God called them “my people.” Earthly ownership papers become worthless when the I AM claims what belongs to Him.

This setting must be handled correctly. Israel was a literal, physical nation descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Church had not yet been formed, the body of Christ had not yet been revealed through Paul, and the Mosaic law had not yet been given at Sinai. God was preparing to redeem His covenant nation from physical bondage and bring them toward the land promised to their fathers. The passage may yield rich spiritual applications concerning deliverance, but it must not be robbed of its historical and dispensational identity. Israel is not a poetic code word for the Church, Egypt is not merely a bad attitude, and Pharaoh is not simply low self-esteem wearing a crown. God keeps His covenants with the people to whom He made them. A theologian may redistribute Israel’s promises with a fountain pen, but God is unlikely to surrender Abraham’s deed because a scholar adjusted the margins.

3. The Question Behind the Commission

Moses first asked, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?” Forty years earlier he seemed to possess the answer. He was Moses, educated in Egypt, mighty in words and deeds, and ready to settle matters with his own hands. The desert had reduced that self-confidence to a question. God did not rebuild Moses’ ego with a speech about hidden greatness. He answered, “Certainly I will be with thee.” The important matter was not who Moses was but who would accompany him. A weak man with God is stronger than a mighty man operating from self-appointment. The Lord did not commission Moses because Moses had finally discovered enough personal potential. He commissioned him because the time had arrived, the covenant stood, and divine presence would make the difference. God’s answer to “Who am I?” was essentially, “That is not the controlling question.” Heaven’s work does not rest upon the magnificence of the messenger but upon the authority of the One who sends him.

Moses then raised the question of God's name. He anticipated going to Israel and saying, "The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you." If they responded, "What is his name?" Moses asked, "what shall I say unto them?" This was not an unreasonable concern. Israel had lived for generations within an idolatrous culture. Egypt possessed named gods connected with natural forces, regions, occupations, and royal authority. Moses would not arrive as a motivational speaker offering the slaves a positive vision. He would declare that the God of their fathers had visited them and would bring them from Egypt to Canaan. The authority of the message depended upon the identity of the Sender. No committee of Hebrew elders had elected Moses, and Pharaoh had certainly not issued him diplomatic credentials. His authority came from above. A preacher without God's message is merely a religious man making noise in public, but a stammering shepherd sent by the I AM can shake an empire.

The question also shows that a name in Scripture concerns revealed identity, character, and authority, not merely a convenient label. God's name tells who He is and distinguishes Him from every counterfeit. Men today speak vaguely of "God" while filling the word with whatever contents they prefer. One man's god approves every appetite, another man's god is an impersonal force, and another's is a religious mascot who appears during emergencies but never commands repentance. A blank label can be attached to any idol. Moses needed more than the word "god," because Egypt already had gods by the wagonload. He needed the name of the living God. The LORD did not authorize Moses to tell Israel that a higher power had noticed their difficulties. He said, "I AM hath sent me unto you." God defines Himself. Man's task is not to invent an acceptable deity but to hear, believe, and proclaim the One who has spoken.

4. "I AM THAT I AM"—The God Who Depends on Nothing

"I AM THAT I AM" declares absolute self-existence. Every created thing can trace its existence to something outside itself. A child comes from parents, a tree from seed, a river from its source, and a kingdom from people, land, and power. God has no source because He is the Source. Psalm 90:2, written by Moses, says, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." He was not made, born, promoted, elected, assembled, or imagined into existence. He did not emerge from darkness because darkness itself is subject to Him. He did not arise from matter because He created matter. Asking who created God assumes that the Creator belongs to the category of created things. That is like asking how much a commandment weighs or what color Thursday is. The question breaks because the category is wrong. The I AM is not one object inside the universe; the universe exists because He willed it.

The name also declares God's independence and sufficiency. Acts 17:25 says He is not "worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." God does not need worship to sustain His self-esteem. He commands worship because He alone is worthy and because man becomes corrupt whenever he worships anything lower. The sun does not become brighter when a blind man admits it exists, and God does not become greater when a sinner acknowledges Him. Heaven did not experience a budget crisis before human offerings appeared. God made the gold, the silver, the cattle, the hills, and the hands that bring them. Egypt's idols needed priests to wash them, carry them, guard them, and repair them. A god requiring protection from dust and thieves is having a difficult time maintaining the illusion of omnipotence. The I AM requires no maintenance department.

God's name further declares His immutability. Malachi 3:6 says, "For I am the LORD, I change not." Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." God does not improve because perfection cannot be improved, and He does not decline because omnipotence cannot weaken. His revealed dealings with men differ according to His dispensational purposes, but His holy character never mutates. The God who judged sin in Eden did not become morally relaxed in the Church Age. Grace does not mean that God lowered His standard; it means Christ satisfied divine righteousness through His finished work. Men change theology whenever culture changes its wardrobe, then announce that God has grown with them. The Almighty is not growing. The problem with fashionable religion is that its god always resembles the latest crowd because the crowd made him. "I AM THAT I AM" shuts the door on every attempt to redesign God according to the season.

5. The Memorial Name and the Covenant That Could Not Die

God continued in Exodus 3:15, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you." He then declared, "this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." The great I AM was not an anonymous force hovering beyond history. He bound His revealed name to real men, actual promises, and a literal covenant line. Abraham had died, Isaac had died, and Jacob had died, but their God remained alive and their covenant remained enforceable. Centuries later, Christ used this very language to answer the Sadducees concerning resurrection, declaring that God "is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living." The covenant name reached beyond the grave because death cannot cancel a promise held by the living God.

In Exodus 6:3, God declared, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them." The patriarchs

had encountered the LORD and possessed His promises, but Israel was about to know that covenant name through a national display of redemptive power and judgment unlike anything their fathers had witnessed. The name would be demonstrated in plagues, Passover blood, a divided sea, daily manna, water from the rock, and the destruction of Pharaoh's army. God's names are not empty religious badges. They reveal who He is through what He says and does. Egypt would learn that JEHOVAH was not a tribal ornament carried by powerless slaves. He was the covenant-keeping God who could enter the strongest empire on earth, distinguish His people, overthrow its gods, break its ruler, and leave with an entire nation.

The words "unto all generations" also answer the religious hobbyist who treats God's revealed identity as disposable. His name was not temporary scenery for an ancient drama. Psalm 83:18 says, "That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth." Isaiah 42:8 declares, "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another." The Lord guards His name because His name represents His glory, truth, and exclusive deity. Fallen man wants a cooperative god willing to share the platform with idols, philosophies, and personal preferences. The LORD refuses. He does not attend interfaith banquets as one honored guest among many. Elijah's challenge still stands: "If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." God never asked to be included in man's collection. He commands every counterfeit to be thrown out.

6. Pharaoh's Question Answered in Ten Installments

When Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh, they said, "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go." Pharaoh answered in Exodus 5:2, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go." Pharaoh's question was the opposite of Moses' question. Moses asked because he needed to proclaim God faithfully. Pharaoh asked because he had no intention of obeying. Moses sought revelation; Pharaoh announced resistance. One man removed his shoes before holy ground, while the other sat upon a throne as though the Nile had elected him permanent chairman of creation. Pharaoh's "Who is the LORD?" was not humble ignorance but royal contempt. He believed his authority, economy, army, priests, and gods placed Egypt beyond interference. He would learn that refusing to know God does not prevent God from introducing Himself.

The plagues answered Pharaoh's question with escalating force. The water became blood, frogs invaded the land, lice rose from the dust, flies filled Egyptian houses, cattle died, boils struck man and beast, hail crushed the fields, locusts consumed what remained, darkness covered Egypt, and the firstborn died. God declared in Exodus 12:12, "against all

the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.” Scripture gives the doctrinal interpretation. The contest was not between Moses’ magic and Pharaoh’s magic, or between one regional deity and another. The LORD was judging Egypt, its ruler, and its gods. Pharaoh had asked who the LORD was, and each plague supplied another line of the answer. The river Egypt worshipped could not defend itself, the magicians could not reverse the judgments, and Pharaoh’s throne could not issue an injunction against Heaven. Omnipotence does not need Pharaoh’s permission before entering the palace.

The final answer came at the Red Sea. Pharaoh released Israel after the death of the firstborn, then hardened his heart again and pursued them. Israel stood between the sea and Egypt’s army, apparently trapped. But the God who said “I AM” does not become “I WAS” when circumstances grow difficult. He divided the waters, brought Israel across on dry ground, and drowned Pharaoh’s host when they followed. Exodus 14:30 says, “Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians.” Pharaoh demanded, “Who is the LORD?” and the Red Sea closed over the remainder of his argument. The man who would not bow before God’s word went down beneath God’s waters. Unbelief often asks for evidence while standing knee-deep in it. By the time Pharaoh possessed the answer he demanded, there was no air left with which to revise his position.

7. Jesus Christ and the Eternal “I AM”

The connection between the name at the bush and the Lord Jesus Christ is not religious imagination; it stands in the words of Christ Himself. In John 8, the Jews challenged Jesus concerning Abraham. Christ answered, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.” When they objected that He was not yet fifty years old, Jesus declared, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” He did not say, “Before Abraham was, I was.” Abraham entered existence at a point in time; Christ is the eternal I AM. The Jews understood the claim and immediately took up stones. They did not think He had merely spoken awkwardly. They recognized that He had claimed divine identity. Religious unbelief often understands Christ’s words more clearly than modern teachers who spend years explaining why He could not possibly have meant what He plainly said.

John opens his Gospel with the same truth: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Verse 3 declares, “All things were made by him,” and verse 14 says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Colossians 1:16 says that by Christ “were all things created,” while verse 17 states, “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” Jesus Christ is not a created assistant, promoted angel, lesser deity, or inspirational teacher who obtained divinity through religious imagination. The baby in Bethlehem was the eternal Word manifest in flesh. The hands that touched blind eyes had fashioned the first eyes from dust. The voice that calmed the sea

was the voice that commanded waters at creation. He did not begin when Mary conceived. He entered human history through the virgin birth while remaining the eternal Son.

Christ repeatedly unveiled His sufficiency through the great declarations recorded in John: “I am the bread of life,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the door,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the resurrection, and the life,” “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” and “I am the true vine.” Fallen men hunger, stumble in darkness, stand outside, wander like sheep, die, lose the way, believe lies, and produce nothing of eternal value. Christ answers every condition in Himself. He does not merely distribute life; He is the life. He does not merely point toward truth; He is the truth. He does not merely show a door; He is the door. Christianity is not salvation through a religious system but salvation in a Person. Egypt had a god for nearly every problem and could solve none of them. The believer has one Lord Jesus Christ, and “ye are complete in him.”

Conclusion

Satan has always labored to corrupt, conceal, replace, and dilute the identity of the true God. In Eden he attacked God’s words and slandered God’s character. At Babel men sought to make themselves a name. Throughout Israel’s history, idols competed for worship, false prophets spoke lies in God’s name, and apostates attempted to join the LORD to Baal. In the present age, Second Corinthians 11:4 warns of “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” and “another gospel.” A counterfeit Jesus may be praised as a teacher, social reformer, created being, religious symbol, or tolerant mascot while the eternal Son revealed in Scripture is rejected. Satan does not object to the name Jesus if men are allowed to pour a false identity into it. A label on an empty bottle does not cure anyone. The saving Christ is the Lord Jesus Christ of Scripture: God manifest in the flesh, crucified for our sins, buried, risen bodily, and coming again.

God has joined His name to His word. Psalm 138:2 says, “for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” A man cannot honor God’s identity while despising what God has spoken. The religious world claims affection for God while correcting His Book, rearranging His covenants, weakening His warnings, and rejecting His Son. That is not reverence; it is rebellion carrying a hymnal. Moses did not return to Egypt with personal opinions about what the desert experience meant to him. He carried the words of the I AM: “Thus saith the LORD.” That phrase broke Pharaoh’s resistance, separated Israel from Egypt, and governed every stage of the deliverance. The power was not in Moses’ personality, eloquence, education, or staff. The power rested in the God who had spoken. A preacher may possess impressive credentials and still be empty, but a man armed with the living words of the living God carries authority Hell cannot erase.

Moses approached the bush asking, “What is his name?” The answer carried him through confrontation, rejection, plagues, Passover night, and the divided sea. The I AM proved sufficient when Moses felt insufficient, faithful when Israel complained, sovereign when Pharaoh resisted, and victorious when Egypt pursued. That same eternal identity shines in Jesus Christ, whose name is “above every name.” Acts 4:12 declares, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” The sinner does not need a religious label, mystical password, or pantheon of helpers. He needs the Lord Jesus Christ. Moses left the burning bush bearing the name before which Egypt would burn. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Pharaoh asked, “Who is the LORD?” The universe will not need to ask twice.

4 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “Why Dost Thou Not Pardon My Transgression?”: Job’s Cry from the Ash Heap

Key Passage: Job 7:20–21

“I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself? And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.”

Introduction

Job asked his question from the ashes, not from an armchair. He had lost his oxen, asses, sheep, camels, servants, sons, daughters, health, standing, comfort, and every visible evidence that the favor of God still rested upon his life. His flesh was covered “with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown,” and he scraped himself with a potsherd while sitting among the ashes. His wife told him to curse God and die. His friends arrived to comfort him, remained silent for seven days, and then spent chapter after chapter pouring religious vinegar into an open wound. When Job asked, “Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity?” he was not playing with a theological riddle. He was trying to understand why the God he feared appeared to have marked him as an enemy. There are questions spoken into microphones for attention, and there are questions groaned through cracked lips because a man has nowhere else to turn. God knows the difference.

The reader of Job knows something Job did not know. Chapters 1 and 2 pull back the curtain and reveal Satan appearing before the LORD, accusing Job of serving God only because God had prospered and protected him. Satan sneered, “Doth Job fear God for nought?” According to the accuser, Job’s worship was merely a commercial arrangement: blessings arrived at the front door, and praise was returned as payment. God therefore permitted Satan to touch Job’s possessions, family, and body while placing strict boundaries around the attack. Job never saw that heavenly conversation. No messenger arrived afterward with a transcript. He experienced the earthly blows without possessing the heavenly explanation. That distinction governs the entire book. Job was attempting to solve an equation while the most important line had been hidden from view. His conclusions sometimes wandered because his information was incomplete, but his suffering was not imaginary, and God did not despise his cries.

The book of Job refuses two convenient lies. It will not allow suffering to be reduced to a simple proof of secret wickedness, and it will not allow suffering to become an excuse for charging God foolishly. Job’s friends defended the first error, while Job occasionally approached the second. The Holy Ghost leaves the tension intact because faith must live where easy explanations fail. God can withstand the honest cries of a wounded saint, but He will not surrender His throne to that saint’s limited understanding. When God finally answered Job, He did not explain Satan’s challenge, identify the precise purpose of every loss, or hand Job a neat diagram of providence. He revealed Himself from the whirlwind. Job wanted the storm explained; God stepped out of it and asked whether Job could command one. The final answer to suffering was not that Job learned everything. It was that Job saw enough of God to trust what remained unseen.

1. A Perfect Man Who Was Not a Sinless Man

Job 1:1 introduces him as “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.” The word “perfect” does not mean Job had never committed a sin. Job himself offered sacrifices, acknowledged iniquity, and later repented in dust and ashes. The term describes spiritual maturity, integrity, and completeness of character. Job was no hypocrite hiding a double life beneath religious clothing. God repeated the assessment before Satan: “there is none like him in the earth.” That testimony did not originate with Job’s public-relations department. God said it. Any interpretation of the book that turns Job into a secret villain must begin by correcting the LORD’s opening statement, which is an ambitious project for a man carrying a study Bible and a fountain pen. Job suffered severely, but the suffering did not prove that he had been living wickedly. The inspired introduction closes that escape route before the ashes ever appear.

Job's setting also demands careful handling. The book does not place him under the Mosaic law, identify him as an Israelite, or put him inside the present Church Age. His wealth was measured largely in livestock, he acted as priest for his household, and his life bears the marks of the patriarchal world. The law given through Moses had not established Israel's priesthood and national covenant order in Job's account. Neither should the believer force Paul's completed revelation concerning the Body of Christ backward into Job's experience. Yet the moral and spiritual truths remain powerful. Satan accuses, God rules, man suffers, religious judgment misfires, and faith must rest upon God's character when circumstances offer no readable explanation. Proper dispensational distinction does not weaken application. It prevents the preacher from turning Scripture into a theological stew where Job, Israel, and the Church lose every God-given boundary.

The opening testimony destroys the friends' central argument that extraordinary suffering must prove extraordinary wickedness. Their formula was neat: God blesses the righteous, punishes the wicked, Job is suffering, therefore Job must be wicked. It fit comfortably into a sermon outline and failed completely in the case before them. Truth misapplied becomes a weapon in the hands of a religious fool. God does chasten sin, judge rebellion, and cause men to reap what they sow. But not every grave marks a greater sinner, not every disease identifies hidden wickedness, and not every loss is a receipt from a specific transgression. Christ confronted the same error when asked about the man born blind: "Who did sin, this man, or his parents?" The disciples arrived carrying the same little calculator Job's friends had used. God's providence is larger than a two-button machine marked "good things" and "bad people."

2. The Accuser Behind the Curtain

Satan's accusation was directed at Job, but its deepest target was God. "Doth Job fear God for nought?" implied that God could not inspire genuine worship and had to purchase loyalty with livestock, protection, and prosperity. Satan claimed that Job loved the gifts rather than the Giver. The devil has never understood worship because pride can calculate advantage but cannot comprehend love. He had abandoned Heaven's glory in pursuit of his own throne, so he assumed every creature operated by the same selfish machinery. According to Satan, remove the hedge, touch Job's possessions, and Job would curse God to His face. The accuser wanted to turn Job's mouth into evidence against the worthiness of God. Every attack therefore carried a theological question: Is God worthy when the cattle are gone, the graves are fresh, the body is broken, and Heaven offers no explanation? Job became the battlefield upon which that question was tested.

God permitted the attack, but Satan remained on a chain. In the first trial the LORD said, "only upon himself put not forth thine hand." In the second He said, "behold, he is in thine

hand; but save his life.” Satan could go no farther than divine permission allowed. The Sabeans, Chaldeans, fire, wind, disease, and human agents did real damage, yet none of them had removed God from the throne. This does not mean that every Christian tragedy should be confidently attributed to a direct satanic conference in Heaven. Job’s first two chapters reveal the cause of Job’s particular trial; they do not authorize believers to invent unseen explanations for every affliction. But they do establish that Satan is neither independent nor sovereign. He is a vicious dog on God’s chain. He may bite when permitted, but he cannot lengthen the chain by growling at it.

Job knew nothing of these proceedings. Had God immediately explained the contest, the nature of the test would have changed. Job could have endured by watching the clock and expecting a reward once the examination ended. Instead, he had to walk by what he knew of God while everything he knew about his circumstances appeared to contradict it. Faith was not tested in sunlight with the answer sheet visible. It was tested in ashes beneath a closed Heaven. Modern religion often promises that if a believer discovers the right formula, every painful event will unfold into a tidy lesson before bedtime. Job’s boils lasted longer than that sermon. Some answers are delayed, some are partial, and some await eternity. Faith is not pretending the pain does not hurt. Faith is refusing to enthrone the pain as the final interpreter of God’s character.

3. Worship Before the Ashes and Questions Within Them

When the first sequence of calamities struck, Job “arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped.” His response was not denial. He mourned visibly and deeply. Yet he said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” Job recognized that everything he possessed had first come from God. He had not entered the world holding title deeds to children, servants, herds, and health. “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.” The next verse gives the divine verdict: “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” Grief and worship occupied the same ground. Job’s tears did not cancel faith, and his faith did not make tears unnecessary. Biblical strength is not a painted smile stretched across a broken heart. It is a broken man still blessing God.

When Satan attacked Job’s body, his wife said, “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.” Job answered, “Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh.” He did not call her permanently foolish; he said her words belonged to that category. She too had buried ten children and lost the household’s prosperity, but grief did not make her counsel right. Job then asked, “What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” Again the inspired record says, “In all this did not Job sin with his lips.” Satan had predicted a curse, but Job delivered a rebuke to unbelief instead. The devil had

stripped away nearly everything but could not make Job's mouth perform on command. Hell may arrange the pressure, but it cannot force a saint to curse. Temptation presents the script; the believer still chooses whether to read it.

As the days lengthened and the friends began accusing him, Job's speech became more troubled. He cursed the day of his birth, lamented his misery, demanded answers, and used words he would later withdraw. Scripture does not hide those statements or airbrush the sufferer into a porcelain saint. Job's endurance was real, but it was not emotionless. James 5:11 says, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job," yet the book bearing his name contains anguished complaints and repeated questions. Patience in Scripture does not mean that a believer never groans. It means he remains beneath the load without abandoning God. Job spoke to God, argued before God, appealed to God, and demanded an audience with God because, beneath all the confusion, he still believed God was the only One who could answer. Unbelief walks away. Tormented faith pounds on the door because it still believes Someone is inside.

4. The Comforters Who Turned Affliction into an Indictment

Job's three friends began well. They came to mourn with him, wept, rent their mantles, sprinkled dust upon their heads, and sat silently for seven days because they saw that "his grief was very great." Their ministry deteriorated when they opened their mouths. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar possessed many true sayings about God's justice, man's frailty, the danger of wickedness, and the value of repentance. The problem was their relentless misapplication. They treated every general principle as a direct verdict upon Job. Because wicked men suffer, they reasoned that Job's suffering proved wickedness. Because God chastens, they concluded that Job's losses identified a secret crime. They arrived as comforters and gradually promoted themselves to prosecutors. A religious man with a true principle and no discernment can do more damage than a fool who knows nothing, because he strikes the wounded while quoting something that sounds biblical.

Eliphaz even supported his accusations with a supernatural experience. In Job 4 he described a spirit passing before his face, causing his hair to stand up, and delivering a message. The dramatic experience did not make his application correct. Goose bumps are not inspiration, and a midnight visitor is not automatically the Holy Ghost because he knows how to lower the room temperature. God later told Eliphaz, "ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath." That verdict should sober every man who confuses spiritual atmosphere with scriptural authority. The friends' speeches contained enough truth to sound convincing, but their central judgment concerning Job was false. Error rarely arrives wearing a sign that says, "Complete nonsense ahead." It usually borrows Bible vocabulary, adds confidence, and applies a truth where God did not apply it.

The friends also reveal how quickly men defend their system at the expense of a sufferer. Once they concluded that Job must be guilty, every protest of innocence became additional evidence of pride. If Job remained silent, they could interpret it as concealment. If he answered, they called him self-righteous. Their theory became impossible to disprove because every fact was bent to fit it. That is not discernment; it is a religious trap with Scripture verses nailed to the sides. Job did possess pride that God would later expose, and he spoke words without full knowledge. But the friends had not discovered the cause of his calamity. Their insistence that they had done so added false accusation to his grief. A wise comforter does not manufacture explanations God has not revealed. Sometimes the holiest thing a man can say beside an ash heap is nothing at all.

5. “Why Hast Thou Set Me as a Mark Against Thee?”

In Job 7, Job addressed God as “O thou preserver of men” and asked, “why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself?” A mark is a target. Job felt as though the arrows of Heaven had selected him personally and would not stop until he disappeared into the dust. Earlier he had said, “For the arrows of the Almighty are within me.” He interpreted the concentration of suffering as evidence that God had taken aim at him. Yet the opening chapters show that Satan had challenged Job while God had established the boundaries. Job saw the blows but not the council behind them. Suffering narrowed his field of vision until every calamity appeared to say, “God is against you.” Pain is a loud preacher, but it is not always an accurate expositor. It can describe the wound while lying about the hand of God.

Job then said, “I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee?” He was not maintaining absolute sinlessness. He understood that he was a man before a holy God. His confusion concerned the apparent proportion and continuation of his affliction. If he had sinned, why did God not pardon and remove the iniquity? If some unknown offense had brought the storm, what could Job do to obtain relief? His question reveals the danger of reading providence as though every circumstance were a direct commentary upon one’s spiritual standing. A clear day does not prove a man is righteous, and a thunderstorm does not prove he is condemned. The rich fool in Luke 12 had barns full of goods and was hours from death. Paul possessed apostolic authority and endured beatings, imprisonment, hunger, cold, and shipwreck. If prosperity were a reliable spiritual report card, Pharaoh would have graduated with honors before the plagues began.

Job’s question about pardon must not be dragged carelessly into the present gospel of grace. Today the sinner is justified by grace through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,” declares Colossians 1:14. The believer’s eternal standing is not recalculated whenever he

becomes sick, loses money, or enters grief. He is “accepted in the beloved,” sealed by the Holy Spirit, and complete in Christ. A saved man may experience chastening, consequences, testing, and loss, but he does not fall in and out of justification according to the weather of his circumstances. Job lived before Calvary’s completed revelation and was struggling to understand why pardon and relief appeared absent. The Christian possesses a fuller answer: forgiveness rests upon Christ’s blood, not upon the immediate removal of every earthly affliction.

6. The Daysman Job Needed and the Redeemer He Saw by Faith

Job’s agony repeatedly produced a desire for someone who could stand between him and God. In Job 9:32–33 he said, “For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.” Job understood the distance. God was not another suffering man whom Job could summon into an earthly court, and Job could not climb into Heaven to argue as an equal. He needed a mediator able to place one hand upon God and the other upon man. That cry reaches beyond the ash heap to the great necessity of every sinner. Religion supplies priests who die, rituals that fade, and works that cannot cross the gulf. Job needed more than advice from three men sitting in dust. He needed a Daysman who belonged fully on both sides.

The answer appears in First Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” The eternal Word became flesh without ceasing to be God. He could lay hold upon deity because He is God manifest in the flesh, and He could represent humanity because He became man. Job wanted someone who could bring the parties together; Calvary reveals the Mediator who “made peace through the blood of his cross.” Christ did not merely explain suffering from a safe distance. He entered this world of graves, hunger, tears, betrayal, injustice, pain, and death. He was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Yet His suffering differed from Job’s in one decisive respect: Christ was absolutely sinless and willingly bore “our sins in his own body on the tree.” The only innocent Man suffered as the Substitute for the guilty.

Job also declared in Job 19:25–27, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” His circumstances screamed abandonment, but faith spoke of a living Redeemer. Job expected bodily reality beyond death: “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” He did not possess the full doctrinal revelation later given concerning resurrection, the Church, and the coming of Christ, but he knew death would not have the last word. The ash heap could not erase the Redeemer, and worms could not cancel God’s purpose for the body. Job did not say, “I know why everything happened.” He said, “I know that my redeemer liveth.” Faith

may lack the explanation while still possessing the essential Person. When reasons disappear, the Redeemer remains.

7. The Answer That Came Out of the Whirlwind

Beginning in Job 38, “the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind.” God did not open by explaining the heavenly scene, Satan’s accusation, or the purpose of each calamity. He asked, “Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?” Then He told Job, “Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.” Job had requested an audience, and now the audience began with God asking the questions. “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?” “Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days?” “Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?” “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?” The questions were not evasions. They exposed the distance between Job’s limited knowledge and God’s sovereign administration of creation. A man unable to command sunrise should hesitate before auditing providence.

God marched Job through the earth, sea, light, darkness, snow, hail, stars, weather, animals, Behemoth, and Leviathan. Every question revealed a realm God governed without Job’s assistance. Job did not feed the ravens, provide for the wild goats, give the horse strength, teach the eagle to mount up, or draw out Leviathan with a hook. Creation was not running on Job’s understanding, and neither was Job’s life. The Lord’s point was not that suffering does not matter. It was that divine wisdom extends infinitely beyond the sufferer’s sight. Man sees one torn page and announces that the Author has lost the plot. God sees the entire volume from beginning to end. The whirlwind did not minimize Job’s wounds; it placed them beneath the rule of the One whose wisdom could be trusted even where it could not yet be traced.

Job’s response changed when revelation replaced speculation. In Job 40:4 he answered, “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.” Later he confessed, “I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.” Then came the decisive statement: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Job did not repent of the secret crimes his friends had invented. He repented of speaking beyond his knowledge and approaching God’s government as though suffering had qualified him to judge it. His circumstances had not yet been restored when he bowed. God Himself was the answer before restoration became the blessing. Job wanted a reason he could examine; God gave him a revelation before which he had to kneel.

Conclusion

The question “Why dost thou not pardon my transgression?” came from a man who knew God was holy, knew himself to be mortal, and could not understand why the hand of affliction remained upon him. Job was wrong whenever he implied that God had treated him unjustly, but he was not wrong to carry his agony to God. The LORD corrected Job’s words without despising Job’s wounds. He also rebuked the friends who had defended divine justice with false accusations. God said to Eliphaz, “my wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends,” and required them to offer sacrifice while Job prayed for them. The men who arrived to diagnose Job ended up needing Job’s intercession. That is one of the book’s finer pieces of divine irony. The patient they had examined from every angle became the man standing between them and judgment.

God eventually restored Job’s health and gave him twice as much as he had before, but the restoration must not be turned into a mechanical promise that every faithful sufferer will receive doubled possessions before death. Job’s outcome belongs to Job’s inspired history. Paul’s thorn remained, Stephen was stoned, James was killed, and countless saints have died without seeing earthly losses reversed. The Church Age believer is promised spiritual blessings in heavenly places, sustaining grace, resurrection, and eternal glory—not exemption from graves, disease, persecution, or tears. Romans 8 does not say that every event is good; it says that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” The loom may appear tangled from beneath, but the Weaver sees the pattern from above. Faith does not call the dark thread white. It trusts the hand that knows where the dark thread belongs.

Job never received the complete explanation recorded for the reader, yet he emerged knowing God more deeply than before. That is the final force of the book. Faith is not possessing an answer for every grave, illness, loss, delay, and unanswered prayer. It is refusing to curse God while the answer remains hidden. The believer can grieve, ask, groan, and seek light without pretending that God owes him control of the universe. The ash heap is not a throne, and pain is not omniscience. Job asked God to explain the storm; God stepped from the whirlwind and revealed who commands it. When explanations fail, the Christian possesses something Job longed to see clearly: a living Mediator, a risen Redeemer, and a coming Lord. The question may remain for a season, but the One who bears the answer has scars in His hands and all authority in Heaven and earth.

5 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “How Long Wilt Thou Forget Me?”: David’s Prayer When Heaven Seemed Silent

Key Passage: Psalm 13:1–6

“How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”

Introduction

Psalm 13 begins in the dark with four cries of “How long?” and ends with a song. Between the complaint and the singing, the inspired record contains no report that David’s enemy had fallen, his danger had passed, or his circumstances had visibly improved. No messenger arrived announcing relief. No trumpet sounded from the hill. No sudden miracle interrupted the prayer. Yet the man who began by asking whether God had forgotten him forever ended by declaring, “I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.” Something changed, but the psalm does not say that the outward situation changed. David’s sight remained surrounded by trouble, while faith recovered its hold upon the character of God. The enemy may still have been standing when the song began. That is faith with some iron in it. Anybody can sing after the prison door opens; David found his song while the hinges were still locked.

The superscription identifies this composition simply as “A Psalm of David.” Scripture does not identify the particular enemy, date, or historical crisis behind it, so there is no profit in manufacturing a scene and presenting imagination as exposition. David endured Saul’s pursuit, foreign enemies, betrayal, family rebellion, political upheaval, and the consequences of his own sins, but Psalm 13 does not attach itself explicitly to any one of them. The absence of a named occasion gives the words a broad usefulness without erasing their historical setting. David was an Israelite living under the law, the anointed king connected with God’s covenant purposes for Israel, not a member of the yet-unrevealed Body of Christ. Nevertheless, the cry of a believer who cannot see God moving crosses dispensational boundaries as a legitimate spiritual application. The covenant setting must remain intact, but a wounded heart requires no dictionary to understand “How long?”

David’s question was not Cain’s insolence or Pharaoh’s contempt. He was not denying God’s authority, mocking God’s word, or demanding that the Almighty vacate the throne. He was speaking to the God whose apparent silence troubled him precisely because he believed God was there. A man does not cry, “How long wilt thou forget me?” toward an

empty sky unless some remaining strand of faith still expects an answer. David felt forgotten, but he carried that feeling to the One he feared had forgotten him. He felt that God had hidden His face, yet he continued seeking that face. He felt trapped inside his own counsel, yet he turned his counsel into prayer. “How long?” is not always unbelief wearing a religious coat. Sometimes it is faith bruised, breathless, and hanging from the promises of God with both hands while darkness tries to pry loose every finger.

1. Four Cries from a Man Who Had Reached the End of His Patience

David asked “How long?” four times in two verses. The repetition is the pulse of the psalm. “How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever?” “How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?” “How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?” “How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” The trouble surrounded him from four directions. He looked upward and saw no visible response from God. He looked inward and found restless counsel and daily sorrow. He looked outward and saw an enemy gaining ground. He looked ahead and saw no date marked for relief. The present hurt, and the future appeared to contain an unlimited supply of the same. Trouble becomes especially heavy when it loses a visible ending. A burden with a known finish can be counted; a burden marked “until further notice” sits on the chest differently.

The expression “for ever?” shows how prolonged suffering can distort a man’s sense of time. David knew doctrinally that God’s covenant faithfulness had not expired, yet the delay felt endless. One silent day had joined another until the days appeared to have formed a conspiracy. Pain watches the clock. Faith must watch the Lord. A joyful hour passes quickly, while a night beside a sickbed seems to borrow extra hours from the following week. David was not carrying a stopwatch into the prayer closet because impatience was fashionable. He was measuring an ordeal that had outlasted his visible resources. The Bible does not rebuke him for admitting that the delay hurt. God inspired the question and preserved it in the Psalms, proving that genuine prayer is not required to wear a plastic grin. Heaven does not need a wounded saint to lie about the wound before approaching the throne.

Yet four cries of “How long?” contain an implied confession: David believed there was an appointed end. He did not ask whether God would ever act as though God were powerless. He asked when the present condition would cease. Habakkuk later cried, “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!” The souls under the altar in Revelation 6 ask, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?” The question belongs to believers who know God will act but cannot understand His timing. Unbelief says, “God will do nothing.” Faith under pressure says, “Lord, when wilt thou do what I

know Thou art able to do?" The difference may sound narrow to a careless ear, but Heaven hears it clearly. One statement slams the door on God; the other keeps knocking upon it.

2. Forgotten in Feeling but Never Lost from God's Knowledge

David said, "How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD?" He described the situation as it appeared from below. God had not literally misplaced David. The omniscient LORD does not forget information, lose track of His servants, or discover that one of His children has fallen behind the furniture of providence. Psalm 139 says, "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me." God knew David's downsitting and uprising, understood his thought afar off, and was acquainted with all his ways. Before a word entered David's tongue, the LORD knew it altogether. The same God did not suddenly suffer a lapse of memory in Psalm 13. David's experience felt like abandonment because God's intervention had not become visible. He interpreted silence through pain and called the result forgetfulness. The feeling was real; the conclusion was not. Sincerity makes an emotion honest, but it does not make every interpretation accurate.

Scripture often speaks of God "remembering" His people, not because He previously forgot them, but because He moves to fulfill His covenant word in their experience. God remembered Noah and caused the waters to assuage. He remembered Abraham and delivered Lot from Sodom. He remembered Rachel and opened her womb. He heard Israel's groaning and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In each case, divine remembrance meant that the hidden purpose of God became visible action. David was asking for that movement. He wanted God's knowledge of his condition to become deliverance within his condition. There is no sin in asking God to act, provided the request does not become an accusation that God has ceased to be faithful. Prayer may spread the painful facts before the Lord, but it must not edit God's character to match the color of the afternoon.

The present Church Age believer possesses promises David did not receive in precisely the same dispensational form. Every saved person has been baptized by one Spirit into the Body of Christ, sealed "unto the day of redemption," accepted in the beloved, and seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Hebrews 13:5 gives the promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Romans 8 declares that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." God's silence cannot break the seal of the Holy Spirit. Delayed relief cannot remove the believer from Christ's body. Feelings may testify that Heaven has withdrawn, but feelings were never appointed keeper of the eternal record. A saved man's security rests upon Christ's finished work, not upon the volume at which he can presently hear God's footsteps.

3. When God Appears to Hide His Face

David's second question was, "How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" The face of the LORD in the Old Testament repeatedly signifies divine favor, fellowship, attention, and manifested presence. The priestly blessing of Numbers 6 says, "The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." Psalm 27 records David seeking God's face and pleading, "Hide not thy face far from me." In Psalm 13, David felt that the light of divine favor had been covered. He still believed God existed, but he could not read God's expression through the darkness. It is one thing to know the Lord rules in Heaven; it is another to feel as though He has turned away while the enemy advances. David did not ask for a theological lecture on omnipresence. He asked for the manifested favor of the God whose face appeared hidden.

There are times when sin interrupts fellowship and prayers are hindered. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Isaiah told Israel that their iniquities had separated between them and their God and caused Him to hide His face. James warns that men ask and receive not because they ask amiss, while Peter teaches that misconduct within marriage can hinder prayers. A believer should therefore examine himself honestly rather than baptizing every spiritual silence as a mysterious trial. If God has placed His finger upon known disobedience, the answer is confession and correction, not another month of dramatic wondering. Some people complain that Heaven is silent while the Bible lies unopened and the last clear command God gave them remains disobeyed. They want new directions because the old directions interfere with their travel plans.

Psalm 13, however, does not identify a particular sin as the cause of David's delay. It would be as foolish to invent hidden wickedness for David here as it was for Job's friends to invent crimes upon the ash heap. God may delay without rejecting, remain unseen without departing, and test faith without punishing secret rebellion. Joseph waited years between his dreams and his elevation. Abraham waited for the promised son. Moses spent forty years in the desert before the bush burned. Lazarus died while Christ deliberately remained where He was two more days, yet the delay served a glory no grieving sister could see at first. God's pauses are not empty spaces in His plan. Heaven may look motionless while providence is arranging an answer too large to enter by the door impatience selected.

4. The Dangerous Counsel of a Soul Left Alone with Sorrow

David asked, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?" With no visible answer from above, he had begun consulting himself. The soul became adviser, client, conference room, and audience. David examined the danger, rehearsed the

possibilities, studied the enemy, measured his strength, and returned each day to the same sorrow. There is a limit to what a man can solve by interviewing his own fears. Human reasoning can gather facts, compare options, and make lawful plans, but once it separates itself from the words of God it begins walking in circles while calling the circles progress. Proverbs 3:5 commands, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” The problem is not that man possesses understanding. The problem begins when he leans his full weight upon something too weak to hold him.

The counsel of the soul naturally changes with circumstances. On a good morning it predicts deliverance; by evening it has selected a suitable verse for the funeral. It reads providence through sensation and revises doctrine according to the latest report. That is why faith must stand upon something outside the self. David’s feelings were witnesses to his sorrow, but they were not qualified judges of God’s faithfulness. Jeremiah said, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them,” while Psalm 119 repeatedly ties hope, comfort, and life to the word of God. The soul talking to itself becomes an echo chamber; the soul hearing Scripture receives a voice from outside the room. A man cannot think his way out of every darkness, but he can believe what God has said while still unable to see where the path turns.

David’s phrase “sorrow in my heart daily” refuses the cheap promise that spiritual people recover from grief on a tidy schedule. His sorrow was not a brief cloud floating across an otherwise cheerful afternoon. It reported for duty every day. Scripture does not call that sorrow imaginary, diagnose it with fashionable terminology, or replace conviction and faith with therapeutic fog. David needed God to hear, consider, and enlighten him. The Bible neither romanticizes sorrow nor enthrones it. Sorrow is a real inhabitant of a fallen world, but it is a poor king and a worse prophet. Second Corinthians 4 teaches the believer to look “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” The seen trouble is temporal; the unseen glory is eternal. Faith does not deny the sorrow sitting at the table. It refuses to let sorrow say grace.

5. The Enemy Who Mistook Delay for Victory

David’s fourth cry was, “How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” The enemy’s advancement made God’s silence appear even more painful. David was not merely waiting in a quiet room; he was watching opposition rise while his own position weakened. Wicked men often interpret delayed judgment as divine approval. Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” The enemy sees no immediate lightning bolt, checks himself for burns, and concludes that Heaven has retired. He mistakes patience for impotence and delay for surrender. The devil has repeated that error since Eden. God

allows the rebel enough rope to hang his pride, and the rebel uses the rope to decorate his platform.

David prayed, “Consider and hear me, O LORD my God.” The movement is important. He passed from complaint to petition and addressed the LORD personally as “my God.” The God who seemed to have forgotten him was still his God. The face that appeared hidden was still the face he sought. The enemy who appeared exalted had not acquired ownership of David. Prayer restored the relationship to the center of the crisis. David did not merely ask for improved circumstances; he appealed to the covenant God to consider and hear. The word “consider” asks God to look upon the entire condition, weigh what David could not explain, and act according to perfect wisdom. The believer does not need to exaggerate a case before omniscience. God sees the enemy’s strength, the saint’s weakness, the hidden factor, and the approaching hour. Prayer brings the matter before the only Judge who cannot be misinformed.

David feared that if God did not intervene, the enemy would say, “I have prevailed against him,” and those troubling him would rejoice when he was moved. His concern included the enemy’s interpretation of his fall. The defeat of God’s anointed could become an occasion for wicked men to boast. David’s prayer therefore reached beyond personal comfort to the honor of God connected with his testimony and calling. This does not mean every believer may demand escape because an unpleasant result might look embarrassing. Sometimes God is glorified through martyrdom, imprisonment, weakness, or apparent defeat. The cross looked like Satan’s triumph until the tomb opened. Stephen’s enemies killed him but could not stop the witness his death placed before Saul. Heaven’s victories do not always wear earthly medals. The enemy’s celebration may begin before God has written the final line.

6. “Lighten Mine Eyes, Lest I Sleep the Sleep of Death”

David’s central request was, “Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” The phrase concerns more than emotional encouragement. He believed the danger could end in physical death unless God intervened. In Scripture, light in the eyes signifies vitality, strength, perception, and renewed life. Ezra 9:8 speaks of God giving His people “a little reviving” and lightening their eyes. Jonathan’s eyes were enlightened after he tasted honey. David needed divine illumination and preservation because prolonged sorrow, enemy pressure, and inward counsel had left him looking through the dimness of exhaustion. He did not ask God to pretend the danger was small. He asked for light sufficient to face it. Biblical prayer does not manufacture sunshine with positive language. It asks the Lord who commanded light out of darkness to shine where human resources have failed.

The expression “sleep the sleep of death” refers to the body in physical death, not to an unconscious soul after death. Scripture can describe a dead body as sleeping because it will awaken in resurrection, but the soul does not enter a state of oblivion. The rich man in Luke 16 died and was conscious in torment; Lazarus was comforted; Paul desired to depart and be with Christ; and the souls under the altar in Revelation spoke to God. David feared that his body would be laid down in death while his enemy announced victory. His words must not be recruited to support the false doctrine of soul sleep. A sleeping body awaits awakening, but the inner man continues consciously in its appointed place. Right division saves the preacher from turning a vivid expression into a doctrinal mattress upon which error can snore comfortably.

For the Church Age believer, death itself cannot become final defeat. First Corinthians 15 declares that the dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible and that death will be swallowed up in victory. First Thessalonians 4 says, “the dead in Christ shall rise first,” and living believers will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. David properly prayed for earthly preservation within his historical circumstances, but the completed revelation given to the Church shows that even an enemy’s successful killing of a believer cannot separate that believer from Christ. The grave can hold the body temporarily, but it cannot cancel the purchased possession. Death is no longer a locked prison; Christ left the door hanging open. The enemy may brag beside a tombstone, but resurrection morning will make his speech look embarrassingly premature.

7. Mercy Trusted, Salvation Anticipated, and a Song Born in the Dark

Verse 5 introduces the great turn: “But I have trusted in thy mercy.” The word “But” stands like a gate across the road of despair. God seemed to have forgotten him, hidden His face, left him with daily sorrow, and permitted the enemy to rise—but David had trusted in God’s mercy. He did not say he trusted his ability to understand the delay. He did not trust the stability of his emotions, the loyalty of men, or the weakness of his enemy. His confidence rested in the mercy of the LORD. Mercy is God withholding deserved judgment and showing compassion according to His character and covenant purposes. David had no invoice by which he could bill Heaven for immediate relief. He approached as a dependent man resting upon divine goodness. Faith does not demand wages from mercy. It arrives empty-handed and discovers that God’s hand is not empty.

David continued, “My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.” At the beginning, sorrow occupied his heart daily; now that same heart anticipated rejoicing. The change did not come because David talked himself into believing the enemy was harmless. He transferred his attention from the enemy’s present exaltation to God’s promised salvation. The word “shall” looks forward. David’s present sorrow could not veto the future God would provide.

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking dressed for church. It is expectation anchored in the reliability of God. For the Christian, salvation includes past deliverance from sin's penalty, present deliverance in the life of faith, and future deliverance of the body at Christ's coming. The believer has been saved, is being saved from sin's practical dominion as he walks in the Spirit, and awaits "the redemption of our body." God's complete salvation reaches farther than today's pain can see.

David ended, "I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." The grammar is glorious. He had just asked how long God would forget him, yet he now reviewed God's dealings and called them bountiful. Memory began preaching to misery. David looked beyond the unfinished present and remembered the record of divine goodness. The God who had preserved him from the lion, the bear, Goliath, and countless dangers had not suddenly become unfaithful. Singing was not an emotional trick; it was a verdict of faith concerning God's character. The world sings because the party has started. Faith can sing while the musicians are absent, the lights are out, and the enemy is listening outside the door. David's song did not prove that the trial was over. It proved that the trial had failed to silence his confidence in God.

Conclusion

Psalms 13 travels from questioning to petition, from petition to trust, and from trust to praise. David began with what he could not understand and ended with what he knew. He did not receive a dated schedule explaining when the enemy would fall. God did not show him every gear moving inside providence. Instead, prayer brought him back to mercy, salvation, and the remembered bounty of the LORD. The psalm therefore does not teach that honest believers never ask "How long?" It teaches them where to carry the question and where the question must finally bow. David spoke plainly about feeling forgotten, but he did not make that feeling his doctrine. He admitted daily sorrow, but he did not grant sorrow the last word. He saw the enemy exalted, but he did not crown the enemy king. Faith lets the wound speak, then makes it sit down while Scripture delivers the verdict.

Heaven's silence is not Heaven's absence. God may work without announcing each movement, delay without denying His promise, and hide the machinery of providence while every wheel turns under His command. A farmer does not dig up the seed every morning to determine whether life is operating beneath the soil. Yet believers often pray on Monday, inspect the ground on Tuesday, and declare agriculture a fraud by Wednesday. God's timetable is not adjusted by human impatience. Abraham waited, Joseph waited, Moses waited, David waited, and Israel waited for Messiah. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." Calvary did not occur one hour before or after the appointed

time. The same Lord governs every delay facing His people. Heaven's clock does not run late merely because an impatient saint cannot see its hands moving.

When God seems silent, the believer must continue doing what David did: address the LORD, state the burden honestly, request divine light, refuse the enemy's interpretation, trust God's mercy, anticipate His salvation, and remember His former bounty. This is not a formula guaranteeing immediate relief. It is the road faith walks when immediate relief has not come. The Christian's final hope is not that every earthly question will receive a comfortable answer before nightfall. It is that the Lord Jesus Christ will descend from Heaven, the dead in Christ will rise, living saints will be caught up, and every unfinished sorrow will meet the sufficiency of His presence. Until then, "How long?" may remain upon the lips, but it need not be the final line. David entered the psalm with a question and walked out singing. The darkness remained outside, but it no longer owned the room.

6 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “Why Dost Thou Shew Me Iniquity?”: Habakkuk's Argument with a Silent Heaven

Key Passage: Habakkuk 1:2–4

“O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.”

Introduction

Habakkuk looked across Judah and saw a nation rotting beneath the weight of its own rebellion. Violence had become common, strife had become public, judgment had become crooked, and the law had become powerless in the hands of men sworn to uphold it. The prophet did not complain because he had discovered one unpleasant incident in an otherwise healthy society. He saw iniquity standing in the streets with official permission while righteousness was surrounded, delayed, and overruled. He had cried to God, yet no visible deliverance had come. Heaven appeared to be watching the collapse without interrupting it. “Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?” was not the question of a man fascinated by sin. It was the groan of a prophet sick of seeing what God hated flourish beneath an apparently silent sky. Habakkuk was not asking

permission to compromise. He was asking how much longer holiness had to watch rebellion hold office.

His question is painfully recognizable because wickedness often looks strongest just before judgment arrives. The law is still printed, courts are still open, judges still wear robes, religious leaders still hold services, and politicians still speak of justice, yet “wrong judgment proceedeth.” A nation can retain all the furniture of order after the foundation has been eaten through. Habakkuk saw the law “slacked,” meaning it had become weakened, chilled, and deprived of effective force. It had not vanished from the scroll; it had been paralyzed in practice. Wicked men compassed the righteous until truth could scarcely reach the courtroom without being mugged on the steps. The prophet therefore asked the LORD why He allowed him to behold it. A man who loves God’s word cannot stare indefinitely at legalized corruption without feeling something burn. If iniquity never troubles a preacher, iniquity has probably hired him.

God answered Habakkuk, but the answer disturbed him more than the silence. The LORD was not ignoring Judah’s corruption. He was raising the Chaldeans, “that bitter and hasty nation,” to sweep across the land in judgment. Habakkuk had asked God to act, only to discover that divine action would not follow the plan he had prepared for God’s approval. He wanted Judah corrected; God announced national invasion. He wanted wicked rulers judged; God would use a nation even more brutal than Judah as the rod. The prophet’s first question concerned God’s delay. His second concerned God’s method. Through both questions, Habakkuk had to learn that God’s government is not required to pass inspection at the desk of human reason. The book begins with a prophet looking at iniquity and questioning Heaven. It ends with that prophet looking at God, trembling before His power, and rejoicing in His salvation while every visible support collapses.

1. “How Long Shall I Cry?”—The Burden of an Unanswered Prophet

Habakkuk opened with “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!” He had not remained silent and then blamed God for the absence of an answer. He had cried repeatedly. The violence was not merely discussed among concerned citizens over supper; it had been carried before the LORD. Yet the situation continued. The oppressor remained powerful, the law remained slacked, and God’s intervention remained unseen. This delay placed pressure upon the prophet’s faith because he knew the LORD was holy and able to save. If God were powerless, there would have been no mystery. Habakkuk’s trouble arose from the collision between what he knew about God and what he saw around him. A silent idol creates no theological difficulty because nobody expects a stone to speak. The silence of the living God troubles faith precisely because faith knows He hears.

The prophet's cry was specifically "of violence." The repeated word describes ruthless wrong that injured people and tore at the nation's moral order. Habakkuk did not soften the evil into unfortunate social behavior or excuse it with a catalogue of environmental influences. Violence was violence, iniquity was iniquity, grievance was grievance, and wrong judgment was wrong. The Holy Ghost did not send the prophet to a vocabulary workshop where sin could be renamed until nobody felt convicted. A nation nearing judgment always becomes skilled at verbal laundering. Theft becomes redistribution, murder becomes choice, perversion becomes authenticity, cowardice becomes tolerance, and judicial corruption becomes reform. Men wash the word until they imagine the deed has become clean. But Heaven judges actions by God's dictionary, not by the slogans printed on the rebel's banner.

Habakkuk's persistence demonstrates that repeated prayer is not necessarily unbelief. David cried, "How long wilt thou forget me?" The souls under the altar ask, "How long, O Lord, holy and true?" Christ taught that men "ought always to pray, and not to faint." Faith may return to the throne because the burden remains and the answer has not appeared. Yet persistent prayer must remain submission, not attempted control. Habakkuk could ask how long, but he could not appoint the hour. He could plead for judgment, but he could not choose the instrument. Prayer brings the case before God; it does not climb onto the bench and borrow His gavel. Many men enjoy praying for God's will until God's will arrives wearing clothes they did not select. Habakkuk's faith would be tested not merely by whether God answered, but by whether he could endure the answer God gave.

2. When the Law Is Slacked and Wrong Judgment Proceeds

Habakkuk said, "Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth." Judah possessed the law of Moses, the priesthood, the temple, the sacrifices, the covenant history, and the testimony of generations. This was not a Gentile nation stumbling without revealed light. Israel had received the oracles of God, and Judah had the throne of David in Jerusalem. Greater light brought greater responsibility. The law could expose sin, establish righteous judgment, and govern national conduct, but it could not benefit a people determined to ignore it. A Bible displayed on a courthouse wall cannot restrain judges who despise what it says. A commandment carved in stone accomplishes little in a heart already set upon rebellion. The law had not become defective; the people charged with obeying and enforcing it had become corrupt. Man's disobedience never proves a defect in God's revelation.

The historical setting must remain clear. Habakkuk was speaking concerning Judah under the Mosaic covenant, not the Body of Christ under grace. The Church is not a replacement Israel inheriting Judah's national curses and earthly covenant promises. The Mosaic law

was given to Israel, and the coming Chaldean invasion was a covenant judgment upon that literal nation for rebellion against the LORD. Yet the passage contains legitimate application for every society that despises truth and corrupts judgment. Civil authority is ordained of God to punish evildoers and commend those who do well. When rulers reverse that function, the courthouse becomes a shelter for wolves and a trap for sheep. A nation cannot mock righteousness forever because it has printed its wickedness upon official letterhead. Government ink does not turn wrong into right. Sometimes it merely documents the rebellion more neatly for the day of judgment.

“For the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.” The order is exact. Wickedness surrounded righteousness before corrupted decisions emerged. Evil seldom conquers judgment in one public leap. It encircles it, pressures it, intimidates it, outnumbers it, and fills the surrounding offices until the righteous voice is treated as the intruder. Then wrong judgment begins proceeding with all the dignity of official procedure. The verdict may be stamped, signed, filed, and announced from a polished bench, but ceremony cannot baptize injustice. Pilate washed his hands, followed political necessity, and delivered an innocent Man to crucifixion. His basin did not cleanse the record. When the wicked compass the righteous, truth may lose the vote, but it does not lose the case before God. Heaven is the court of final appeal, and its docket is never controlled by the local majority.

3. The Answer More Frightening Than the Question

The LORD answered, “Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously.” God was already performing a work so astonishing that Judah would not believe it though it were told. Habakkuk had interpreted delay as inactivity, but divine preparation had been moving beyond his field of vision. The LORD said, “For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans.” That statement placed Babylon’s rise beneath divine sovereignty. The Chaldeans possessed their own ambition, cruelty, idolatry, and military designs, yet God would employ their advance as judgment upon Judah. Providence can use a rod without approving the rod’s character. God used Assyria as “the rod of mine anger” and then judged Assyria’s pride. He used Pharaoh’s hardness to display His power without making Pharaoh innocent. The Almighty can direct a storm while holding every destructive wind accountable for the path it willingly takes.

The Chaldeans were described as “that bitter and hasty nation,” marching through the breadth of the land to possess dwellings that were not theirs. They were “terrible and dreadful,” their horses swifter than leopards, their horsemen fiercer than evening wolves, and their armies compared to an eagle hastening to eat. “They shall come all for violence,” the very sin Habakkuk had denounced within Judah. God would answer domestic violence

through an invading nation whose violence operated on an imperial scale. The medicine looked more dangerous than the disease. Habakkuk wanted God to repair the courthouse, but God announced that foreign soldiers were approaching the city. Men request revival while quietly assuming that God will preserve every comfortable arrangement. Sometimes God answers by shaking the building because the rot has passed the stage where another coat of religious paint will help.

The Chaldeans gathered captives like sand, scoffed at kings, derided rulers, and laughed at fortified cities. Yet Habakkuk 1:11 says they would offend by “imputing this his power unto his god.” Babylon’s military success would feed its idolatrous pride. God used the nation, but the nation credited its false gods and its own strength. That distinction matters. Divine sovereignty does not sanctify human arrogance. The rod in God’s hand does not become righteous merely because God strikes with it. Babylon would conquer Judah according to God’s purpose and later be judged for its cruelty, pride, bloodshed, covetousness, and idolatry. Providence is not approval. A wicked man may serve a purpose in God’s government while marching directly toward judgment for the wickedness with which he served it. The Lord can use a crooked stick to strike and then cast the stick into the fire.

4. The Prophet’s Second Argument with Heaven

Habakkuk’s answer began with a confession: “Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One?” He did not abandon what he knew when confronted by what he could not understand. God was everlasting, personal, holy, and sovereign. Habakkuk continued, “we shall not die,” resting upon God’s covenant purposes for His people even though national chastening approached. Then he acknowledged, “O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.” The prophet understood the announced method intellectually. The Chaldeans were appointed as a judicial instrument. His difficulty was moral: how could the Holy One use such a filthy nation against Judah? Habakkuk’s faith did not solve the tension by denying God’s holiness or Babylon’s wickedness. He placed both truths before the LORD and asked for light.

“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity,” Habakkuk declared. The verse does not mean God lacks awareness of sin; the entire complaint rests upon His seeing it. It means His holy nature cannot approve, tolerate as righteous, or look favorably upon evil. Habakkuk therefore asked, “wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously?” The first complaint concerned God’s apparent tolerance of wicked Judah. The second concerned His intended use of more wicked Babylon. Judah was guilty, but the Chaldeans appeared worse. Would a holy God allow “the wicked” to devour “the man that is more righteous than he”? More righteous is comparative, not absolute. Judah

had sinned grievously, but Babylon's savagery and idolatry exceeded it. A cleaner prisoner is still a prisoner, yet Habakkuk could not understand why the dirtiest inmate had been handed the keys.

The prophet described nations caught like fish in Babylon's net. The Chaldean gathered them, rejoiced over the catch, and then "sacrificeth unto their net, and burneth incense unto their drag." Babylon worshipped the military machinery that supplied its prosperity. Its net became its god because conquest had filled its portion and made its meat plenteous. Fallen man still burns incense to his tools. He worships armies, economies, technologies, institutions, parties, intellect, and machines, then congratulates the net for fish God allowed it to catch. Habakkuk asked whether Babylon would therefore continue emptying its net and slaying nations without pity. Would success become permanent because brutality was efficient? The prophet had moved from asking why Judah's wickedness went unpunished to asking why Babylon's wickedness would be permitted to prosper. God's first answer had solved one problem by creating a larger one.

5. The Watchtower Where the Questioner Learned to Wait

Habakkuk 2 begins with the prophet saying, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower." He had presented his complaint, and now he positioned himself to receive correction. The watchtower was a place of vigilance, distance, and perspective. A watchman did not bury his head beneath the blankets because the night looked unpleasant. He remained alert for what approached. Habakkuk added that he would "watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." That last expression reveals humility. The prophet believed his argument might require correction. He had spoken boldly but had not declared himself incapable of error. An honest question remains teachable after it is asked. A foolish challenge demands that God surrender. Habakkuk climbed the tower prepared to listen, which is more than can be said for many men who call their speech prayer and then never pause long enough for Scripture to answer.

The LORD told him, "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." God did not tell Habakkuk to preserve a foggy religious impression or hide the message beneath language accessible only to an educated priesthood. The vision was to be written and made plain. God's truth is deep, but depth is not the same as deliberate obscurity. A muddy puddle can look deep when nobody is allowed to measure it. The divine message concerning judgment, Babylon's doom, and the necessity of faith was to be recorded plainly enough to move the reader. Writing fixed the revelation outside Habakkuk's changing emotions. Once written, the vision did not become less certain

because the prophet awoke discouraged or the Chaldeans looked unstoppable. Faith requires a written authority stronger than the mood of the man reading it.

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time,” God said. “Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” The apparent tension is deliberate. From the watcher’s perspective, fulfillment seemed to tarry; from God’s appointed timetable, it would not arrive one moment late. Heaven does not measure delay by man’s impatience. God had fixed the time, and Babylon’s rise and fall would obey that appointment. The waiting prophet needed neither to force fulfillment nor revise the message. He needed to stand upon the word while history caught up with it. Men routinely accuse God of lateness because He refuses to follow the schedule they wrote without consulting Him. But the Almighty has never missed an appointment. Prophecy may wait across centuries, yet when the appointed hour comes, kingdoms move, rulers fall, and every syllable arrives on time.

6. “The Just Shall Live by His Faith”

At the center of God’s answer stands the contrast in Habakkuk 2:4: “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.” Babylon’s soul was lifted up with pride. The conqueror trusted strength, appetite, expansion, and military success. The just man possessed no such visible machinery. He lived by faith. Pride rests upon what man can accumulate, control, display, and credit to himself. Faith rests upon what God has spoken, even while outward circumstances appear to contradict it. Babylon had horses, armies, weapons, captives, and cities beneath its feet. Habakkuk had a written vision and a command to wait. The carnal eye would have invested in Babylon. God had already written “woe” across the empire’s balance sheet.

The phrase “the just shall live by his faith” belongs first to Habakkuk’s historical setting. A believing remnant in Judah would need to live by faith while judgment approached and Babylon appeared invincible. Yet the Holy Ghost carried the statement into Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. Paul used it to establish justification by faith apart from the works of the law. In the present Church Age, a sinner is justified freely by God’s grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Salvation is not earned through law-keeping, religious ceremonies, personal merit, endurance, or membership in an earthly institution. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. The sinner who believes is justified. Habakkuk does not erase Paul’s revelation, and Paul does not erase Habakkuk’s setting. The same inspired sentence carries its original force and its later doctrinal application without confusing Israel and the Church.

Faith does not mean believing strongly in whatever outcome a man prefers. It is not spiritual optimism, religious imagination, or positive speech aimed at forcing God’s hand.

Biblical faith takes God at His word. Habakkuk was not told to believe that Babylon would disappear before invading. He was told that judgment would come, the proud would be condemned, the vision would be fulfilled, and the just must live by faith. Sometimes faith believes God for deliverance; sometimes it believes God while deliverance takes a form the flesh would never choose. A man does not demonstrate faith by closing his eyes to an approaching army and announcing that everything feels peaceful. Faith opens its eyes, reads the written vision, sees the army, and still declares that Babylon's apparent triumph cannot outlive God's appointed word.

7. From the Complaint to the Song

Habakkuk 2 pronounces a series of woes upon the Chaldean power. The nation that enlarged its desire as hell, gathered all nations, increased what was not its own, coveted an evil covetousness, built towns with blood, gave neighbors drink, and trusted graven images would not escape judgment. The instrument God used against Judah would answer for its own sins. "The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." Babylon's buildings would testify against the blood and covetousness used to erect them. Empires enjoy carving their victories into stone, forgetting that stones make durable witnesses for the prosecution. The chapter then silences human pride with the words, "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." Habakkuk had complained about a silent Heaven; God answered by commanding a noisy earth to become silent before His throne.

Chapter 3 records "A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet." He had heard God's speech and was afraid. He prayed, "O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years," and added, "in wrath remember mercy." Habakkuk no longer demanded a method of judgment that matched his preference. He asked God to perform His work and mingle deserved wrath with mercy. The prophet then described the LORD coming in overwhelming glory and power. His brightness was as the light, pestilence went before Him, mountains were scattered, the deep uttered its voice, and sun and moon stood still. God was not absent from history. He was advancing through it with power that made Babylon's army look like dust marching beneath a thundercloud. The prophet's vision rose above the Chaldeans to the God who rules nations, creation, judgment, and salvation.

Habakkuk trembled at what he heard. His belly trembled, his lips quivered, rottenness entered his bones, and he trembled in himself "that I might rest in the day of trouble." The strange union is the heart of biblical fear: he trembled and rested. He did not rest because trouble disappeared but because God stood above it. Then came his great confession: although the fig tree did not blossom, fruit failed from the vines, the olive yielded nothing, fields produced no meat, flocks vanished from the fold, and no herd remained in the stalls,

“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” Every earthly support could be stripped bare, but God would remain. Faith had moved from asking why God allowed the crisis to declaring that God Himself was sufficient within it.

Conclusion

Habakkuk began by questioning God’s silence and ended by singing of God’s salvation. Between those points, his circumstances did not become easier. Judah remained corrupt, Babylon remained appointed, invasion remained ahead, and the visible economy of the land stood beneath the threat of ruin. What changed was the prophet’s view of God. At first he looked horizontally at violence, paralyzed law, wicked rulers, and wrong judgments, then looked upward and wondered whether Heaven had lost control. By the end, he looked at the LORD first and interpreted the coming devastation beneath divine sovereignty. God had not changed. The prophet’s sight had been corrected. A man who measures God by the crisis will always shrink the throne to the size of the newspaper. A man who measures the crisis by God will discover that the largest empire is still small enough to fit beneath His foot.

The book does not forbid honest questions. God did not strike Habakkuk for asking why, silence him for mentioning injustice, or demand that he pretend Judah’s corruption was harmless. The LORD answered him, corrected his perspective, commanded him to write, and taught him to wait. Honest prayer may bring confusion to God, but it must also receive correction from God. Habakkuk could ask why God used Babylon; he could not insist that divine providence conform to the limits of prophetic understanding. The difference between faith and rebellion is not that faith never struggles. Faith struggles before God and finally bows to what God has said. Rebellion struggles against God and bows only when judgment breaks its knees. Habakkuk climbed the watchtower expecting an explanation. He came down carrying a commandment: “the just shall live by his faith.”

When Heaven seems silent, the believer must remember that God may already be preparing an answer beyond the range of human sight—and that the answer may overturn comfortable assumptions before it removes the trouble. The Church must not steal Judah’s covenant position, but it can learn from Judah’s prophet. God still judges sin, overrules nations, humbles pride, exposes idols, honors His written word, and requires His people to walk by faith rather than sight. The Christian’s confidence rests upon the Lord Jesus Christ, whose death, burial, and resurrection secure eternal salvation for every believer. Governments may corrupt judgment, enemies may rise, economies may fail, and the visible field may stand empty. Yet the saved man possesses a God who cannot fail. Habakkuk began with “Why dost thou shew me iniquity?” He ended with “Yet I will rejoice in

the LORD.” That is not denial. That is faith standing in an empty field and singing because God is still full.

7 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “How Can a Man Be Born When He Is Old?”: Nicodemus and the Religion That Could Not Produce Life

Key Passage: John 3:3–7

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”

Introduction

Nicodemus came to Jesus carrying enough religion to sink a fishing boat. He was “a man of the Pharisees,” “a ruler of the Jews,” and, according to Christ’s own words, “a master of Israel.” He possessed ancestry, morality, education, authority, reputation, Scripture knowledge, and membership in the strictest religious party of his nation. If salvation could have been obtained by respectable credentials, Nicodemus could have entered Heaven waving references from half of Jerusalem. Yet the first thing Jesus told this distinguished visitor was that he could not even see the kingdom of God without being born again. Christ did not congratulate him on his achievements, ask him to share leadership principles, or offer him an honorary seat among the disciples. He put the religious ruler in the same spiritual nursery as every publican, harlot, beggar, and common sinner. Nicodemus had mastered religion, but religion had never produced life in him.

He came by night. Scripture does not explicitly say whether fear, caution, privacy, or convenience determined the hour, so there is no need to build an imaginary biography around the darkness. Yet the scene carries an unmistakable spiritual likeness. A man surrounded by religious light approached the Light of the world while still unable to understand spiritual birth. Nicodemus began politely: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God.” He recognized Christ as a teacher authenticated by miracles, but his confession stopped far short of the truth. Jesus was not merely another rabbi joining Israel’s religious faculty. He was the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son, and

the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. Nicodemus brought a compliment; Christ answered with a diagnosis. The ruler wanted conversation, but the Lord brought him face-to-face with his spiritual death.

“How can a man be born when he is old?” revealed the inability of the natural mind to grasp spiritual truth. Nicodemus attempted to force Christ’s statement into the only category fallen reason could reach: physical birth. Could an old man enter his mother’s womb a second time? The question sounds almost absurd, yet it was the best religion’s trained intellect could produce when confronted with regeneration. First Corinthians 2:14 explains why: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” Religious education can sharpen the natural mind, but it cannot transform it into a spiritual mind. A corpse may be dressed in academic robes, seated behind a sacred desk, and awarded several impressive degrees, but none of the tassels will make it breathe. Nicodemus did not need another certificate. He needed life from above.

1. A Ruler Who Came to Jesus in the Dark

John 3 follows a sobering statement at the end of John 2. Many believed in Christ’s name when they saw the miracles, but “Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men.” He “needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” Then chapter 3 introduces “a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus.” The chapter division must not hide the connection. Christ knew what was in the crowd, and He knew what was in this man. Nicodemus referred to the miracles: “for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” But an intellectual conclusion based upon signs was not the new birth. A man may admire Christ’s power, defend His historical existence, approve His ethics, and still remain dead in trespasses and sins. Being impressed by Jesus is not the same as believing on Him for everlasting life.

Nicodemus represented the best religion could manufacture from Adam’s fallen stock. The Pharisees fasted, prayed, gave alms, studied the law, guarded tradition, and separated themselves from obvious public corruption. Nicodemus was not introduced stumbling out of a tavern, stealing from widows, or serving idols in a pagan temple. He came with a clean coat and a respected name. That is precisely why his case drives the knife so deeply into human pride. Christ did not reserve the new birth for society’s visible wreckage while allowing respectable sinners to enter by the front gate. The drunkard and the religious ruler differ in conduct, consequence, and public reputation, but both descend from Adam and both require life from God. One corpse may lie in an alley and another in a polished casket. The undertaker knows the difference in price, but not in pulse.

As “a ruler of the Jews,” Nicodemus possessed national and covenant privilege. Romans 3:2 says that unto the Jews “were committed the oracles of God.” Israel had the law, the prophets, the covenants, the temple, the priesthood, and the promises. Those advantages were real and must not be stolen by a replacement theology that turns Israel into a decorative name for the Church. Yet covenant privilege did not eliminate the necessity of individual faith. John the Baptist warned men not to say, “We have Abraham to our father,” because ancestry could not substitute for repentance. Nicodemus had Abraham in his family history and Moses in his religious curriculum, but he still needed to be born again. A man can stand beside the right altar, carry the right Bible, belong to the right nation, and remain spiritually dead. Proximity to truth is not possession of life.

2. “Ye Must Be Born Again”—The Necessity Religion Cannot Negotiate

Jesus began with solemn authority: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee.” The repeated “Verily” placed divine certainty behind the declaration. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Christ did not say a man should consider spiritual renewal, might benefit from a fresh beginning, or ought to explore religion more deeply. He said, “cannot.” Human ability reached a locked door. Education could not pick the lock, morality could not climb through a window, and ceremony could not bribe the Keeper. The word “must” later removed every exception. “Ye must be born again.” Heaven does not negotiate with Adam’s nature. God is not running a rehabilitation program for respectable flesh. He demands a birth because nothing short of new life can enter a spiritual kingdom.

The first birth provides physical life in Adam’s fallen family. The second birth provides spiritual life from God. Christ explained the distinction plainly: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Flesh reproduces flesh. It can be educated, disciplined, religious, cultured, washed, perfumed, and taught to shake hands in a church vestibule, but it remains flesh. Romans 7:18 says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.” God does not repair the old nature until it qualifies for Heaven. He creates something new by His Spirit. Man’s favorite religious project is improving Adam; God’s answer is putting Adam’s condemned race aside in Christ and imparting new life. The flesh wants renovation because renovation allows it to remain the owner. God posts a condemnation notice and starts with a new birth.

The necessity is universal and personal. Christ said, “Except a man,” then pressed the matter directly upon Nicodemus: “Ye must be born again.” No priest, parent, preacher, denomination, nation, or religious institution can undergo the birth in another man’s place. A godly mother cannot transfer regeneration through the family name. A faithful pastor cannot preach enough truth to make an unbelieving hearer alive apart from personal faith. Church membership can place a name on a roll but cannot place that name in the Lamb’s

book of life. Baptism can make a sinner wet without making him righteous. Communion can place bread in his mouth without placing Christ in his heart. Every individual must deal with Jesus Christ. God has no grandchildren. A man is either born of the Spirit or he remains a child of Adam, regardless of how long he has occupied the same pew.

3. Born of Water and of the Spirit

Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Religious systems eager to place salvation under their control immediately drag a baptistery into the verse. Yet baptism is not mentioned in the conversation, and Christ's own next sentence explains the contrast: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The water birth corresponds to physical birth; the Spirit birth corresponds to spiritual birth. Nicodemus had asked about entering his mother's womb and being born physically a second time. Jesus answered the question by distinguishing the natural birth from the spiritual. Every man enters the world through the water associated with physical birth, but entering the kingdom of God requires a second birth produced by the Holy Spirit. Christ interpreted His own words before sacramental religion arrived to improve them.

Water baptism is an important act of obedience and public identification, but it does not regenerate a dead sinner. Paul said in First Corinthians 1:17, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." If baptism were part of the saving gospel, that statement would reduce Paul's commission to nonsense. In First Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul defines the gospel as Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection according to the Scriptures. No water appears in the saving message. The Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He did not tell the jailer to locate enough water before midnight. A ceremony performed by human hands cannot produce a birth performed by the Spirit of God. A preacher may lower a dry sinner into water and raise a wet sinner three seconds later.

Titus 3:5 says salvation is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy," through "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The Holy Ghost performs the regeneration. The washing belongs to the impartation and cleansing of new life, not to the application of water upon the flesh. Ephesians 5:26 connects cleansing with "the washing of water by the word," while First Peter 1:23 says believers are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God." The Spirit of God uses the word of God to bring the sinner to faith in the Son of God. Water baptism follows salvation as testimony; it does not crawl backward into Calvary and help Christ finish the work. When Jesus cried, "It is finished," He was not waiting for a church committee to add plumbing.

4. The Wind That Exposed the Blindness of the Natural Man

Jesus said, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” Nicodemus was astonished because his religious system dealt largely with outward identity, conduct, purification, observance, and privilege. Christ announced an inward work beyond human manufacture. The ruler’s amazement revealed how far organized religion can travel from the central necessity of divine life. Men can argue over rules, garments, calendars, ceremonies, titles, and authority while nobody in the room has been born of the Spirit. They build elaborate nurseries for people who have never been born. They issue membership cards to corpses and then call the growing cemetery a revival. Nicodemus knew how a man could enter the synagogue, join the Pharisees, keep traditions, and rise to leadership. He did not know how a man received life from above.

Christ illustrated the Spirit’s work with the wind: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth.” The wind is invisible, yet its operation produces visible evidence. A man cannot see the wind itself, but he can hear its sound and observe what it moves. So is everyone born of the Spirit. Regeneration is a real work of God within the believer, although it cannot be reduced to an external religious performance. The Spirit is sovereign, invisible, and effective. Man does not command Him through ritual. No priest turns regeneration on by speaking a formula, and no institution owns the machinery of the new birth. The Spirit of God is not a sacramental employee waiting behind a curtain for an authorized official to ring a bell.

Nicodemus answered, “How can these things be?” He had moved from misunderstanding the physical figure to confessing his inability to comprehend the spiritual reality. First Corinthians 2:14 says the things of the Spirit “are foolishness” unto the natural man and that “neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” This does not mean a lost man is incapable of understanding the words of the gospel at any level; faith comes by hearing the word of God. It means the unregenerate mind does not naturally receive, value, and discern spiritual truth as the Spirit teaches it. Human brilliance cannot overpower this inability. A scholar may parse every sentence in John 3 and remain as dead as the dictionary on his desk. Intelligence can analyze the lamp; only God can make the blind man see its light.

5. “Art Thou a Master of Israel, and Knowest Not These Things?”

Jesus asked, “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” The question pierced the reputation Nicodemus carried into the meeting. He instructed others in Israel yet did not understand the necessity of spiritual birth. His position magnified his responsibility. James 3:1 warns, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall

receive the greater condemnation.” A title does not compensate for ignorance of truth; it makes that ignorance more dangerous. Nicodemus may have been able to discuss legal traditions, ceremonial questions, and theological disputes, but the Master before him exposed the missing foundation. The religious world still produces experts who can lecture on church history, ancient customs, leadership methods, and the latest cultural concern while stumbling over “Ye must be born again.” Their library is full, their vocabulary is polished, and their spiritual nursery remains empty.

Israel’s Scriptures had already prepared a teacher to understand that divine cleansing and spiritual renewal must come from God. Ezekiel 36:25–27 promised Israel, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean,” followed by, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” God promised to place His Spirit within the nation in connection with Israel’s future restoration and new covenant blessings. That prophecy must not be stolen from Israel and casually relabeled as the Church. Its national, earthly, and covenant setting remains Israel’s. Nevertheless, Nicodemus should have recognized the revealed principle that external law could not produce the inward life God Himself must give. Jeremiah likewise promised a new covenant in which God’s law would be written in the heart. The Old Testament had already shown that washing the outside of the cup would never solve the condition within.

Jesus then said, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.” Nicodemus had opened with “we know,” claiming that he and others knew Jesus was a teacher from God because of the miracles. Christ answered the ruler’s “we know” with divine knowledge: “We speak that we do know.” Nicodemus possessed deductions; Christ possessed firsthand heavenly authority. The man on earth was attempting to classify the One who came from Heaven. That is religion’s favorite arrangement. It seats Christ before an examining board and asks whether He meets the current standards for recognition. But Jesus said, “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” Nicodemus had arrived as the examiner and discovered that he was the student who had failed the entrance question.

6. The Serpent in the Wilderness and the Son Lifted Up

Christ led Nicodemus directly to Numbers 21: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” Israel had sinned against God and Moses, and the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people. Those bitten were dying. When the people confessed, God instructed Moses to make a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole. “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.” The dying Israelite did not heal himself, remove the poison, perform a ceremony, or

purchase medicine. He looked at the provision God had appointed and lived. The cure was outside him. His sincerity could not neutralize venom, and his family heritage could not reverse death. God joined life to faith in His revealed provision.

The brass serpent pictured Christ being lifted up upon the cross. Brass in Scripture is associated with judgment, and the serpent represented the curse under judgment without becoming sinful itself. Second Corinthians 5:21 says that God made Christ “to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Galatians 3:13 declares, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” The Lord Jesus never committed sin, possessed sin, or yielded to sin. Yet upon Calvary He bore our sins in His own body and suffered the judgment they deserved. The serpent’s bite was fatal, but God supplied one object upon which the dying could look. Sin is fatal, and God has supplied one Saviour in whom the sinner must believe. Heaven has no second pole and no alternate Christ.

The simplicity of the remedy offends religious pride. The poisoned Israelite could not claim credit for looking, and the believing sinner cannot boast in receiving Christ. Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith,” and adds, “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Religion prefers a cure requiring human administration because the administrator can charge admission, guard the gate, and take credit for the recovery. God places salvation in the crucified and risen Son and tells the sinner to believe. Nicodemus had spent his life within a system of law, ceremony, and achievement. Jesus took him back to dying men in a wilderness who lived by looking at God’s provision. The new birth is miraculous in its source and simple in its reception: the Spirit gives life when the sinner believes God’s testimony concerning His Son.

7. Everlasting Life in the Only Begotten Son

Christ explained the purpose of His being lifted up: “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” The word “whosoever” opens the door beyond social rank, religious background, nationality, education, and past failure. The word “believeth” identifies the response. The words “eternal life” identify the possession. Eternal life is not temporary life maintained by the sinner’s continued perfection. If it can expire, it was misnamed when given. John 3:16 repeats the truth: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” God did not give a religious program, moral example, or ceremonial ladder. He gave His Son “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The new birth rests upon Christ’s finished work and God’s promise, not upon the stability of human performance.

The chapter also declares why men remain condemned: “he that believeth not is condemned already.” A sinner is not neutral while he evaluates Christianity from a comfortable balcony. He is already condemned because he descends from fallen Adam and has committed personal sin against God. Christ did not come to place good people on probation. He came to save the lost. Verses 19–20 expose the moral root of unbelief: “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” The problem is not merely that men need more evidence. Nicodemus had seen miracles. Fallen men resist the light because the light reproves their deeds. An unbeliever may wrap rebellion in intellectual vocabulary and present it as noble investigation, but God knows when the research project is merely darkness wearing spectacles.

The later appearances of Nicodemus suggest movement from darkness toward public identification with Christ. In John 7 he challenged his fellow rulers: “Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” They answered with contempt. After the crucifixion, Nicodemus joined Joseph of Arimathea and brought “a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight” for the burial of Jesus. The man who first came privately at night later appeared when association with a condemned Christ carried danger and cost. Scripture does not record the exact moment of his conversion, so no man should write what God omitted. Yet the progression is striking. Nicodemus moved from complimenting a teacher, to defending a hearing, to honoring the crucified body. The conversation about the lifted-up Son had not disappeared into the night.

Conclusion

The new birth destroys every human ground of boasting. Ceremony cannot produce it, ancestry cannot transmit it, scholarship cannot discover it, law-keeping cannot earn it, morality cannot imitate it, baptism cannot manufacture it, and church membership cannot certify it. The Spirit of God alone gives spiritual life through the word of God as the sinner believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. The old man is not rehabilitated. He remains flesh, and “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” God imparts a new nature. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” Christianity is not Adam attending reform school. It is the believer joined to the risen Christ. God does not improve the corpse’s manners, teach it religious vocabulary, and pronounce it alive because it learned to sit upright in a pew. He raises the dead.

In the present Church Age, the saving gospel is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day. When the sinner hears “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation,” and believes, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The Spirit regenerates him, places him into the Body of Christ, and seals him unto the day of redemption. Salvation is therefore entirely by grace, received through faith, and

eternally secure in Christ. Good works follow as the proper fruit of salvation, but fruit does not give birth to the tree. A believer should walk worthy of his calling, mortify the deeds of the body, and serve Christ faithfully, yet none of those acts becomes the price of his new life. Christ paid the price before the sinner performed his first Christian duty.

Nicodemus asked, “How can a man be born when he is old?” The answer was not found in his mother’s womb, Israel’s religious machinery, or another course beneath Jerusalem’s teachers. It stood before him in the Son of man who would be lifted up. The dying sinner must look away from himself and believe on Jesus Christ. There is no age too old, past too filthy, reputation too respectable, education too advanced, or religion too established for the command: “Ye must be born again.” The drunkard must come, the church member must come, the professor must come, the preacher must come, and the ruler must come. All enter through the same Door because Heaven has no entrance reserved for distinguished corpses. Religion brought Nicodemus to Christ by night, but only Christ could give him life.

8 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “What Is Truth?”: Pilate’s Question with the Answer Standing Before Him

Key Passage: John 18:36–38

“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.”

Introduction

Pilate asked the right question of the right Person and then walked away before receiving the answer. “What is truth?” may be the most tragic question ever spoken by a man who had Truth incarnate standing within arm’s reach. Jesus Christ had already declared that He came into the world to bear witness unto the truth and that everyone who was of the truth heard His voice. Pilate replied with three words dressed in philosophical dignity, then immediately “went out again.” He did not pause, kneel, inquire, or listen. His question sounded thoughtful, but his feet exposed it as an escape route. Men have been repeating

the performance ever since. They announce that truth is complicated, inaccessible, subjective, culturally conditioned, or forever beyond certainty, then hurry away before the word of God can answer. Skepticism often wears a professor's robe when it is merely cowardice looking for a dignified place to hide.

Pilate was not suffering from a shortage of evidence. He examined Christ personally, heard His testimony, witnessed the hatred of the accusers, learned that Herod found no cause of death in Him, received a warning from his wife, and repeatedly declared Jesus innocent. He possessed political authority to release the prisoner, though Christ reminded him that such authority existed only because it had been given from above. Yet Pilate surrendered the innocent Man because the crowd threatened his standing with Caesar. Truth stood on one side; political survival stood on the other. Pilate did not lack enough facts to decide. He lacked enough character to obey the facts he possessed. A man can be intellectually convinced and morally condemned because knowing truth is not the same as submitting to it. Pilate's mouth said, "I find in him no fault at all," while his hands delivered the faultless One to be scourged and crucified.

The scene is a courtroom turned upside down. The Roman governor occupied the judgment seat, religious rulers presented charges, soldiers waited for orders, and Jesus stood bound as the accused. Yet the prisoner was the Judge of all the earth, the governor was the guilty man, and every witness was being examined by the Truth they imagined they were examining. Pilate believed Christ's fate rested upon his verdict. In reality, Pilate's soul was being weighed by his response to Christ. The Lord Jesus was not trapped by Roman power. He had come to lay down His life according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Pilate could wash his hands, but he could not wash the record. Water removes dust from skin; it does not remove blood from guilt. Truth had a name, a voice, a face, a cross, and soon an empty tomb. Pilate asked what truth was because he loved his position too much to bow before Who truth was.

1. The Accused Who Was Actually the Judge

Jesus entered Pilate's hall after enduring betrayal, arrest, false witnesses, abuse, and an illegal religious proceeding conducted by men determined upon His death. The chief priests brought Him to the Roman governor because they wanted the power of Rome to carry out the sentence. John 18:31 records Pilate telling them, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law." They answered, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." Their religious accusation concerned Christ's claim concerning His divine identity, but before Pilate they emphasized political charges likely to alarm Rome. Luke 23:2 records them accusing Jesus of perverting the nation, forbidding tribute to Caesar, and claiming to be "Christ a King." The first two charges were false, and the third was true in a sense far

greater than either the accusers or Pilate understood. Political convenience had joined religious envy, and each supplied the other with a weapon.

Pilate asked, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” The question placed Israel’s Messiah before a Gentile ruler holding authority beneath the fourth great Gentile empire revealed in prophecy. The Davidic King stood bound before a representative of Caesar. Yet appearances lied. Rome possessed soldiers, standards, fortresses, taxes, and courts, but its authority was borrowed and temporary. Christ possessed the covenant right to David’s throne, the title deed to creation, and all authority in Heaven and earth. Psalm 2 had already declared that God set His King upon His holy hill of Zion and would give Him the heathen for His inheritance. Rome could crucify the King only because the King permitted wicked hands to perform what God’s redemptive purpose had determined. Caesar’s empire has become history. Christ’s kingdom is still approaching its public manifestation.

Pilate imagined that his judgment seat elevated him above the prisoner, but Jesus later corrected him: “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.” Civil power is real, but it is delegated. Romans 13 teaches that earthly authority is ordained of God, which means rulers are accountable to the One who ordained it. Pilate’s office did not make him sovereign; it made him responsible. He could command soldiers, but he could not manufacture moral authority independent of Heaven. Modern rulers suffer the same delusion when they sign wickedness into law and suppose the signature has revised God’s judgment. A legislature can legalize sin, a court can approve it, and an executive can enforce it, but none can make God salute the paperwork. Pilate sat above Christ for an hour only because Heaven allowed the furniture to remain arranged that way.

2. “My Kingdom Is Not of This World”

Jesus answered Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” That statement has been twisted into the claim that Christ will never establish a literal kingdom upon this earth. But the Lord explained His meaning in the next words: “if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight.” He concluded, “but now is my kingdom not from hence.” The kingdom did not originate from the present world system, receive authority from Rome, or advance through carnal weapons at His first coming. “Not from hence” concerns its source and present manner, not the cancellation of God’s promises concerning David’s throne, Israel’s restoration, and Christ’s future reign. The prophets did not spend centuries describing a literal kingdom only for a theologian to turn it into an invisible mood inside a committee room.

At Christ's first coming, His servants were not commissioned to fight Rome and install Him by force. When Peter drew his sword in Gethsemane and struck the high priest's servant, Jesus said, "Put up thy sword into the sheath." Christ could have called more than twelve legions of angels, but the Scriptures concerning His suffering had to be fulfilled. He came first as the Lamb of God to bear sin, not as the Lion of the tribe of Juda to destroy His enemies. Calvary preceded the crown. The Church today is not commanded to establish the kingdom through political violence, religious conquest, or carnal force. Our weapons are not carnal, our message is the gospel of Christ, and our citizenship is in Heaven. The Bride does not seize the earth before the Bridegroom arrives. She waits for Him while proclaiming His saving grace.

Yet Christ will return physically and visibly to rule this earth. Revelation 19 presents Him descending from Heaven as "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS," followed by the armies of Heaven. Revelation 20 declares that He will reign for a thousand years. Isaiah's promised government will be upon His shoulder, and the throne of David will not be replaced by a religious metaphor. At the Second Advent, Christ's enemies will discover that "not of this world" never meant "never coming to rule it." Pilate saw a bound King because the appointed time for the cross had arrived. The world will see a crowned King when the appointed time for judgment comes. The first time men placed a reed in His hand to mock Him. The next time He will carry a rod of iron, and nobody will be laughing.

3. "For This Cause Came I into the World"

Jesus told Pilate, "Thou sayest that I am a king." He then declared, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world." Those two expressions reveal both His genuine humanity and His preexistence. He was born as man, yet He "came" into the world because He existed before Bethlehem. John 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word," that "the Word was God," and that "the Word was made flesh." Christ did not begin when Mary gave birth. The eternal Son entered human history through the virgin birth. Pilate was examining no ordinary Galilean teacher accidentally caught in political trouble. The Creator had entered His own creation, the King had visited His own nation, and the Light had come into a world that loved darkness. Rome's governor stood before a mystery greater than his empire and treated it like another difficult case before breakfast.

Christ identified one central purpose of His coming: "that I should bear witness unto the truth." He had revealed the Father, fulfilled the Scriptures, exposed human sin, uncovered religious hypocrisy, demonstrated divine holiness, and proclaimed the words of eternal life. His witness was not one opinion placed beside competing philosophies. He spoke what He had seen and heard from above. John 8:14 records Him saying, "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go." Pilate did not

know where Christ came from or where his own compromise would carry him. Truth does not derive authority from the number of people willing to accept it. Christ remained true when disciples departed, rulers rejected Him, witnesses lied, and crowds cried for His blood. A majority can outvote truth only until judgment counts the ballots.

Jesus added, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." That statement placed Pilate's response beneath examination. The question was not merely whether Pilate could define truth but whether he would hear the voice of Truth. Christ's sheep hear His voice. Those who are of God hear God's words. Pilate heard the sound physically, understood enough to recognize innocence, and still refused submission. Religious and intellectual knowledge can reach the ear without governing the heart. Many men say they would believe if God spoke clearly, though a King James Bible sits unread within reach. Their problem is not that God mumbles. They dislike what His voice commands. Truth calls sin by its name, strips man of self-righteousness, demands repentance, and makes Christ the only way. Fallen pride prefers a truth vague enough to admire and weak enough to ignore.

4. The Question That Refused to Wait for an Answer

"What is truth?" can be an honest question when asked by a man willing to receive the answer. Pilate's conduct reveals something else. John says, "And when he had said this, he went out again." He did not remain for Christ to answer, though the answer was standing before him. His question functioned as a dismissal. It carried the weary shrug of a politician accustomed to competing claims, manipulated witnesses, convenient narratives, and truth adjusted to serve power. Pilate may have considered certainty impossible or irrelevant. If so, that philosophy served him nicely, because a man who declares truth unknowable never has to risk his career obeying it. Intellectual fog makes excellent cover for moral retreat. Pilate did not need another lecture; he needed to act upon the truth he had already discovered: Jesus was innocent.

Skepticism frequently presents itself as humility. "Who can really know?" sounds cautious, broad-minded, and sophisticated. Yet Scripture does not praise men for perpetual uncertainty when God has spoken. Second Timothy 3:7 describes those who are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." They turn inquiry into a permanent residence because arrival would require decision. They study every road sign and refuse to travel. They compare beliefs, examine arguments, collect religious experiences, and congratulate themselves for avoiding dogmatism, while death continues toward them with tremendous dogmatic confidence. A man does not escape truth by delaying his verdict. He merely allows time to decide against him. Pilate walked away from Christ, but he did not walk beyond Christ's jurisdiction.

Truth is not created by personal perception. A statement does not become true because it feels authentic, gains social approval, or assists a preferred outcome. Two contradictory claims cannot both be true in the same sense merely because modern politeness dislikes choosing between them. If Christ rose bodily from the dead, the claim that He remained dead is false. If He is the only way to the Father, every contradictory way is false. The law of noncontradiction was not repealed because a generation discovered feelings. Men may call truth personal, but gravity remains remarkably impersonal when they step from a roof. Pilate's uncertainty did not change Christ's identity. Truth stands whether embraced, denied, ridiculed, or crucified. The crowd can nail it to wood, but three days later the tomb has an embarrassing vacancy.

5. "I Find in Him No Fault at All"

Pilate's verdict in John 18:38 was clear: "I find in him no fault at all." He did not say the evidence was inconclusive or that additional investigation was required. He found no fault. John 19:4 records him saying again, "I find no fault in him," and verse 6 repeats it a third time. Luke records Pilate declaring that he found no fault in Christ concerning the charges, that Herod found none, and that "nothing worthy of death is done unto him." The governor possessed the truth necessary for a righteous verdict. Christ was innocent. Pilate's repeated declarations therefore increased rather than reduced his guilt. Every "no fault" made the coming scourging more indefensible, the release of Barabbas more corrupt, and the crucifixion more wicked. Light rejected does not leave a man where it found him; it adds knowledge to his condemnation.

The faultlessness of Christ was not merely Pilate's legal opinion. It belonged to His sinless nature. First Peter 2:22 says He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Second Corinthians 5:21 calls Him the One "who knew no sin." Hebrews 4:15 says He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Judas confessed, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." The dying thief declared, "this man hath done nothing amiss." The centurion said, "Certainly this was a righteous man." Heaven, enemies, betrayer, criminal, governor, and executioner all supplied testimony. Christ did not die for crimes of His own. He died as the spotless Lamb bearing ours. The courtroom's innocent Prisoner was the only Person present qualified to become the sacrifice for every guilty soul surrounding Him.

Pilate attempted a compromise. Luke 23 records him proposing, "I will therefore chastise him, and release him." If Christ was innocent, chastisement was unjust. Pilate hoped a smaller wrong might satisfy men demanding a larger one. Compromise always congratulates itself for avoiding the worst while quietly performing what it admits is wrong. He had Jesus scourged, and the soldiers crowned Him with thorns, clothed Him in purple,

mocked His kingship, and struck Him. Pilate then presented the battered Christ and said, "Behold the man!" Perhaps he hoped the spectacle would awaken pity and settle the matter. It did not. A mob fed with concession becomes hungrier, not grateful. When authority sacrifices justice to calm wickedness, wickedness does not shake hands and go home. It asks what else is available.

6. Barabbas Released and the Innocent Son Condemned

Pilate offered the crowd a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. Barabbas was a robber, insurrectionist, and murderer. Christ was sinless, peaceful, and innocent. The contrast could scarcely have been sharper. One man deserved the Roman cross; the other had committed nothing worthy of death. Yet the crowd cried, "Not this man, but Barabbas." The guilty man walked free while the innocent Man took the path toward execution. In that dreadful exchange stands a picture of substitution. Barabbas could look at Christ and know that the cross prepared for guilt would be occupied by innocence. The record does not say Barabbas believed or understood the meaning, but the picture remains. Every saved sinner is a spiritual Barabbas. Christ took the judgment we deserved so that grace could release us.

The choice also reveals fallen man's hostility toward the true Christ. The world claims it would receive Jesus if only He appeared plainly, yet when He stood before men in perfect holiness, they preferred a murderer. Acts 3:14 says, "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you." This guilt was not confined to one ethnicity or class. Judas betrayed Him, religious rulers accused Him, a mob rejected Him, Pilate condemned Him, Roman soldiers crucified Him, and the sins of the whole world required His sacrifice. Calvary exposes humanity, not merely one group. The flesh prefers a criminal it can understand to a King before whom it must repent. Barabbas threatened Rome's order, but Christ threatened man's throne within his own heart. Men will tolerate dangerous rebels before surrendering sovereignty to the Son of God.

Pilate knew that envy motivated the accusers. Matthew 27:18 says, "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him." Knowledge continued piling up while courage continued shrinking. He knew the charges were corrupt, knew Christ was innocent, knew the crowd was manipulated, and knew his wife had suffered in a dream because of "that just man." Yet every warning met the same wall: Pilate wanted the crisis resolved without personal cost. He attempted to release Christ until the crowd cried, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." That sentence found the governor's nerve. The question was no longer abstract truth but whether truth might damage his position. Pilate's convictions survived until Caesar entered the sentence. Many men are lions for truth until truth reaches their paycheck, title, reputation, or chair.

7. The Hands That Water Could Never Clean

Matthew 27:24 records Pilate taking water and washing his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.” The gesture was public, dramatic, and completely useless. Pilate could not transfer his responsibility to the crowd after authorizing the sentence. Deuteronomy’s provision concerning innocent blood did not give a knowingly unjust judge permission to stage a handwashing ceremony while surrendering an innocent man. Pilate wanted the appearance of innocence without the action justice required. Religion and politics are both fond of symbolic gestures when obedience is expensive. A basin costs less than courage. He washed the hands that signed the order, but history still sees the stain because God never accepted the towel as evidence.

Pilate’s declaration “see ye to it” was another attempt to push moral responsibility away. Judas had used similar words when the chief priests told him, “What is that to us? see thou to that.” Guilty men enjoy passing the parcel when judgment is inside it. The religious rulers blamed Roman necessity, Pilate blamed the crowd, and the crowd followed its leaders. Yet each participant remained accountable for his own act. Acts 2:23 holds divine sovereignty and human guilt together: Christ was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” yet He was taken and crucified “by wicked hands.” God’s redemptive purpose did not make the hands righteous. The cross was eternally planned by God and wickedly performed by men. Providence overruled the crime without excusing a single criminal.

Pilate eventually sat down “in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement,” and delivered Jesus to be crucified. The governor who asked what truth was rendered a verdict against the Truth he had declared faultless. His failure was not intellectual complexity but moral surrender. He feared political accusation more than divine judgment. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare.” Pilate discovered the snare after stepping into it with both feet. He tried to save his position by sacrificing truth, but earthly positions expire. Caesar is gone, Rome’s empire has fallen, and Pilate’s judgment seat survives only because Scripture records the cowardice committed upon it. The man who feared being called no friend of Caesar became forever known as the governor who condemned Christ. Compromise promises to preserve reputation and then chooses the inscription placed upon the grave.

Conclusion

Pilate asked, “What is truth?” Scripture answers with unmistakable clarity. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He did not merely teach true ideas; He is

the Truth in personal, divine manifestation. In John 17:17 He prayed to the Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” Truth therefore has both an incarnate revelation in Jesus Christ and a written revelation in the words of God. The Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth,” and He guides according to what God has spoken. These witnesses never contradict one another. Christ does not lead a man against Scripture, the Holy Ghost does not inspire private revelations that correct the Bible, and biblical truth does not point away from Christ. The devil sells contradictions by printing “spiritual” across the package, but changing the label does not improve the contents.

Truth also has a cross and an empty tomb. The gospel is not an abstract philosophy proposed for polite discussion. “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,” was buried, and “rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” Those are historical, doctrinal facts upon which eternal salvation rests. If Christ did not rise, faith is vain and men remain in their sins. But Christ did rise, and the empty tomb overturned the verdicts of every earthly court that rejected Him. Pilate handed Jesus to soldiers, Joseph laid His body in a tomb, guards watched, and a stone sealed the entrance. None of them could keep the Truth buried. Men have attempted to bury Him beneath philosophy, ritual, criticism, politics, and false religion ever since. The grave performed better than they have, and even the grave failed after three days.

Every person eventually stands where Pilate stood—not upon a Roman pavement, but before the testimony of Jesus Christ. The question is not whether truth exists. God has spoken, Christ has come, Calvary has occurred, the tomb is empty, and the gospel has been declared. The question is whether the hearer will receive the Truth or walk away to protect something scheduled for destruction. A title, reputation, appetite, religion, relationship, or political advantage is a miserable exchange for the soul. Pilate asked the right question but loved his position too much to receive the Answer. He washed his hands while keeping his idol. The sinner needs something stronger than water: “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Truth stood before Pilate bound, bleeding, and rejected. One day Pilate will stand before that same Truth enthroned, and this time the Judge will not be asking questions.

9 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “What Must I Do to Be Saved?”: The Question Eternity Cannot Afford to Leave Unanswered

Key Passage: Acts 16:29–31

“Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

Introduction

The Philippian jailer did not ask his question from a cushioned seat in a religious classroom. The prison had shaken, the foundations had moved, the doors had opened, the prisoners' bands had fallen off, and the man charged with keeping them had drawn his sword to kill himself. Paul stopped him with the cry, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.” The jailer called for a light, sprang into the prison, fell trembling before Paul and Silas, brought them out, and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” He was not inviting a philosophical discussion or gathering material for a comparative-religion course. He believed himself to be standing on the edge of ruin and needed an answer before the next moment arrived. Men ask many questions that can wait until morning. This one carries eternity in its mouth and death at its back.

Paul and Silas answered with a sentence clear enough for a jailer at midnight and strong enough to carry a sinner into eternity: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” They did not tell him to keep the commandments, join a church, submit to a priest, perform a sacrament, reform his conduct, endure to the end, accumulate merit, or begin paying religious installments upon Calvary. They pointed him to a Person. The jailer asked what he must do, and the answer directed him to what Christ had already done. Salvation is not God rewarding a sinner who successfully climbs toward Heaven. It is God saving a sinner who believes on the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. Religion hands a drowning man a rulebook on swimming technique. The gospel throws him a finished lifeline and commands him to receive it.

The simplicity of that answer has offended religious pride ever since. Men will tolerate grace provided they are permitted to charge it rent. They will praise the cross if a priest, ceremony, ordinance, institution, or human achievement can be wedged between Christ and the sinner. But salvation by grace through faith leaves flesh without a ribbon to pin upon its chest. Romans 4:5 declares, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly.” God justifies the ungodly who believe. He does not wait until the ungodly have made themselves partly godly and then contribute the remaining amount. Christ did not make salvation possible for those who finish the job. He finished the work, and the sinner either believes the gospel or insults its sufficiency by trying to improve it.

1. A Gospel That Sang Behind Prison Doors

The events at Philippi began with the gospel invading new ground. Paul had seen the Macedonian vision and concluded that the Lord had called his company to preach the gospel there. Lydia heard the word, the Lord opened her heart, and her household received the apostolic ministry. Then Paul confronted a damsel possessed with “a spirit of divination” who had brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. When Paul commanded the spirit to come out in the name of Jesus Christ, “he came out the same hour.” The deliverance cost her masters their income. They tolerated spiritual bondage while it remained profitable, but the moment truth touched the cash drawer, they discovered deep civic concern. False religion is often willing to coexist with anything except a gospel that shuts down business.

The masters dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates, stirred the multitude, and accused them of troubling the city. The magistrates tore off their clothes, commanded them to be beaten, laid many stripes upon them, and cast them into prison. The jailer was charged to keep them safely, so he thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks. No trial is recorded, no lawful examination occurred, and no concern was shown for their Roman citizenship until the following day. The gospel had exposed a profitable devil, so respectable society answered with a beating. Men who call Bible preaching divisive rarely complain when sin tears a soul apart. Their concern for peace usually begins when truth interrupts an established arrangement.

“At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.” Their backs were torn, their feet were fast, and their location was the inner prison, yet the jail became a meetinghouse. They did not sing because the pain was imaginary or because imprisonment had become pleasant. They sang because Christ remained worthy when circumstances were hostile. The prisoners heard them, which means their suffering had become a pulpit. Anybody can testify after the chains fall off. Paul and Silas testified while the stocks were still locked. The devil had confined the preachers but had forgotten that songs fit between iron bars. Rome owned the building, the jailer held the keys, but Heaven controlled the acoustics.

2. The Earthquake That Brought a Man to the Edge

“Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken.” This was not a convenient tremor later interpreted as a spiritual experience. The doors opened and every prisoner’s bands were loosed. God knew the exact location of the prison, the construction of its foundations, the locks upon its doors, and the chains upon each prisoner. The earthquake struck with surgical accuracy. The LORD who shook Sinai and would later shake Heaven and earth required no permission from the Philippian magistrates before touching their jail. Men build institutions as though stone walls can

confine the word of God. Then God moves one finger beneath the foundation, and the security system develops a theological problem.

The jailer awoke, saw the prison doors open, and supposed the prisoners had escaped. He drew his sword and “would have killed himself.” Whatever consequences he expected from his superiors, he concluded that death by his own hand was preferable. Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.” The apostle had been beaten without justice and confined under this man’s supervision, yet he did not watch silently while the jailer died. Paul valued the soul of the man connected with his imprisonment. Gospel charity does not wait for the sinner to become likable. The jailer needed physical preservation long enough to hear the message of eternal salvation. Paul first stopped the sword, then pointed him to Christ.

The words “for we are all here” revealed something the jailer had not expected. The doors stood open, the bands were gone, and yet the prisoners remained. Paul and Silas could have interpreted the earthquake as God’s escape plan and disappeared into the night. Instead, they stayed, preventing the jailer’s death and creating the setting for the gospel. A miracle by itself did not save him. The earthquake awakened him, frightened him, and overturned his false security, but he still needed the word of the Lord. Conviction may shake a man, circumstances may humble him, and fear may bring him trembling into the room, but none of those things is the gospel. An earthquake can open a prison door; only Christ can open the door of eternal life.

3. The Question Every Sinner Must Ask

The jailer called for a light, sprang in, came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. Minutes earlier, he had occupied the position of authority. They were prisoners and he was keeper of the prison. Now he lay before the men whose feet he had secured. God had rearranged the room without consulting the seating chart. The jailer’s trembling did not save him, but it showed that the matter had ceased to be academic. He recognized that these beaten preachers possessed a message connected with the power that had just shaken his world. The sinner rarely thinks clearly about eternity while every earthly foundation feels permanent. God sometimes permits the foundation to move so a man will notice the grave beneath the carpet.

He brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The question acknowledged personal need. He did not ask what Philippi should do, what his wife believed, or whether his parents had practiced religion. Salvation is individual. Romans 14:12 says, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” A man may inherit property, money, nationality, and family traditions, but he cannot inherit

regeneration through natural birth. God has no household plan under which one member believes and everyone else enters Heaven as a dependent. The jailer said, “What must I do?” because another man’s faith could not settle his account.

His question also assumed the urgency of salvation. He did not ask how to improve his outlook, manage his fear, discover purpose, or become more religious. He needed to be saved. The biblical term presupposes danger. A man is saved from something. Scripture declares that the sinner is condemned already, under sin, spiritually dead, and headed toward judgment. “The wages of sin is death,” and after death comes judgment. The lake of fire is not a metaphor for an unpleasant memory, and Hell is not a therapeutic illustration designed to make better neighbors. Christ came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” A generation that refuses to admit it is lost will naturally find the word “saved” offensive. Men dislike rescue terminology when they are busy complimenting the burning building.

4. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”

Paul and Silas answered, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Every word matters. “Believe” identifies faith as the means of receiving salvation. “On” directs that faith away from self and onto Another. “The Lord” identifies Christ’s authority and divine identity. “Jesus” identifies the historical Saviour who was born, lived, died, and rose again. “Christ” identifies the promised Messiah and anointed One. Salvation does not rest upon faith in faith, sincerity, religion, or a vague higher power. The object is the Lord Jesus Christ. A man can believe fervently in a false object and perish sincerely. Poison does not become medicine because the patient trusts the label with all his heart.

To believe on Christ is more than admitting that a man named Jesus existed. Devils believe in God’s existence and tremble, but they are not candidates for salvation. Saving faith receives God’s testimony concerning His Son and rests upon Christ’s finished work as the only ground of acceptance. First Corinthians 15:3–4 declares the gospel: “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,” “he was buried,” and “he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” The jailer needed this message explained, which is why Acts 16:32 says, “And they spake unto him the word of the Lord.” The brief answer identified the requirement; the following instruction supplied the truth to be believed. Biblical faith has content. It is not a leap into darkness but reliance upon God’s revealed gospel.

Repentance does not compete with faith or become an additional work attached to it. Paul preached “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Repentance is a change of mind toward God and sin that turns the sinner from false confidence to Christ. It is not a period of emotional suffering by which a man helps pay for his sins. The jailer had undergone a complete reversal. He moved from guarding the preachers to falling before

them and asking how to be saved. Yet Paul did not place him upon a mourning bench until he produced an approved quantity of tears. The command was “Believe.” Genuine belief abandons the lies that kept a man from Christ, but the saving merit remains entirely in Christ, not in the dramatic quality of the sinner’s reaction.

5. “Thou Shalt Be Saved”—The Certainty of God’s Promise

The answer did not say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou mayest eventually be saved if thy future performance remains satisfactory.” It said, “thou shalt be saved.” That is divine certainty. Jesus said in John 5:24 that the believer “hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” The verbs do not leave the believer standing in a religious waiting room hoping his application survives final review. He has everlasting life, will not come into condemnation, and has passed from death unto life. God’s promise does not rest upon the believer’s ability to keep himself saved. Eternal life guarded by temporary human faithfulness would be eternal in name and probationary in fact.

Ephesians 1:13 says that after hearing the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and believing, the sinner is “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” Ephesians 4:30 says that believers are sealed “unto the day of redemption.” The Holy Spirit’s seal is not reopened every time the believer stumbles, nor is Christ’s body dismembered whenever one member fails. Salvation establishes a new position in Christ. The believer is justified, reconciled, accepted in the beloved, and made complete in Him. Sin in the Christian life remains serious and brings broken fellowship, chastening, consequences, loss of testimony, and possible loss of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. But chastening belongs to sons, not condemned criminals. God corrects His children; He does not unborn them.

The certainty of salvation magnifies Christ rather than encouraging sin. Romans 6 answers the foolish claim that grace licenses rebellion: “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” The believer should serve God because he has been saved, not in order to remain saved. Gratitude, the indwelling Spirit, the word of God, love for Christ, and the coming Judgment Seat supply powerful motives for holiness. A man dangling over Hell by the frayed rope of his own performance has no security and no biblical gospel. A man resting in Christ possesses both assurance and responsibility. Grace is not God pretending sin does not matter. Grace is God placing the believer in the One who paid for sin completely and then teaching him to deny ungodliness.

6. What Paul Did Not Add to the Answer

Paul did not tell the jailer to keep the law. Galatians 2:16 says, “a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” The law reveals sin, stops the boasting

mouth, and makes the whole world guilty before God. It is a mirror showing the dirt, not soap capable of removing it. A sinner cannot repair his lawbreaking by promising to keep the law tomorrow. One offense makes him guilty, and the flesh cannot produce the righteousness God requires. Romans 3:28 concludes, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Religious works merchants read “without” and immediately begin preparing a list of deeds they believe God forgot to include.

Paul did not place a sacrament, priesthood, or church institution between the jailer and Christ. First Timothy 2:5 says, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” One Mediator leaves no vacancy for an earthly priest to occupy as a dispenser of saving grace. Hebrews 10:14 says, “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” One offering perfected them for ever. Christ is not repeatedly offered, Calvary is not continued upon an altar, and grace is not stored in a religious treasury controlled by men wearing special garments. The veil was torn, the sacrifice was completed, and the believer has direct access through Christ. Religion keeps trying to sew the veil back together because open access is bad for the tollbooth business.

Paul did not tell the jailer to earn salvation by good works, reform himself before believing, or prove future endurance as a condition of present justification. Titus 3:5 declares, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.” Ephesians 2:8–9 says salvation is “by grace” “through faith,” “not of works, lest any man should boast.” Good works appear in the next verse as the purpose for which saved people are created in Christ Jesus, not as the price of their creation. Works are fruit, not root; evidence, not payment; service, not Saviour. A cart may be useful, but putting it before the horse does not improve transportation. Religion reverses God’s order and then blames the gospel when the wagon lands in the ditch.

7. The Household, the Baptism, and the Fruit Put in Their Proper Order

“And thy house” did not mean the jailer’s faith automatically saved every person living beneath his roof. Paul and Silas “spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.” The household received the word because each member needed to hear and believe. Verse 34 says the jailer rejoiced, “believing in God with all his house.” The text does not present unconscious infants receiving salvation through the decision of a household head. It presents a household hearing the word and believing. The promise extended to the house on the same terms extended to the jailer: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. God saves families one soul at a time. A father’s conversion can bring the gospel into the home, but it cannot regenerate another person by family authority.

The jailer and his household were baptized that same night, but baptism followed the preaching of the word and the response of faith. It was not included in the answer to “What must I do to be saved?” Paul had already said, “Believe.” Water baptism is the proper public testimony of a believer’s identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, but it does not wash away sin or produce the new birth. First Corinthians 1:17 states, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” If baptism were part of the saving gospel, Paul would have separated two things that could not be separated. The apostle knew the difference between the gospel that saves and the ordinance that follows salvation. Water can wash prison dust from a man’s skin; only Christ’s blood can cleanse his sin.

The jailer’s conduct changed immediately. He took Paul and Silas the same hour of the night, washed their stripes, brought them into his house, set meat before them, and rejoiced. The man connected with their confinement began tending their wounds. This change did not purchase salvation; it displayed the working of faith after salvation. The order is beautiful: the word was preached, Christ was believed, baptism followed, service appeared, and joy filled the house. Religion reverses the order by demanding service first and offering uncertain salvation later. Grace saves first and then transforms the direction of a life. The jailer did not perform good works to persuade God to accept him. Because he believed God’s promise, the hands that had managed prisoners began ministering to preachers.

Conclusion

The Philippian jailer asked the question eternity cannot afford to leave unanswered: “What must I do to be saved?” The answer remains exactly what the Holy Ghost recorded: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” No council possesses authority to revise it, no church can add admission fees, and no theologian may attach conditions Paul omitted. Galatians 1 pronounces a curse upon anyone preaching another gospel. The gospel is not improved by adding law, ritual, water, merit, endurance, or institutional control. Adding anything to Christ as a requirement for justification does not honor His work; it declares His work insufficient. A man who adds one penny to a paid debt is not helping the benefactor. He is denying that the receipt says “paid in full.”

Salvation is free to the sinner because it cost the Saviour everything. The Lord Jesus Christ left Heaven’s glory, took upon Him the form of a servant, became obedient unto death, and bore our sins upon the cross. He shed His blood, was buried, and rose again bodily on the third day. God now justifies the ungodly who believe on Him. The sinner does not bring a cleaned-up life, a spotless record, or a bundle of religious achievements. He comes guilty and receives the righteousness of God in Christ. Romans 6:23 contrasts the arrangements perfectly: “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ

our Lord.” Wages are earned; a gift is received. Religion keeps presenting God with timecards. Grace keeps pointing to the gift.

The jailer stood trembling because his earthly security had collapsed, but he went into his house rejoicing because he had believed God. The earthquake opened the prison; the gospel opened eternity. The same question stands before every sinner, though no physical foundation may shake beneath him. Death is approaching, judgment is appointed, and no religious alibi will survive the throne. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not believe on a church, ordinance, priest, personal reformation, family tradition, or emotional experience. Believe on Christ—crucified for your sins, buried, risen, sufficient, and able to save completely. The jailer asked what he must do, and the answer directed him to what Christ had already done. Eternity hangs upon whether a man believes that answer or tries to improve it.

10 of 10: The Questions Men Ask God – “What Shall Be the Sign of Thy Coming?”: The Question This Sleeping World Cannot Silence

Key Passage: Matthew 24:1–3

“And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Introduction

The disciples asked one of the greatest prophetic questions ever placed before the Lord Jesus Christ: “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” They asked it privately upon the Mount of Olives after Christ announced the destruction of the temple buildings they had admired. Their question concerned Jerusalem, the temple, Christ’s coming, and the end of the world. Those details are not religious decorations that can be removed while leaving the interpretation untouched. They establish the Jewish, prophetic, and earthly setting of the discourse. Jesus did not answer a gathering of Gentile members of the Body of Christ asking about the Rapture. The Body of Christ had not yet been formed, and the mystery later revealed through Paul had not yet been disclosed. Failure to recognize the audience turns Matthew 24 into a theological junk drawer where

Israel, the Church, the Tribulation, and the Second Advent are thrown together until no sock matches another.

Christ answered with warnings of deception, false Christs, wars, rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecution, betrayal, false prophets, abounding iniquity, the abomination of desolation, and great tribulation. These are not signs of mankind gradually improving until civilization votes Jesus into office. The prophetic road descends into unprecedented trouble before the King returns in power and great glory. The world prefers a future in which technology becomes saviour, government becomes providence, and fallen man eventually repairs himself with enough education, surveillance, and committee meetings. Christ described something else. Human rebellion ripens, deception multiplies, Israel becomes the center of prophetic crisis, and Heaven interrupts history through the visible return of its rightful King. Optimism sells better than judgment, but a cheerful forecast does not stop the storm Christ said would come.

The disciples wanted signs, but the Church is awaiting a shout, a voice, and a trumpet. Matthew 24 describes events connected with Israel and the visible Second Advent, while First Thessalonians 4 reveals Christ catching away His Church before the wrath of Daniel's seventieth week. One coming has saints caught up to meet the Lord in the air; the other has Christ descending visibly to the earth with the armies of Heaven. One is a mystery involving the dead in Christ and living members of His Body; the other is preceded by unmistakable signs and ends the Tribulation. Confusing them does not produce deeper prophecy. It produces a calendar assembled with a hammer. The world may mock His return, theologians may rearrange it, and date-setters may embarrass themselves every few years, but the King is not asking any of them for permission to come.

1. Three Questions beneath the Shadow of the Temple

Matthew 24 begins with Jesus departing from the temple while the disciples drew His attention to its buildings. Mark records one disciple saying, "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" The temple complex stood as an impressive center of Israel's religious life, but outward magnificence could not conceal national rejection of the Messiah. Christ had just pronounced woes upon the scribes and Pharisees, lamented over Jerusalem, and declared, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." The building still stood, sacrifices still burned, priests still ministered, and pilgrims still admired the architecture, yet Christ called the house desolate. A religious structure becomes empty before the walls collapse when the Lord of the house has been rejected. Men inspect the stonework; God inspects whether His Son is welcome inside.

Jesus answered their admiration with a prophecy: “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” The temple’s destruction would be literal, not an inward spiritual feeling. The Roman devastation of Jerusalem brought a historical fulfillment of that judgment, yet the discourse quickly reaches beyond that event to the future abomination of desolation, the great Tribulation, cosmic upheaval, and Christ’s visible appearing. Prophecy can contain an immediate horizon and a distant mountain without making either imaginary. The destruction of the temple demonstrated the certainty of Christ’s word, while the end-time setting awaits the fulfillment of the remaining details. A man who watched one prediction come to pass and then mocks the rest is like a fellow standing beneath the first raindrop and announcing that the storm has failed.

The disciples asked, “When shall these things be?” “What shall be the sign of thy coming?” and what shall be the sign “of the end of the world?” Their questions were connected but not identical. They wanted timing, a sign, and the conclusion of the age. Christ did not provide a date for curiosity merchants to print upon posters. He supplied a prophetic framework and repeated warnings concerning deception, endurance, vigilance, and readiness. Prophecy was never given to satisfy the flesh’s appetite for secret schedules while leaving the life unchanged. It reveals God’s program, exposes counterfeit claims, strengthens faith, and commands watchfulness. A man who can chart every seal while refusing to obey plain Church Age doctrine has learned to use prophecy as religious wallpaper.

2. The Beginning of Sorrows and the Machinery of Deception

Christ’s first warning was, “Take heed that no man deceive you.” Before wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, He warned about deception. The chief danger would not merely be outward disaster but false interpretation and counterfeit deliverers. “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” The Tribulation will become fertile ground for false messiahs because terrified people will accept almost any saviour who promises order. Satan manufactures counterfeit Christs because he cannot erase the expectation of the true One. He substitutes imitation for denial. The devil does not mind people looking for a christ if he controls the costume department.

Wars and rumours of wars follow, yet Christ said, “see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.” Nation rises against nation and kingdom against kingdom. Famines, pestilences, and earthquakes occur “in divers places.” These are called “the beginning of sorrows,” not the completion. The language resembles birth pangs: real, painful, and moving toward an appointed conclusion. Every conflict or earthquake in the present age should not be seized by an excitable prophet and advertised as the final fulfillment before supper. Wars and disasters have marked human history

throughout the Church Age. The specific concentration and prophetic relationship described by Christ belong to the future course leading through Daniel's seventieth week. Newspaper headlines may illustrate the world's condition, but Scripture must interpret prophecy—not the newsreader's pulse rate.

Deception intensifies through false prophets who “shall rise, and shall deceive many.” Iniquity abounds, and “the love of many shall wax cold.” Persecution produces betrayal, hatred, and offense. This is not a gentle religious awakening in which humanity discovers universal brotherhood. It is a pressure chamber exposing allegiance. Christ also declared, “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” The gospel of the kingdom in this prophetic setting must not be carelessly confused with Paul's gospel of the grace of God. Today the Church proclaims salvation through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Matthew 24 concerns the coming King and His approaching earthly kingdom during a period when God's dealings have turned prophetically toward Israel and the nations.

3. Daniel's Seventieth Week and the Abomination in the Holy Place

Christ supplied the great interpretive marker in Matthew 24:15: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place.” He named Daniel, identified the abomination, and placed it in a holy place connected with Jewish worship. Daniel 9 declares that seventy weeks are determined “upon thy people and upon thy holy city.” Gabriel was speaking to Daniel, a Jew, concerning Daniel's people and Jerusalem. The prophecy does not say seventy weeks were determined upon the Body of Christ and a spiritualized city. Israel means Israel, Jerusalem means Jerusalem, and a week means a week in the prophetic structure God gave. Replacement theology must repaint every road sign because the plain directions keep leading back to the Jew.

Daniel's seventieth week follows the cutting off of Messiah and concerns a coming prince who confirms a covenant for one week. “In the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” That language requires Jewish sacrifices and a sanctuary setting in which the abomination can stand. Paul's warning in Second Thessalonians 2 describes the man of sin sitting “in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” Christ, Daniel, and Paul speak in harmony concerning a future desecration centered upon a real temple. A man cannot stand in a metaphorical holy place, stop figurative sacrifices, and sit inside an allegorical temple while everybody congratulates himself for literal interpretation. Prophecy does not become more spiritual by becoming less grammatical.

When that abomination appears, Christ commands those “in Judaea” to flee into the mountains. A man on the housetop is not to return for his belongings; one in the field is not to retrieve his clothes. Christ mentions pregnant women, nursing mothers, winter, and the sabbath day. Every feature belongs to an earthly, Jewish setting. The Church is never commanded to flee Judaea when the Antichrist enters a temple. The Body of Christ spans nations and has no sabbath restriction under the law of Moses. Dragging the Church into the passage requires ignoring Judaea, the temple, Daniel, the sabbath, and Israel—approximately everything in the room except the punctuation. Right division does not remove the Bible from the Christian. It prevents him from stealing another group’s mail and wondering why the instructions do not fit.

4. Great Tribulation, Endurance, and Israel’s Elect

Christ called this period “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” This description prevents the passage from being exhausted by ordinary persecution, the destruction of Jerusalem, or the Church’s hardships throughout history. Many saints have suffered terribly, and Jerusalem’s ancient destruction was dreadful, but Christ identified a unique and unparalleled period. Daniel 12 calls it “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” Jeremiah 30 names it “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” yet promises that Jacob “shall be saved out of it.” The Tribulation is connected with Israel, the nations, the man of sin, divine wrath, and the preparation for Christ’s Second Advent. Calling every difficult century “the Tribulation” is prophetic inflation; eventually the word buys nothing.

Matthew 24:13 says, “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” That verse has been stolen repeatedly to deny eternal security for the Church Age believer. But the context concerns people living through the Tribulation, facing persecution, betrayal, false prophets, and the abomination of desolation. The “end” is the end about which the disciples asked, and salvation in the passage includes deliverance through the period into the kingdom. It is not Paul’s doctrinal explanation of justification for a member of Christ’s Body. Today the believer is saved by grace through faith, sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption, and kept by God’s power. A verse addressed to Tribulation survivors does not reach backward into Ephesians and break the seal because a works preacher needs help frightening his congregation.

Christ said that except those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved, “but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” The elect in this context are associated with Israel and the prophetic purpose of God. Isaiah 45:4 calls Israel “mine elect.” The word “elect” does not automatically mean the Church every time it appears any more than the word “servant” always identifies the same person. Context establishes identity. At Christ’s

visible coming, angels gather His elect “from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” God will preserve and regather Israel according to His covenant promises. The Church has not replaced that nation, inherited its land by allegory, or canceled the unconditional promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. God does not need theologians to revise His contracts after He signs them.

5. The Rapture the Church Awaits Before Wrath

The Rapture is revealed most clearly in Paul’s epistles. First Thessalonians 4 says, “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” The dead in Christ rise first, then living believers are “caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” The destination of that meeting is not a Judean mountain escape route. The Church meets Christ in the air. First Corinthians 15 calls this event a mystery and reveals that living believers will be changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” The disciples in Matthew 24 asked for signs; the Church received a mystery involving a shout, a voice, a trumpet, resurrection, transformation, and sudden removal.

The Rapture occurs before the outpouring of Tribulation wrath. First Thessalonians 1:10 says believers wait for God’s Son from Heaven, “which delivered us from the wrath to come.” First Thessalonians 5:9 declares, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” Revelation 3:10 promises, “I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world.” The promise concerns deliverance from the hour itself, not merely spiritual protection while enduring its judgments. Noah entered the ark before the Flood, Lot left Sodom before the fire, and the Church will be removed before the seals open upon Daniel’s final week. God does not beat Christ’s Bride beneath Tribulation judgments and then collect her at the reception.

The Rapture is grounded in the believer’s position in Christ, not in his success at decoding contemporary events. Every saved member of Christ’s Body will be caught up, including carnal believers who may suffer loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The event does not reward an elite group of especially alert saints while leaving less-informed members behind to improve their theology under Antichrist. First Corinthians 15 says, “We shall all be changed.” The Body of Christ is one organism and will not be amputated at the clouds. Watchfulness affects present faithfulness and future reward, but union with Christ determines participation in the Rapture. A believer may lose a crown; he will not lose his Head.

6. The Visible Second Advent in Power and Great Glory

Matthew 24:27 describes the Second Advent: “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” This is not a secret event perceived only by a select group. Lightning across the heavens is visible, sudden, and unmistakable. Christ warned against reports that He was hiding in the desert or secret chambers. His true return will require no advertising agency to establish its authenticity. Revelation 1:7 declares, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him.” The first coming occurred in humility, with the world largely unaware of the Child in Bethlehem. The Second Advent arrives with Heaven opened, armies following, nations mourning, and the King’s identity beyond dispute.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days” the sun is darkened, the moon ceases to give her light, the stars fall from Heaven, and the powers of the heavens are shaken. Then appears “the sign of the Son of man in heaven.” The sequence is explicit: after the Tribulation, Christ appears visibly. This is the Second Advent, not the pre-Tribulation Rapture. At the Rapture, believers go up to meet Christ in the air. At the Second Advent, Christ comes down to execute judgment and establish His kingdom. Zechariah 14 says His feet will stand upon the Mount of Olives. Colossians 3:4 says that when Christ appears, the Church will “appear with him in glory.” Saints must first be gathered to Him before they can return with Him. Even a child understands that a passenger must board before he can arrive with the driver.

Christ’s visible return ends the counterfeit dominion of the beast and brings the prophetic kingdom promised to Israel. Revelation 19 presents the Lord upon a white horse, judging and making war in righteousness. His name is called “The Word of God,” and upon His vesture and thigh is written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” Revelation 20 follows with the thousand-year reign. This is not the Church gradually converting the world, nor is it a symbolic description of Christ ruling invisibly through the present age. The nations are not presently submitting to a rod of iron, Satan is not presently bound in the bottomless pit, and creation is not presently enjoying millennial restoration. Calling this mess the kingdom requires a theological imagination strong enough to make a garbage dump resemble Eden.

7. The Scoffers Who Mistake Patience for Prophetic Failure

Second Peter 3 warns that “there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,” asking, “Where is the promise of his coming?” Their question does not arise from careful biblical concern but from moral rebellion. They walk after their lusts and then construct a worldview in which judgment never arrives. They argue that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation,” deliberately ignoring the Flood. Their doctrine serves their appetite. If God never intervened before and never will again, man can sin without expecting the Judge to enter history. Uniformity becomes an alibi. The scoffer’s

calendar has no room for divine appointments because he has written himself into every available date.

Peter answers that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. The verse is not a formula allowing every use of “day” in Scripture to become a thousand years. It declares that God is not bound by man’s impatient measurement of time. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.” The apparent delay expresses longsuffering, because God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Every day the scoffer uses to mock Christ’s return is a day God has mercifully allowed him to hear the gospel. He mistakes the open door for proof that no Judge owns the house. Patience does not cancel judgment; it postpones it while mercy speaks.

Date-setters make the opposite error by claiming knowledge God has not supplied. They identify a year, month, day, calendar calculation, astronomical arrangement, political event, or private revelation and announce what Scripture does not authorize them to know. When the prediction fails, scoffers mock the Bible instead of the man who ignored it. Christ said, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” Imminence produces readiness, not date charts with expiration dates. The Church is to wait for God’s Son from Heaven, preach the gospel, serve faithfully, and redeem the time. The wise believer watches the door; the fool sells tickets for an hour the Owner never disclosed.

Conclusion

The disciples’ question opened a prophetic discourse reaching from Jerusalem’s temple to the visible coming of the Son of man. Christ warned of deception, wars, famine, pestilence, persecution, false prophets, the abomination of desolation, great Tribulation, cosmic signs, and His return in power and great glory. These details belong together and must remain in their revealed setting. Israel is not the Church, Daniel’s seventieth week is not the ordinary course of the Church Age, the Rapture is not the Second Advent, and salvation by grace is not overturned by instructions given to those enduring Tribulation conditions. Right division does not weaken prophecy. It takes the labels God placed upon His own calendar seriously.

The Church is not watching for Antichrist to enter a rebuilt temple before Christ may receive His Body. We are waiting for the Lord Himself. “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The next event for the Church is not flight from Judaea but a meeting in the air. The dead in Christ will rise, living believers will be changed, and together we will be caught up. After Daniel’s seventieth week runs its appointed course, Christ will return visibly with His saints, destroy the beast’s

power, deliver Israel, judge the nations, and establish His kingdom. The prophetic calendar contains distinct appointments. Drawing arrows across every page does not make a man a Bible scholar; sometimes it merely proves he owns several colored pens.

“What shall be the sign of thy coming?” remains a question this sleeping world cannot silence. The world mocks because the sky appears unchanged, business continues, governments boast, and graves keep filling. Yet every passing day moves history toward the hour God appointed. The Christ who departed visibly will return visibly, literally, personally, and victoriously. Men may debate the signs, spiritualize the promises, move Israel out of the text, drag the Church through wrath, or announce another failed date. None of it alters one word. The trumpet will sound, the Church will rise, Daniel’s final week will unfold, and the heavens will open for the King. Prophecy does not depend upon the world believing it. The King is coming, and He is not waiting for the world to vote.

The Questions Men Ask God

Honest Cries, Foolish Challenges, and Final Answers

Conclusion

The questions have now been asked, the witnesses have testified, and the answers stand written in a Book that has outlived every man who tried to correct it. From Cain’s bloodstained field to Christ’s promised return in the clouds, Scripture has carried us through honest cries, foolish challenges, wounded faith, rebellious pride, religious blindness, political cowardice, saving conviction, and prophetic expectation. Ten men or groups of men stood before God with questions, but in every case the question exposed more than the situation. It exposed the questioner. The words revealed whether the heart wanted truth, mercy, relief, authority, salvation, or merely an excuse. Man thinks he is examining God when he asks the question. The Bible shows that God is examining man through the answer. The sinner brings a question mark into the courtroom and discovers that the Judge has already opened the books.

God never feared one of these questions. Cain could not intimidate Him, Abraham did not inform Him, Moses did not identify something He had forgotten, Job did not uncover a flaw in His government, David did not awaken Him from sleep, Habakkuk did not alert Him to national corruption, Nicodemus did not surprise Him with religious ignorance, Pilate did not place truth beyond His reach, the jailer did not catch Him without a plan of salvation, and the disciples did not ask for a future God had neglected to arrange. The LORD knew

every question before the tongue formed it and possessed every answer before the foundation of the world. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” Heaven has never called an emergency meeting because a man asked something difficult.

The central distinction has remained clear from the beginning: not every question is honest merely because it ends with a question mark. Cain asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” after murdering Abel and lying to the face of God. His question was not a searchlight looking for truth; it was a smoke bomb thrown by guilt. He hoped sarcasm might distract the Judge from the blood beneath his feet. It did not. Abel’s mouth had been silenced, but his blood found a voice, and the ground entered evidence for the prosecution. Cain teaches that rebellion often becomes philosophical only after it has become guilty. A sinner refuses the plain command, commits the deed, hides the evidence, and then suddenly develops profound questions about morality. His conscience catches fire, and he requests a debate about the nature of smoke.

Abraham asked from another spirit entirely. “Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” was the plea of a man who knew judgment was deserved but still sought mercy before it fell. He did not excuse Sodom, redefine its sin, or accuse God of cruelty. He appealed to the righteousness of the Judge: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Abraham drew near boldly while remembering that he was “but dust and ashes.” That is the proper balance of intercession. Faith may approach the throne, but it does not climb into it. Abraham pleaded from fifty righteous people down to ten, and when Sodom failed the count, God still removed Lot before the fire descended. The smoke over the plain became God’s final answer: He delivered the righteous and judged the wicked without confusing one for the other.

Moses asked, “What is his name?” because Egypt possessed enough false gods to stock every temple while lacking one deity capable of delivering a single Hebrew slave. The LORD answered, “I AM THAT I AM.” He did not introduce Himself as one power among many or request a vacant shelf in Pharaoh’s pantheon. He revealed Himself as the eternal, self-existent, uncreated God who borrows nothing and supplies everything. Moses carried that name into Egypt, and Pharaoh foolishly asked, “Who is the LORD?” The answer came through ten plagues and a divided sea. Egypt’s gods needed priests to carry them; Israel’s God carried a nation out of bondage. Pharaoh had the throne, army, economy, and monuments, but Moses had the name. One word from the I AM outweighed every stone in Egypt.

Job’s question came from ashes deep enough to swallow shallow preaching whole. “Why dost thou not pardon my transgression?” was not asked by a comfortable man

experimenting with religious ideas. Job had buried his children, lost his possessions, suffered in his body, endured his wife's despair, and listened while friends turned his wounds into evidence for crimes they invented. The reader saw Satan's accusation in Heaven, but Job did not. He experienced the blows without being shown the machinery behind them. When God finally answered, He did not explain every event. He revealed His wisdom, power, and sovereignty through questions Job could not answer. Job wanted the storm diagrammed; God stepped from the whirlwind. Faith did not receive every reason, but it saw the One who remained righteous when every reason was hidden.

David asked, "How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD?" He felt that God had hidden His face, sorrow had occupied his heart, his own counsel had become a prison, and the enemy remained exalted. Yet David carried the feeling of abandonment to the God he feared had abandoned him. That was not atheism. It was bruised faith refusing to let go. Psalm 13 begins with four cries of "How long?" and ends with, "I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." The psalm does not report that the enemy had fallen before the song began. David's confidence changed before his circumstances did. Heaven's silence had not become Heaven's absence. The clock was still running even though the suffering man could not see its hands.

Habakkuk asked, "Why dost thou shew me iniquity?" because Judah's law was slacked, wrong judgment proceeded, violence increased, and the wicked compassed about the righteous. He cried for God to act and then discovered that God's answer would be more frightening than the silence. The LORD was raising the Chaldeans as an instrument of judgment. Habakkuk wanted corruption corrected; God announced invasion. The prophet then had to learn that divine methods are not required to pass inspection at the desk of human reason. He climbed the watchtower, received the written vision, and was commanded to wait because "the just shall live by his faith." He began by questioning God's government and ended rejoicing in God's salvation though every earthly supply failed. The empty stall could not empty God.

Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?" He came to Christ carrying religion's finest luggage: ancestry, morality, education, authority, Scripture knowledge, and membership among the Pharisees. Jesus looked past every credential and said, "Ye must be born again." Nicodemus did not need another lesson on improving Adam's fallen nature. He needed life from the Spirit of God. Ceremony could not produce it, water baptism could not manufacture it, law-keeping could not earn it, and scholarship could not discover it. Flesh remained flesh no matter how respectfully it dressed for worship. God did not send His Son to operate a religious repair shop for Adam. He came to give life to men dead in trespasses and sins.

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" while Truth incarnate stood before him. He then walked out without waiting for the answer. He repeatedly declared, "I find in him no fault at all," received his wife's warning concerning "that just man," recognized the envy of the accusers, and possessed authority to release the innocent Prisoner. Yet when the crowd threatened his standing with Caesar, Pilate surrendered truth to convenience. He washed his hands, but water could not remove the guilt from his verdict. The governor's problem was not a lack of evidence. It was a lack of courage. He knew enough to act and loved his position too much to obey. The man who asked whether truth could be known became forever known for rejecting the Truth he had already found.

The Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" while trembling between an opened prison and eternity. Paul and Silas answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The answer did not place the jailer beneath a priest, inside a sacramental machine, under the law, or upon a treadmill of religious performance. It pointed him to Christ. The gospel declares that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day. Salvation is received through faith because the saving work has already been completed. The jailer asked what he must do, and the answer directed him to what Jesus had done. Religion keeps submitting additions to Calvary as though the Son of God died without finishing the assignment.

The disciples asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Christ answered with a prophetic framework involving Israel, Jerusalem, the temple, Daniel's seventieth week, the abomination of desolation, great Tribulation, cosmic upheaval, and His visible Second Advent. Right division prevents the Church from being dragged into passages addressed to people fleeing Judaea and concerned about the sabbath day. The Church awaits a different revealed event: the Lord descending with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. The dead in Christ will rise, living believers will be changed, and the Body will meet its Head in the air before Tribulation wrath. Later Christ will return visibly with His saints to judge, deliver Israel, and establish His kingdom. God's prophetic calendar does not become clearer when somebody spills all the appointments into one box.

These questions demonstrate that God answers in different ways according to His wisdom and the questioner's need. Cain received exposure and judgment. Abraham received assurance through deliverance. Moses received a name and commission. Job received a revelation of God greater than the explanation he demanded. David received renewed trust before visible relief. Habakkuk received a command to watch, write, wait, and live by faith. Nicodemus received the doctrine of the new birth. Pilate received truth sufficient to condemn his cowardice. The jailer received the saving gospel. The disciples received

prophecy that reaches to the return of the King. God's answers are never defective, though they frequently refuse to flatter the expectations of the man asking.

The Book also teaches that an unanswered question is not necessarily an ignored question. God may answer immediately, delay the visible answer, correct the assumptions beneath the question, or reveal that the questioner could not yet carry the explanation he demands. Job never received the heavenly transcript the reader possesses. David did not receive a date beside "How long?" Habakkuk had to wait for an appointed time. Abraham watched smoke rise without initially seeing where Lot had gone. Faith must learn that God's silence is not proof of God's absence and that delay is not evidence of divine confusion. A child may not understand the physician's instrument, but his lack of understanding does not make the physician cruel. Human sight is short, pain is loud, and providence is deep. God remains right when man cannot see past the next hour.

Still, Scripture never uses mystery as a soft cushion for laziness and disobedience. Some men complain that God has not answered while His written answer lies unopened on the table. They ask for guidance after ignoring the last clear command, seek peace while clinging to sin, demand truth while correcting the Bible, and request a sign while refusing the gospel. They want fresh revelation because the old revelation has become inconvenient. God is under no obligation to provide decorative lighting for a road He has already forbidden. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." When the lamp exposes the wrong path, the answer is not to unscrew the bulb and pray for more illumination.

The questioner must therefore examine his motive. Does he want truth, or does he want ammunition against truth? Is he pleading like Abraham or evading like Cain? Is he crying like Job or dismissing like Pilate? Is he seeking God's authority like Moses or challenging that authority like Pharaoh? Is he asking how to be saved because he will believe the answer, or hoping the answer will contain enough religious labor to preserve his pride? God welcomes honest inquiry, but honesty is measured by what a man does when the answer arrives. A man who repeatedly asks while refusing every biblical answer is not seeking light. He is shopping for darkness at a discount.

The great answer running beneath all ten studies is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the righteous Judge before whom Cain stood guilty and the source of mercy to which Abraham appealed. He is the eternal I AM revealed to Moses, the living Redeemer Job expected, the salvation in which David and Habakkuk rejoiced, the Son lifted up before Nicodemus, the Truth abandoned by Pilate, the Lord upon whom the jailer believed, and the King whose coming the disciples anticipated. God's answers do not end in an abstract system. They converge upon a Person. Colossians 2:3 says that in Christ "are hid all the treasures of

wisdom and knowledge.” Fallen man keeps searching the attic of philosophy while the treasure stands at the door.

Christ answers man’s deepest problem because man’s deepest problem is not intellectual limitation, social disadvantage, political disorder, or emotional dissatisfaction. It is sin. Man is guilty before a holy God, dead in trespasses, alienated from divine life, unable to justify himself, and headed toward judgment. A library cannot pardon him, a government cannot regenerate him, a therapist cannot reconcile him to God, and a church ceremony cannot raise his dead spirit. The answer required blood, death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, shed the blood that cleanses from all sin, and rose bodily from the grave. The cross was not God giving advice. It was God providing the only sacrifice capable of saving the guilty.

Salvation therefore remains as plain as Paul gave it to the jailer: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Not believe and earn, believe and join, believe and endure to become justified, believe and submit to a human priesthood, or believe and let water complete what blood could not finish. The sinner is justified by grace through faith without the deeds of the law. The moment he believes the gospel, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, placed into Christ, and given eternal life. Good works follow as the fruit of salvation, but fruit does not purchase the tree. Religion puts the cart before the horse and then spends centuries holding conferences on why the wagon never moves.

For the believer, these questions demand more than admiration. Cain warns against resentment, concealed sin, and indifference toward others. Abraham calls us to intercede before judgment falls. Moses teaches that divine work requires divine authority rather than human confidence. Job teaches trust when explanations disappear. David teaches the soul to sing while the answer remains delayed. Habakkuk teaches faithfulness when nations rot and judgment gathers. Nicodemus warns that religious familiarity cannot replace spiritual life. Pilate exposes the cowardice of knowing truth without defending it. The jailer keeps the gospel clear. The disciples remind us that history is moving toward the return of the King. A lesson admired but never obeyed becomes another witness against the hearer.

The Church must especially refuse the spirit of Pilate in an age drunk on convenient uncertainty. We possess the word of God, the gospel of Christ, the revelation of sound doctrine, and the command to preach it. This is no hour for preachers to stand before the crowd washing their hands while truth is led away. The pulpit does not need another manager trained to measure every sentence by public reaction. It needs men who believe the Book strongly enough to say what it says when Caesar, the crowd, the religious establishment, and the offering plate prefer silence. Pilate preserved his position for a

moment and branded his name with cowardice for generations. A man never truly saves his reputation by sacrificing the truth that will judge it.

The coming of Christ supplies the final earthly answer to every scoffer who asks, “Where is the promise of his coming?” The Lord is not slack concerning His promise. Divine patience is not prophetic failure; it is mercy allowing sinners additional time to repent and believe. The same Christ who departed visibly will return according to the written word. First He will catch away His Church before the wrath to come. After Daniel’s seventieth week, He will descend in power and great glory, deliver Israel, overthrow the beast, judge the nations, and sit upon the throne promised to David. Men may move Israel out of prophecy, place the Church inside Jacob’s trouble, turn the Millennium into a metaphor, and spiritualize the throne until only the upholstery remains. The King will still return on schedule.

When He comes, the world’s questions will not delay Him. No government will require additional hearings, no court will issue a stay, no military will defend the beast, and no theologian will request that Christ reconsider the interpretation. Revelation 19 identifies Him as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” The Lamb once stood silent before His shearers; the Lion will not return asking permission. Pilate’s judgment seat is dust, Caesar’s empire is history, and every proud ruler eventually becomes a name in a book. Christ remains. He was before Abraham, stood before Pilate, rose from Joseph’s tomb, sits at the right hand of the Father, and will stand upon the earth at the latter day. History is not wandering. It is approaching an appointment with Jesus Christ.

The questions men ask God will one day give way to the questions God asks men. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” “Who shall stand when he appeareth?” “What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” Those questions cannot be dismissed with philosophy, sarcasm, religious credentials, or political authority. Romans 3:19 declares that every mouth will be stopped and all the world will become guilty before God. The rebel who spent his life demanding answers will have none when the books are opened. The Great White Throne will not host a debate. God has already provided the evidence, issued the warning, sent His Son, preserved His word, and proclaimed the gospel. Judgment does not owe another explanation to the man who rejected them all.

Pilate once asked the crowd, “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?” That question now turns toward every reader. What will you do with Jesus Christ? You cannot reduce Him to a teacher and escape His deity. You cannot admire His morality and avoid His cross. You cannot place Him beside other religious figures when He declared Himself the only way to the Father. You cannot postpone Him indefinitely because death keeps no man’s calendar. You will receive Him, reject Him, ignore Him, distort Him, or attempt to

replace Him, but you will not remain neutral. A man who refuses to decide has decided to remain condemned.

If you are lost, the answer is not hidden. Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. If you are saved but suffering, trust the God who remained sovereign over Job's ash heap and David's silent night. If you are burdened for others, draw near as Abraham did and plead before the fire falls. If you face an impossible assignment, remember the I AM who sent Moses into Egypt. If wickedness surrounds righteousness and wrong judgment proceeds, climb the watchtower with Habakkuk and live by faith. If religion has substituted ceremony for life, hear Christ say, "Ye must be born again." If courage is failing before the crowd, look at Pilate's basin and remember that water cannot wash away compromise.

The final word belongs neither to Cain's defiance, Job's ashes, David's enemy, Babylon's armies, Nicodemus's confusion, Pilate's verdict, Philippi's prison, nor the world's mockery. It belongs to God. His word created the world, exposed sin, promised redemption, announced the cross, opened the grave, established the gospel, revealed the Rapture, and guaranteed the return of the King. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away. Human questions rise for a moment and disappear with the breath that asked them. God's answers remain after the grave has closed over every critic.

Ask honestly, listen humbly, believe completely, and obey promptly. Do not imitate Cain by hiding guilt beneath defiance or Pilate by hiding cowardice beneath skepticism. Come like the jailer, willing to receive the plain answer. Stand like Habakkuk, prepared to wait upon the written word. Trust like David when Heaven seems silent. Confess with Job that some things are too wonderful for limited sight. Intercede like Abraham before judgment arrives. Go forward like Moses under the authority of the I AM. Watch for Christ according to the rightly divided Scriptures. God is not frightened by the question in your mouth, but you should be deeply concerned about what your heart will do with His answer.

The series began with a murderer asking whether he was responsible for his brother and ended with disciples asking about the return of the King. Between those questions stands the entire human condition: guilt, mercy, revelation, suffering, delay, corruption, spiritual death, rejected truth, saving grace, and prophetic hope. God has answered every essential matter. The sinner is guilty, mercy is available, truth is knowable, salvation is finished, the believer is secure, Israel has not been forgotten, the Church will be caught away, judgment will come, and Jesus Christ will reign. The question is no longer whether God has spoken. The question is whether man will believe Him.

One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Cain will not be sarcastic then. Pharaoh will not ask who the LORD is. Pilate will not walk away. The scoffer will not laugh. Every foolish challenge will collapse, every secret motive will be exposed, and every final answer will stand vindicated. The wise man bows now, while grace invites and Christ saves. The fool waits until judgment supplies the answer in fire. God has spoken. The Book is open. The blood has been shed. The tomb is empty. The trumpet is coming. The King is on His way.

THE QUESTIONS MEN ASK GOD

HONEST CRIES, FOOLISH CHALLENGES, AND FINAL ANSWERS

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." — Jeremiah 33:3

My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.
— Isaiah 55:8

CENTRAL TRUTH

God welcomes the honest cry, exposes the foolish challenge, and answers by His word, His work, or His revealed Person. The question never puts the Judge on trial; it reveals the heart of the questioner.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
— Matthew 7:7

1 "AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?" Genesis 4:9 • Rebellion joined a lie to sarcasm after murder. • God asked for confession, not information. • Abel's blood testified when Cain would not. Genesis 4:10 GOD'S ANSWER: Guilt exposed; judgment pronounced.	2 "WILT THOU ALSO DESTROY THE RIGHTEOUS WITH THE WICKED?" Genesis 18:23 • Intercession rested upon the Judge's character. • Abraham spoke boldly, yet as "dust and ashes." Genesis 18:27 • Lot was removed before the fire fell. Genesis 19:22, 29 GOD'S ANSWER: The Judge distinguishes righteous from wicked.	3 "WHAT IS HIS NAME?" Exodus 3:13 • The commission required divine authority. • "I AM THAT I AM" revealed the self-existent LORD. Exodus 3:14 • Pharaoh's "Who is the LORD?" was answered in judgment. Exodus 5:2; 12:12 GOD'S ANSWER: The Name was revealed; Egypt's gods were judged.	4 "WHY DOST THOU NOT PARDON MY TRANSGRESSION?" Job 7:21 • A wounded saint spoke honestly from the ash heap. • The cause was hidden, the grief was real, and the friends were wrong. • God answered from the whirlwind by revealing Himself. Job 38:1-3; 42:5-6 GOD'S ANSWER: Trust the God who commands the storm.	5 "HOW LONG WILT THOU FORGET ME?" Psalm 13:1 • "How long?" rose while the enemy seemed to triumph. • Heaven's silence was not God's absence. • Prayer turned complaint into trust and song. Psalm 13:5-6 GOD'S ANSWER: Mercy was remembered before circumstances changed.
6 "WHY DOST THOU SHEW ME INIQUITY?" Habakkuk 1:3 • Violence, strife, and slacked law filled Judah. Habakkuk 1:2-4 • God asked the Chaldeans; the answer was harder than the question. Habakkuk 1:5-11 • Watch, write, wait, live by faith, and rejoice. Habakkuk 2:1-4; 3:17-19 GOD'S ANSWER: God's government stands above man's inspection.	7 "HOW CAN A MAN BE BORN WHEN HE IS OLD?" John 3:4 • A religious ruler still lacked spiritual life. • "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." John 3:6 • The lifted-up Son gives everlasting life to the believer. John 3:14-16 GOD'S ANSWER: New birth, not religious repair.	8 "WHAT IS TRUTH?" John 18:38 • Truth incarnate stood before Pilate. John 14:6; 18:37-38 • He found no fault, yet yielded Christ to the mob. John 19:4; 6, 16 • Washed hands could not cleanse judicial guilt. Matthew 27:24 GOD'S ANSWER: Skepticism unmasked itself as cowardice.	9 "WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?" Acts 16:30 • The earthquake stripped away false security. Acts 16:26-30 • "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31 • The word was preached; belief came; baptism testified. Acts 16:32-34 GOD'S ANSWER: What the sinner must do rests upon what Christ has done.	10 "WHAT SHALL BE THE SIGN OF THY COMING?" Matthew 24:3 • The setting concerns Israel, Jerusalem, the temple, and Daniel's seventieth week. • THE RAPTURE: shout, voice, trumpet; saints caught up. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 • THE SECOND ADVENT: visible return in glory. Matthew 24:29-30; Acts 1:11; Revelation 19:11-16 GOD'S ANSWER: The Church awaits Christ; the world faces signs and wrath.

WHAT THE QUESTION REVEALS

REBELLION Cain and Pilate: evasion, sarcasm, expediency.	INTERCESSION Abraham: boldness governed by reverence.	SUFFERING FAITH Job, David, Habakkuk: grief carried toward God.	SEEKING LIGHT Moses, Nicodemus, the jailer, the disciples: revelation received and responsibility increased.
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HOW GOD ANSWERS

1 EXPOSES SIN Cain; Pilate	2 UPHOLDS HIS CHARACTER Abraham	3 REVEALS HIS NAME AND PERSON Moses; Nicodemus	4 DEEPENS FAITH Job; David; Habakkuk	5 GIVES GOSPEL AND PROPHECY the jailer; the disciples
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PRACTICAL EXAMINATION

Before asking, examine the asker.

- Am I confessing, interceding, suffering, seeking, or evading?
- Bring honest grief to God.
- Submit human reason to Scripture.
- Receive Christ's finished work.
- Wait on God's time.

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts.
— Psalm 139:23

GOD IS NOT THREATENED BY AN HONEST QUESTION; HE IS NOT CROSS-EXAMINED BY A GUILTY QUESTIONER. THE JUDGE STILL HAS THE LAST WORD.

VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES