



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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The Amazing Virgin Birth

SURELY THE MOST WIDELY CELEBRATED HOLIDAY around the world each year—generating more attention, more excitement, and more anticipation from people than any other special day—is Christmas. Thanks to the huge amount of advertising and publicity that promotes the holiday with seemingly greater intensity and duration from one season to the next, Christmas has transcended national and cultural barriers.

Most people celebrate Christmas; but so few men and women understand what and whom it really commemorates. They probably have heard that it marks the birth of a great teacher from centuries ago; that they should emulate Him by promoting peace, good will, and charity during the Christmas

season; and that they should strive to make the holiday less materialistic and more family oriented. But so many people, even Christians, never pause to fully consider the One who is at the center of the holiday. And so few ever truly grasp the historical and theological significance of what occurred that first Christmas.

Christmas commemorates a divine event and a divine person—the miraculous birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Unlike most of our holidays, Christmas is not a celebration of an event strictly from human history that commemorates a human achievement or recognizes a national milestone. An authentic celebration of Christmas honors the most wonderful of divine accomplishments. It recognizes that the eternal, sovereign God came to earth as a human being to live a righteous life among His people and then to die as a perfect sacrifice to deliver from the wrath of God all who repent and believe.

With those truths in mind, we dare not trivialize or sentimentalize the persons and events surrounding the birth of Christ. We dare not ignore the significance of who He is and what He accomplished on behalf of sinners. And we must not hurry through the texts of familiar Christmas passages, thinking that just because we’ve read and heard them many times before, we know all they have to teach us.

EXTRAORDINARY BIRTHS are cer-

tainly not unprecedented in biblical history. As part of the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised to send a son to Abraham and Sarah ([Genesis 17:19–22](#)).

[Genesis 17:19-22 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁹ But God said, “No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.

²¹ But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.”

²² When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.”

They were both beyond normal childbearing ages and laughed at the prospect of being parents, yet they ultimately witnessed the miraculous arrival of their son, Isaac ([Genesis 21:1–3](#)).

[Genesis 21:1-3 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ “Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.

² So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.

³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.”

In [Judges 13](#), an angel of the Lord told Manoah and his barren wife that they would have a special son. True to the heavenly messenger’s words, Samson entered the world and for a time delivered the Israelites from the oppression of the Philistines.

Samuel, the first prophet, final judge, and anointer of kings, also demonstrated in his birth the providential power of God. He was the answer to the faithful, persevering prayers of his godly mother, Hannah, who had remained childless until then. John the Baptist’s mother, Elizabeth, was also unable to have children until God graciously intervened when she was in her sixties or seventies and made her the mother of the forerunner of Christ ([Luke](#)

[1:15–17, 76–79](#)).

[Luke 1:15-17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

¹⁶ “And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

¹⁷ “It is he who will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

[Luke 1:76-79 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷⁶ “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on **BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS**;

⁷⁷ To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

⁷⁹ **TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace.**”

But none of those special births was as amazing as the virgin birth of the Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

REGARDING THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Even though the fact of Jesus’ virgin birth is clearly and concisely stated in Scripture, the unconverted mind of sinful humanity, as with all essential doctrines of the Christian faith, resists embracing the truth of His unique birth.

First of all, ancient mythologies and world religions counterfeited Christ’s virgin birth with a proliferation of bizarre stories and inaccurate parallels. These stories undercut and minimized the uniqueness and profound impact of our Lord’s birth. Several accounts illustrate the point. The Romans claimed that Zeus impregnated Semele without contact and produced Dionysus, lord of the earth. Babylonian religion asserted that a sunbeam in the priestess Semiramis conceived Tammuz, the Sumerian fertility god ([Ezekiel 8:14](#)).

[Ezekiel 8:14 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴ “Then He brought me to the entrance of the

gate of the LORD'S house which *was* toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.”

Buddha’s mother allegedly saw a large white elephant enter her belly when she conceived the deified Indian philosopher. Hinduism teaches that the divine Vishnu, after living as a fish, tortoise, boar, and lion, entered Devaki’s womb and became her son, Krishna. Satan has propagated other similar legends, all with the purpose of undermining the nature of Christ’s birth and deceiving people into seeing it as just another myth or nothing exceptional.

In addition, the scientific age and the emergence of modern and postmodern theologies during the past two centuries have eroded many professed believers’ confidence in the reality of the virgin birth. (Along with that trend has been a noticeable decline in the percentage of “Christians” who believe in the deity of Christ.) But such skeptical thinking is foolish and directly contrary to the explicit teaching of all four Gospels, the Epistles, and the historical testimony of the entire early church that Jesus was none other than the virgin-born Son of God.

Unfortunately, a heart attitude of unbelief concerning Jesus’ identity has characterized the majority of men and women since the Fall. The Jews who opposed Christ vividly illustrated that attitude on more than one occasion ([John 5:18](#); [John 7:28–30](#); [John 10:30–39](#)).

[John 5:18 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸ “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”

[John 7:28-30 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁸ “Then Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, “You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know.

²⁹ I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me.

³⁰ So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.”

[John 10:30-39 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁰ “I and the Father are one.”

³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

³² Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?”

³³ The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out *to be* God.”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Has it not been written in your Law, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS'?

³⁵ If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),
³⁶ do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?

³⁷ If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

³⁸ but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.”

³⁹ Therefore they were seeking again to seize Him, and He eluded their grasp.”

But such hostility and lack of faith should not discourage us or deter us from embracing and defending the truth of Christ’s virgin birth. The apostle Paul reminds us, “For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar” ([Romans 3:3–4](#), [Romans 10:16](#); [Isaiah 53:1](#)). The world’s opinion, popular as it might be, is rarely a reliable source of truth.

[Romans 3:3-4 \(NASB\)](#)

³ “What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?

⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, “THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED.”

[Romans 10:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ “However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?”

[Isaiah 53:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

Undoubtedly, therefore, the Holy Spirit acted with significant purpose in devoting an early passage from the Gospel of Matthew, at the front of the New Testament, to establish right away the humanity and deity of our Lord.

His incarnation, properly understood, is foundational to Christianity. There could have been no genuine work of redemption apart from the fact of God becoming man and, by being both completely God and completely man, reconciling people to Himself through His substitutionary death and physical resurrection. If Jesus had not been both human and divine, there would be no gospel.

Many skeptical New Testament commentators will concede that Matthew and other authors of Scripture sincerely believed and taught that the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus without any assistance from a human father. But such interpreters nevertheless glibly discount the validity of Scripture's claims by immediately asserting that its writers were naive, uneducated, and subject to the myths and superstitions of ancient times. According to the critics, the Gospel writers merely adapted some of the familiar virgin birth legends to the story of Jesus' birth.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Matthew's account, for example, reads as history, but it is history he could know and record only because God revealed it and accomplished it by miraculous intervention. Matthew's words are far superior to the immoral and repulsive nature of the secular stories he and the other writers allegedly drew from. Here is his clear, uncomplicated narrative of the Incarnation:

Matthew 1:18-25 (NASB)

¹⁸“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

²⁰But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

²¹She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

²²Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³“BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.”

²⁴And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife,

²⁵but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.”

Matthew declares Jesus' divine lineage in this passage and reveals five aspects of His virgin birth: its first announcement, Joseph's response to it, the angel's clarification of it, its connection to prophecy, and its actual occurrence.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH ANNOUNCED

Matthew needs only one verse ([Matthew 1:18](#)) to announce the fact of Christ's virgin birth. Such a concise statement, though it doesn't all by itself prove the point, strongly suggests that the notion of our Lord and Savior's virgin birth was not simply a man-made story. A human author, writing strictly on his own initiative, would characteristically tend to describe such a momentous and amazing event in an expansive, detailed, and elaborate manner. But not the apostle Matthew. He does relate additional circumstances surrounding the virgin birth, but the basic fact is stated in one simple sentence: “After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew devotes the previous seventeen verses to Jesus' human genealogy but just this part of one verse to His divine genealogy. As the Son of God, Jesus “descended” from His heavenly Father by a miraculous and never-repeated act of the Holy Spirit; even so, the Holy Spirit chose to announce that astounding truth by just one brief, declarative sentence. As all God's Word does, Matthew's simple statement contains the solemn tone of authenticity. By contrast, a human fabrication would tend to have that false ring of exaggeration to it, being filled out with much more “convincing” material than what this inspired version needed.

Scripture gives us little information about Mary and even less about Joseph. Mary was undoubtedly a godly young woman, probably a native of Nazareth who came from a relatively poor family. Joseph was the son of Jacob ([Matthew 1:16](#)) and was a craftsman, probably a carpenter ([Matthew 13:55](#)). Most significant, he was a “**just man**” ([Matthew 1:19](#)), one who placed saving trust in the coming Messiah.

Most likely Mary and Joseph were both quite young when they were engaged (“betrothed”). She may have been as young as twelve or thirteen, and he not any older than fifteen or sixteen. Such youthfulness at the time of a couple’s engagement was standard for that culture. Another standard aspect of the Jewish betrothal was its binding nature—society considered the man and the woman legally married even though the formal ceremony and consummation might occur a year later. The purpose of the engagement period was to confirm each partner’s fidelity when the two had little or no social contact with each another.

Mary and Joseph faithfully abstained from sexual relations with one another during the engagement period, as the contract required. That was also in accord with the Bible’s high regard for sexual purity and God’s commands for sexual abstinence prior to the marriage ceremony and for sexual fidelity afterward. Thus, Mary’s virginity was an important indicator of her godliness.

However, Mary’s virginity protected something much more important than her own morality and godly reputation. It ensured the deity of Christ and supported the veracity of His teaching and works as the Son of God. Had Jesus been conceived by natural means, with Joseph or anyone else as His father, He would not have been God and would not have been a true Savior of sinners. To be in accord with what Scripture reported about His life, He would have had to make false claims about Himself, and He would have had to endorse false stories or hoaxes concerning the Resurrection and Ascension. Meanwhile everyone would have remained spiritually dead, condemned forever by their unforgiven sins. But we know that all that is absolutely contrary to what God’s Word teaches.

The apostle Paul, for example, was also very clear and concise when he reiterated the true nature of the Incarnation: “**But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law**” ([Galatians 4:4](#)). Paul includes no mention of a human father for Jesus because, according to the divine plan, God was His Father. Jesus had one human parent (Mary) so that He could be a man and identify closely with what it means to be human ([Philippians 2:5–7](#); [Hebrews 4:15](#)). And He had divine parentage so He could live a sinless life, perfectly fulfill the Law of God for us, and make the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Admittedly, all these centuries after Matthew’s divinely inspired Gospel declared that Jesus was born of a virgin, His miraculous conception remains impossible to understand by human reason alone. God chose not to explain the details of it to us, even as He chose to leave unexplained the intricacies of His creating the universe from nothing, the precise way He could be one God in three Persons, or exactly what happens when depraved sinners are born again as they repent of their sins and trust Christ. Many of the essentials of Christianity God wants believers to accept by faith. Full understanding will have to wait until heaven: “**For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now [we] know in part, but then [we] shall know [fully]**” ([1 Corinthians 13:12](#)).

JOSEPH’S RESPONSE TO THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Initial news of Mary’s condition presented Joseph with a twofold problem. A caring and responsible person concerned about doing the right thing, Joseph was unwilling to proceed with his original plans once he perceived that a crucial part of those plans was no longer acceptable. His difficulty was intensified by the reality that he was a righteous man, genuinely concerned about doing what was morally and ethically right according to God’s Law. First, when Joseph realized Mary was pregnant, he knew he could not go ahead with their marriage. He knew he was not the father and, based on what he knew at the time, he had to assume that another man was.

Joseph’s second difficult decision concerned how he should then treat Mary. Because he was a good and loving man, he was grieved at the thought of shaming her publicly (a common practice in those days when a wife

was unfaithful), and even more so at the prospect of demanding her death, as provided for in [Deuteronomy 22:23–24](#). We don't know if he felt anger, resentment, or bitterness, but he certainly experienced shame at what he had to assume was true. However, Joseph's concern was not primarily with his own shame and embarrassment, but with Mary's. [Matthew 1:19](#) says, **“not wanting to make her a public example, [Joseph] was minded to put her away secretly.”**

Therefore, Joseph's plan was to divorce Mary secretly so she would not have to endure the disgrace of everyone in the community knowing about her supposed sin. Not many husbands ever display such firmly held and deeply felt love for their wives. Of course eventually, when the marriage didn't occur, everyone would have found out that something had gone wrong. But at least in the meantime Mary would be protected from humiliation and death.

The Lord, however, in His sovereign providence and wonderful grace, intervened directly into the situation and spared Joseph the further trauma of actually carrying out his divorce plans. **“But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit’”** ([Matthew 1:20](#)). This verse underscores the miraculous nature of the virgin birth and the supernatural character surrounding the entire event of Christ's birth. It also provides divine assurance to Joseph (“son of David”) and to us that Jesus had legitimate royal lineage that legally came through Joseph as a descendant of King David.

The angel's words provide the ultimate and most irrefutable testimony to the essential truth of the virgin birth and to the proper response Joseph was to have to Mary's extraordinary situation.

THE ANGEL CLARIFIES THE VIRGIN BIRTH

But what was the significance of Mary's pregnancy even though she had not had relations with Joseph or any other man? Joseph likely would have spent some time puzzling over that question if the divine messenger had not immediately clarified his

pronouncement with these words, **“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”** ([Matthew 1:21](#)).

The angel tells Joseph that Mary will actually bear a son. And not just any son, but Jesus, who **“will save His people from their sins.”** God chose the name Jesus for His Son because its basic meaning defined the fundamental, overarching purpose for the Son's coming to earth. **Jesus** is the Greek form of the Hebrew **Joshua**, **Jeshua**, or **Jehoshua**, each of which means **“Jehovah (Yahweh) will save.”** The baby Mary had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and would give birth to in the plan of God would grow up to testify to the Father's salvation and would Himself be that salvation. By His own sacrificial death on the Cross and triumphant Resurrection from the grave He would save His own—all those who are drawn from sin to repentance and who receive faith to embrace His atoning work.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH PROPHESED

At the time the angel told Joseph about Jesus' unique birth, the idea of a virgin birth was not one that was completely foreign to the Jews' understanding of their Scripture. Although they misinterpreted it, many of the rabbis exegeted [Jeremiah 31:22](#) (**“a woman shall encompass a man”**) in a way that suggested the Messiah would have an unusual birth. Their fanciful explanation of that verse (**“Messiah is to have no earthly father,”** and **“The birth of Messiah shall be like the dew of the Lord, as drops upon the grass without the action of man”**) at least preserved the general idea that the Messiah's birth would be unique.

Actually the Book of Genesis gives us the first glimpse that Christ's birth would be special: **“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed”** ([Genesis 3:15](#)). Technically, the woman's seed belongs to the man, but Mary's impregnation by the Holy Spirit is the only instance in history that a woman had a seed within her that did not originate from a human man.

The later divine promise to Abraham concerned his **“descendants”** (Hebrew, **“seed”**; [Genesis 12:7](#)), a common Old Testament way of referring to offspring. The unique reference in [Genesis 3:15](#) to **“her Seed”** looks beyond Adam and Eve to Mary and to Christ. The two seeds of that verse can have a twofold emphasis. First, they can primarily refer to all people who are part

of Satan's progeny and all who are part of Eve's. The two groups constantly wage spiritual war against each other, with the people of righteousness eventually defeating the people of evil. Second, the word translated "**Seed**" can be singular and refer mainly to one final, glorious product of a woman—the Lord Jesus Himself, born without human seed. In that sense the prophecy is definitely Messianic.

[Matthew 1:22–23](#) clearly identifies Jesus' virgin birth as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: "**So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'**" Matthew's quotation here of [Isaiah 7:14](#) confirms that the prophet did in fact predict the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

The prophet Isaiah made this momentous prophecy during the reign of Judah's wicked and idolatrous King Ahaz. The king faced a major military threat from the Israelite king, Pekah; and the Syrian king, Rezin; both of whom wanted to overthrow Ahaz and replace him with a more compliant monarch. Instead of seeking the Lord's help during that crisis, King Ahaz turned to Tiglath-Pileser, the brutal ruler of the pagan Assyrians. Ahaz even induced their assistance by offering them gold and silver stolen from God's Temple.

Ahaz refused to listen to Isaiah's report that God would deliver the people from Pekah and Rezin. Therefore the prophet spoke the remarkable prophecy of [Isaiah 7:14](#), which told Ahaz that no one would destroy the people of God or the royal line of David. And sure enough, although Tiglath-Pileser destroyed the northern kingdom (Israel), deported its population, and overran Judah four times, God ultimately preserved His people just as He promised.

Isaiah also said that before another child (Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz) was very mature or aware of events, the territories of Rezin and Pekah would be abandoned ([Isaiah 7:15–16](#)). Again, the prophet's divinely inspired words were completely accurate. Before the other child, who was born to Isaiah's wife, was three years old, the two enemy kings were dead. Just as God fulfilled that ancient prophecy

about Isaiah's son, so He was about to fulfill the one concerning the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Both were signs from the Lord that He would not abandon His people, but the greatest of the two was obviously the second one: that His Son would actually be born of a virgin, live among His people, and die for their sins.

In his original pronouncement in [Isaiah 7:14](#), Isaiah used the Hebrew word '**alma**' for "**virgin.**" That is a significant term, and it's important to understand why the prophet used it. '**Alma**' occurs six other times in the Old Testament ([Genesis 24:43](#); [Exodus 2:8](#); [Psalm 68:25](#); [Proverbs 30:19](#); [Song of Sol. 1:3](#); [6:8](#)), and in each instance it connotes or denotes "**virgin.**" Until recent times, both Jewish and Christian scholars always translated the word that way.

It is interesting that in modern Hebrew either '**alma**' or '**betula**' can mean "**virgin.**" However, Isaiah did not use '**betula**' because in Old Testament Hebrew it can refer to a married woman who is not a virgin ([Deuteronomy 22:19](#); [Joel 1:8](#)). It's apparent, therefore, that he used '**alma**' in [Isaiah 7:14](#) with the clear, precise conviction that the woman who would bear the Messiah would indeed be a young woman who never had sexual relations with a man.

Matthew's use of Isaiah's prophecy followed directly in the prophet's path. The apostle was not giving '**alma**' a Christian "twist" to make its usage fit a theory of the virgin birth. Instead, Matthew gave the term the same meaning as Isaiah intended, demonstrated by his translation of '**alma**' with the Greek '**parthenos**', the same word used by the Jewish translators of the Greek Old Testament.

Although the credibility of the virgin birth does not rest solely on the use of a Hebrew word, a general understanding of the background and usage of '**alma**' strengthens our belief in Christ's unique birth. It also helps us to see that Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, knew exactly what he was doing when he related [Isaiah 7:14](#) to the birth of Jesus and declared again the equally amazing truths that "**the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel.**" In His virgin birth, Christ was, in the most literal sense, the Son who was "**God with us.**"

THE OCCURRENCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

All of Matthew's explanation of the significance of the virgin birth came within the revelatory dream God gave to Joseph. Such extraordinary, direct communication evidently occurred while Joseph engaged in the otherwise ordinary activity of sleeping. Matthew does not record any detail of Joseph's immediate reaction, except to say that he woke up and obeyed the angel's instructions: "**Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus**" ([Matthew 1:24–25](#)).

You can imagine how great Joseph's feelings of amazement, relief, and gratitude must have been once he realized what the Lord, through the heavenly messenger, had told him. Not only could he go ahead and gladly take Mary as his wife with honor and righteousness, but also he could rejoice at the privilege of being allowed to bring up God's own Son.

The wedding ceremony of Joseph and Mary likely took place soon after Joseph received the angel's announcement. Matthew makes it clear that Mary remained a virgin until after Jesus was born, implying that normal marital relations began after that time. That, along with the references to Jesus' brothers and sisters ([Matthew 12:46](#); [Matthew 13:55–56](#); [Mark 6:3](#)), proves Mary was not a virgin for her entire life, as some claim.

Finally, Joseph followed through on God's command in [Matthew 1:21](#) and named the baby Jesus, indicating, as we've already seen, that He was to be the Savior.

The amazing fact of Jesus' supernatural birth is the only way to explain the perfect, sinless life He lived while on earth. A skeptic who denied the virgin birth once asked a Christian, "If I told you that child over there was born without a human father, would you believe me?" "Yes," the believer replied, "if he lived as Jesus lived."

Christ's virgin birth is a necessary component that helps us believe and make sense of the entire story of His person and work. His extraordinary

conception and birth, not before or since equaled, is an amazing reality that we should with joy and gratitude never take for granted.

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

Integrity, *Coram Deo*

(Continuation from last edition)

A NEW RELATIONSHIP

There is another aspect of your salvation that is just as vital: your new relationship with Jesus Christ. It is the one relationship you are to value above all others for two important reasons: the intimate communion possible with your Lord and Savior, and the wondrous benefits that union can bring.

Intimate Communion

As we discussed earlier in this previous teaching, the most valuable pursuit of Paul's life was "**knowing Christ Jesus**" ([Philippians 3:8](#)). To know Christ is not simply to have intellectual knowledge about Him; Paul uses the Greek verb *ginōskō*, which means to know "**experientially**" or "**personally**."

Paul taught the Ephesians that one of the functions of the church is to build up the people in "**the knowledge of the Son of God**" ([Ephesians 4:13](#)). There the word "**knowledge**" is from *epignōsis*, which refers to full knowledge that is correct and accurate. That is the knowing of which Jesus spoke when He said, "**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them**" ([John 10:27](#)). He was not speaking of merely knowing their identities but of knowing them intimately, and that is the way He wants His people to know Him. Paul's desire is for every believer to develop this deep knowledge of Christ by building a relationship with Him through prayer and faithful study of and obedience to God's Word.

Commentator F.B. Meyer describes our relationship with Christ in this way:

We may know Him personally, intimately, face to face. Christ does not live back in the centuries, nor amid the clouds of heaven: He is near us, with us, compassing our path and our lying down, and acquainted with all our ways. But we cannot know Him in this mortal life except through the illumination and teaching of the Ho-

ly Spirit ... and we must surely know Christ, not as a stranger who turns in to visit for the night, or as the exalted King of men,—there must be the inner knowledge as of those whom He counts His own familiar friends, whom He trusts with His secrets, who eat with Him of His bread (Psalm xli. 9).

To know Christ in the storm of battle; to know Him in the valley of shadow; to know Him when the solar light irradiates our faces, or when they are darkened with disappointment and sorrow; to know the sweetness of His dealing with bruised reeds and smoking flax; to know the tenderness of His sympathy and the strength of His right hand—all this involves many varieties of experience on our part, but each of them, like the facets of a diamond, will reflect the prismatic beauty of His glory from a new angle. (*The Epistle to the Philippians* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1952, 162–63])

That's what it means to know Christ intimately. Growing in this deeper knowledge of Christ is a life-long process that will not be complete until we see our Lord face to face.

A Beneficial Union

In addition to the personal interaction we have with Christ, several benefits accrue to those who have trusted in Him for salvation.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST.

Paul desired to “**be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith**” ([Philippians 3:9](#)). To know Christ is to have His righteousness, His holiness, and His virtue imputed to us, which makes us right before God.

Throughout his earlier life Paul tried to attain salvation through strict adherence to the Law. But when he was confronted by the wondrous reality of Christ, he was ready to trade in all his self-righteous, external morals, good works, and religious rituals for the righteousness granted to him through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul was willing to lose the thin and fading robe of his reputation if he could only gain

the splendid and incorruptible robe of the righteousness of Christ. This is the greatest of all benefits because it secures our standing before God. It is God's gift to the sinner, appropriated by faith in the perfect work of Christ, which satisfies God's justice.

THE POWER OF CHRIST.

While having Christ's righteousness frees us from the penalty of sin, we are still subject to the control of sin. Fortunately, we have the power of Christ available to us to vanquish sin daily. If there is any doubt that His might is strong enough, Paul says it is “**the power of His resurrection**” ([Philippians 3:10](#)).

Christ's resurrection most graphically demonstrated the extent of His power. Raising Himself from the dead displayed His authority and control over both the physical world and the spiritual world. That's the kind of power Paul wanted to experience because he realized he was helpless to overcome sin on his own. His self-righteousness gained him nothing but the awareness of his inability to deal with sin.

The resurrection power of Christ deals with sin in two ways. First, as we discussed earlier, we experience His resurrection might at salvation. We were buried with Christ in His death, and we rose with Him to “**walk in newness of life**” ([Romans 6:4](#)). But to defeat sin daily, we need His resurrection power to be our resource. We need His strength to serve Him faithfully, to conquer temptation, to overcome trials, and to witness boldly. We want to experience the potency of Christ to this degree: He “**is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us**” ([Ephesians 3:20](#)). Only as we build our relationship with Christ and tap into His might will we have victory over sin in this life. And that is the only way we can build a life of integrity.

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST.

While Christ's power is our resource in our ongoing battle with sin, we have another problem: the suffering that is an unavoidable part of life. Because we live in a world full of pain and suffering, each one of us will experience suffering to one degree or another. The question is: Where can we turn when we need comfort? Paul says the answer is in our relationship with Christ because we can experience “**the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death**” ([Philippians 3:10](#)).

When we suffer, Christ is with us to comfort us during our heartache. Paul told the Corinthians, **“Just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:5)**. The degree, to which He has already experienced the same suffering, and even more, is the reason He is able to comfort us. He was rejected by His own people, despised by the religious leaders, mocked by Roman soldiers, and crucified by all three. Yet He endured it all without sinning. He never once compromised God’s law or God’s plan of salvation in an attempt to ease His suffering.

The true test of your character is your response to the severest times of suffering and persecution. When suffering becomes too intense, the easy thing is to get angry and blame God. When persecution becomes too severe, the easy thing is to compromise your faith. To respond in either manner will cause you to miss out on the richest fellowship available to you. That’s because the deepest moments of spiritual fellowship with the living Christ are the direct result of intense suffering. Suffering always drives us to Christ because we find in Him our merciful high priest who sympathizes **“with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15)** and who **“was tempted in that which He has suffered, [and] is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18)**. You need to view your sufferings as opportunities to be blessed by Christ as you find comfort in His fellowship.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

The last benefit of this new relationship with Christ is a future one. Paul hopes to **“attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:11)**. That is Paul’s reference to the Rapture of the church, the day when Christ will return for His people and we will be transformed and will ultimately experience our freedom from the presence of sin. We long for that day because **“our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Philippians 3:20-21)**.

That is the event for which each of us longs. On

that day we will realize the completion of our salvation, until then, we live in this world with the particular knowledge that our home is in heaven; that helps us live in the present because **“Everyone who has this hope fixed on him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3)**. The best way to maintain integrity and avoid compromise is to keep your eyes focused on Christ. Allow him free access to rule and guide your way through the world’s toughest storms.





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Hebrews 6 – Part 2

Author's Note: The overview study for each chapter of Hebrews is intended to simply provide a basic understanding of some of the various key elements of each chapter and is not written as an in-depth theological treatise. However, because of the critical importance of properly understanding Hebrews 6, additional time will be given to the overview of this chapter.

Maybe the right question to ask at this point would be “Why do we need solid food?” Sooner or later a baby needs to graduate from milk to solid food, and if that does not happen, then the child will become deformed. Every day of their life, believers need to grow spiritually. They need to have the capacity of their soul enlarged so that they will trust in God, so that they will love other Christians, and so that they will understand what God wants to communicate to them that day. So often believers simply do not take the things of God seriously, but when they do, everything changes. In reality, it is the ability to digest “solid food” that helps believers to trust God, to depend on Him, and to fully turn their life over to him.

Now, the problem that the Hebrews had was that they were not able to go on. When they got to Melchizedek, it was God’s deeper revelation that exposed and uncovered where they really were spiritually. They simply could not digest spiritual food, and therefore could not go on into maturity. They could not receive what God was trying to say to them. God was wanting to speak to them, wanting to encourage them, and wanting to deepen their walk, but they simply could not receive it. It was more than they could handle. What every believer should be able to do is to read God’s Word and know what it means and understand it. Maturity is when a believer is able to receive whatever God wants to say to them.

The problem that these Hebrew Christians had in Hebrews 6:4-5 was that they had “**been enlightened, had tasted of the heavenly gift, had become partakers of the Holy Spirit, had tasted the good word of God, and had tasted the powers of the age to come**”, but they were not going on. Hebrews 6:1-3 should be read in a way that may make sense.. This is the meat of these 3 verses. The middle section could have a parenthesis put around it so that the verses could be read as follows (*only read what is underlined*),

¹Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, [not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, ²of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.] ³And this we will do if God permits.

The emphasis is going “**on to perfection**”, or maturity. Hebrews 4:1 states it in another way.

¹Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

Now, here is the author’s concern. It is for those people who, for whatever reason, just never go on to maturity. They never progress beyond the beginning. God works in their life, they experience His enlightenment, His power, His Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit in their life, but they just never go forward. So the au-

thor's concern is that if they never go forward that they will reach a place where they never can. It is really difficult to break bad habits. Take the habit of someone never seeking God and never spending time in His Word. It is like they reach a place where no matter how much someone encourages them, their spiritual will to do so is just not there.

Everyone mature believer knows people like this. They have been Christians for years, maybe even decades, but they have never matured. They do not know the Bible, they struggle to pray, church is just a routine, and they never witness to anyone. They are just spiritually stationary. They can tell you about the cross, and they can tell you some Bible stories, they can tell you how they once served in the church, but they just are unable to go forward anymore. There is no motivation, no drive, no compulsion towards the things of God. This is what the writer is concerned about and he is talking about Christians. There is nothing up to this point in the letter that would even remotely suggest that he has changed audiences.

In [Hebrews 6:6](#) are the words "fall away". Those two words – **IN THE CONTEXT** - are describing someone who does not go on to maturity. **THEY ARE NOT DESCRIBING SOMEONE WHO DENYS THE FAITH and WHO DENYS THE WORK OF CHRIST.** They are describing the person who does not go on into maturity in their Christian life. In the context, this falling away is a Christian's failure to go on to maturity, and the consequence of this failure is that they reach a place where it is "**impossible...to renew them again to repentance**". They never enter into God's rest and into a life of fullness and blessing. In the context, the term "**fall away**" is not a reference to salvation or to a Christian losing their salvation. Rather, **it is a reference to repentance – to a person losing that desire for continued repentance, losing that desire to respond to God, to His enlightenment, to His Word, and to the power of God working in their life.** It is a clear reference to the work of ongoing repentance in a Christian, not a loss of their

salvation. A Christian can never lose their salvation, but they can and very often do lose their commitment and their desire to be repentant and responsive to God.

This is a reference to the person who after much wooing and prodding by the Holy Spirit simply reaches a place where they have become unresponsive; dull of hearing, and unwilling to enter into God's rest. They reach that point where they have tuned God out for so long that they no longer can actually hear Him speak. They are literally asleep in the light, and unfortunately, **they become stone deaf at the spiritual level**, and unable to be renewed again to repentance. They have reached a spiritual point of no return. It is impossible to determine where that is or when it might occur in their life, but many people have reached it. They have become dull of hearing out of spiritual neglect. [Hebrews 2:1-3a](#) just begins the warning when it states,

¹Therefore we MUST give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.
²For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation,

Why would the author use the word "**must**"? It is because decisions always have consequences. It is so important for believers to train their hearts and their minds and their spirit to hear God speak and to have a heart that can hear the voice of God.

The problem at this point in the letter is that there is such a thing as a spiritual deafness from which someone may never recover. That statement will make many uncomfortable, but that is exactly what it is designed to do. It is a warning that is designed to make sluggish Christians uncomfortable, and if it does not, they may already have arrived at this point of no return. Here is the warning signal – having become "**dull of hearing**".

In [Hebrews 6:1](#) it is important to look very carefully at two words again – the two words "**go on**". These are two very important little words. In the Greek, they are actually one word – the word "*phero*". It means to be brought, to bring, to carry. It is what is known as a passive verb. I.e., the subject is passive or inactive and is

being acted on by an outside agent. It could be translated as “**let us be carried along to maturity**”, or “**let us be brought to maturity**”. It represents something that someone else wants to do for us, and in this case, something that God wants to do for us and in us. The picture is that God is working in the life of the believer. He is enlightening, instructing, demonstrating, and drawing, but the believer is not responding. God moves, God speaks, God touches, and God reveals. God wants to carry the believer along and to bring them into maturity. So he challenges them, He teaches them, He encourages and strengthens them, but they refuse to respond. The world is too attractive, too alluring, and too enticing. They hear Him speaking, but the less that they respond, the more “**dull of hearing**” they become. He speaks and they hear, but do not respond. It is like reaching a point of no return. Are they saved? Yes. However, are they allowing the Holy Spirit to carry them along to maturity? No they are not and it has very serious consequences.

For many people these warnings in Hebrews are too solemn, and so they brush them off and imagine that they have no application to them as a believer. “*Oh, it is talking about lost people, people who heard the message of salvation, but who just did not respond.*” No, it is not. It is talking about unresponsive believers, people who come to church and hear the Word of God and who witness the work of God, but who just do not respond. [2 Corinthians 13:5](#) says,

5Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless indeed you are disqualified.

I.e., examine and test yourself as to whether or not you are living faithfully and genuinely honoring God with your life. This is not a verse on salvation, but a verse on sanctification. This verse is not asking an unbeliever to examine their life to see if they are in the faith, but it is asking the BELIEVER to see if they are being faithful and are truly following Christ.

If the sluggish and uncommitted believer can just detach themselves from these verses, if they can just discuss them in the context of lost people, of other people, then there is no problem with the judgment seat of Christ, no problem with how they live out their life, no need to come clean with God, and no need to walk in the light or to forgive people who have offended them. If they can just shuffle these verses off to lost people, then they do not have to worry about them anymore, and the intended impact of these verses is undermined and actually lost. The most dangerous thing a believer can do is to say that because they do not understand these strong words that they do not have any relevance to them. If they do that, then they fulfill exactly what these verses are saying. They do not let the Word of God operate in their lives. They annul it, dilute it, take the edge off of it, and the result is that they do not let God carry them and bring them into maturity. It is exactly what was stated earlier. These people were very close to being at the place where **they could not receive what God was trying to say to them.**

The problem that these Hebrew Christians had was that **they just wanted to keep laying the foundation.** With every building there is a foundation, and then there is what architects call the superstructure. [1 Cor. 3:11-15](#) says,

11For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

There is much to lose. The foundation is there, and the elementary things, the spiritual ABCs, are given in [Hebrews 6:1b-2](#),

...not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2of the

doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

They just wanted to keep talking about these basic things, these foundational things. HOWEVER, WHAT ABOUT THE HOUSE! What about their life, what about their attitudes, what about their commitment, what about their lifestyle, and what about the impacts they are making as a Christian on those around them. What about the house? The foundation has been laid – repentance, faith, baptism, judgment - but what about their house? Someone can build the house with wood, hay, or stubble, or they can build it with gold, silver, precious stones – and the day of judgment will declare what the superstructure is. No believer escapes the judgment seat of Christ.

The writer says – **LEAVE THE FOUNDATION.** Start building your life. Initial salvific repentance and faith toward God and being baptized are great things. Knowing that there is a judgment is great, but if a believer wants God to carry them on, if they want God to bring them forward, then they cannot continue to call these the deep things of God, or the meat of God’s word, or “**solid food**”. These are foundational, but they are not building the house. The writer says to “**go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation...**” Leave it and let God carry you into those areas that are going to constantly be challenging and changing your life so that you can be an impact on others.

Most Christians never grasp the beauty and spiritual significance of personal trials and conflicts, and it becomes evident in how they complain about everything. They hate trials and they never grasp that trials are God-ordained. Just think about Joseph and at the end of his life how he was able to look back and say, “**You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.**” “**God did it, God did it.**” Trials and struggles and difficult people are God’s continual method of changing believers and conforming them into the image of Christ. If believers find themselves complaining and blaming everyone else, if they find

themselves always finding fault in someone else, grumpy, irritable, snappy, pouting, hard to get along with, then most likely they understand little to nothing about **God-ordained** trials. In reality they are one of the greatest blessings a believer can ever have.

It is important to understand that it is not enough to be just fundamentally theologically. That was the problem. They had the basics down pat. The foundation was fine, but the house was in terrible shape! What a description of the average Christian today. They know their churches Statement of Faith by heart, but they cannot hear God speak. They can quote some verses, but they cannot hear God speak. They love their pastor and the fellowship at their local church, but they never hear God speak to them. For some strange reason, they think that the message is always for someone else they know.

In order to know how strong the word “**impossible**” really is in **Hebrews 6:4**, it is necessary to see how it is used elsewhere in Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:18 says that “**it is impossible for God to lie**”.

Hebrews 10:4 says “**For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.**”

Hebrews 11:6 says “**But without faith it is impossible to please Him.**”

In no case is there any room for compromise – the statements are **absolutes**.

So what is it that is “**impossible**” to do? It is provided in **Hebrews 6:6** – “**if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance**”. Just read that very calmly, without prejudice, and just simply read what it says. It says that it is “**impossible**” for these individuals to be renewed again, or brought back, to repentance. Why do we suppose that it says “**again**”? Well, there is only one reason. It is because they had repented before. This is not their first rodeo. The idea is that at some previous point in their life that they had had a repentant heart and had been repentant of things in their life that they knew were outside of the will of God. In reading this **Hebrews 6** passage, it is easy to get the feeling that these Christians may have simply grown weary in well

doing. They just wanted a break from the spiritual challenges that they obviously were experiencing.

For every Christian there may come a time in their life for a renewal of repentance, a time in their life when they realize that they have drifted from God, stepped outside of God's boundaries, and left the things of God for a period of time in their life. The issue in v4 is that they "**have been enlightened**", and therefore it is a necessity that they walk in the light. The initial Holy Spirit given enlightenment that is given to a believer at salvation is a once for all experience because the sinner only gets saved one time. However, "**enlightenment**" continues. It has to for a believer to grow. The word simply means to give spiritual light. Initially we did not understand, and now we do understand. We did not see, but now we do see. We did not care, but now we do care. God gave light, God opened our spiritual eyes, He gave sight to the spiritually blind, and now we see. However, that enlightenment carries with it a responsibility. The responsibility is that every believer must now **walk in the light** and **walk in the enlightenment** that they have been given..

So what happens if a believer does not walk in that light? Simple. they begin to draw back – as it says here, to "**fall away**". [Hebrews 2:1](#) used the term "**drift away**".

The term "**fall away**" is "*parapipto*" – *para*: by, *pipto*: fall. Literally, to fall by. It signifies **to fall away from ADHERENCE to the realities and facts of the faith.** It is not that the individual does not believe in God or in Christ or in the truth of God's Word. The issue is that they are not willing to commit their daily lives to that truth. The believer knows what is right, they know what God wants, but they are unwilling to adhere to those realities of the faith in their life. They have been enlightened, they have tasted the heavenly gift, they have become a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and they have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. God has done everything He is going to do to convince them, but they still refuse to follow what they know is right. They simply are going to live

how they want to live. If that describes someone's life and attitude, then the enemy has greatly deceived them in what it even means to be a Christian. At that point in their life, they begin to **drift away, draw back, fall away.** [Hebrews 10:26-31](#) says,

²⁶For if we sin willfully (DELIBERATELY AND KNOWINGLY KEEP ON SINNING) after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people." ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

V26 and v29 clearly indicate that these believers had a personal knowledge of what they were doing. That is why the author uses the term "**of how much worse punishment, do you suppose**". The greater the knowledge, then the greater the punishment will be and ultimately the greater the loss will be. When a believer "**falls away**", it means that they do not walk in the light that they have been given. Having come to the knowledge of the truth and having received the knowledge of the truth, they draw back and willfully sin against God.

The point is very simple. There must be a renewing of repentance in their life. Repentance should be a **normal** part of any believer's life, a normal part of their day, and a normal part of their prayer life and their relationship with God. they must be able to hear God's voice. They must keep their senses exercised to hear God speak, and as they walk in the light, they will hear Him say, "*This is the way to go*". If a believer cannot remember the last time that they were repentant of sin in their life, it would be safe to assume that something may

be terribly wrong and they may be in danger of becoming “**dull of hearing**”.

The impossibility here was that these people were very close to not being able to grasp God’s call on their life. Truth escaped them. Obedience to the truth escaped them. If a believer is not willing to walk in the light that God has given to them, then they do not know where they are going, and worst of all, they do not receive further light. They may hope that they are walking in the right direction, but they do not know. This person has lost their discernment. They have lost their capacity to make good, clear, spiritual judgments. They have lost the capacity to be fruitful and useful. They warm the pews, but that is about all. Jesus said in [Matthew 6:23](#),

23“But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

This has to be one of the greatest illusions and tragedies in life – calling ourselves followers of Christ, but never really following Christ. These believers in [Hebrews 6](#) appear to have lost God’s enlightenment. They no longer heard Him speak. When was the last time that you think God spoke to you and enlightened your mind and heart regarding spiritual truth? When was that time? Can you remember, or are those times very few and far between?

So the question at this point should be how does one fall away? In [Hebrews 12:14-17](#), it says,

14Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no

place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Esau sinned in such a way that “**he found no place for repentance**”. He was a bitter person. He was sexually immoral and profane. The word “**profane**” literally means to cross a threshold. I.e., it means to pollute something that is sacred, to pollute something that is holy, and to defile the things that are godly. Every believer needs to be very careful how they treat the sacred things of God – their Bible, the church, other Christians, the truth. Some people treat these things very lightly. They can take it or leave it, and if they are not careful, they can become profane, cross over the threshold and find no place for repentance. Unfortunately, this may be the norm much more than is imagined.

There are times that God will speak to a believer’s life, offer them opportunities, and if they do not respond, they may never have the opportunity again. It is difficult to know when those opportunities may occur in a believer’s life, but they will happen. For this author, the Holy Spirit convicted me deeply and personally nearly 25 years ago about anger. He spoke clearly, and I believe that if I had not yielded my life to His will or what I want to call His “final” direction in that area of my life, it is my feeble opinion that my life would have suffered very grave consequences. I do not know what they would have been, or how God would have disciplined me, or how things in my life may have developed, but I believe He spoke to my heart in such a way that it was final. I do not know that. I do not know what the Holy Spirit may have done later, but deep within my inner man I knew that I had to make a choice as to whether or not I would walk in the light that God was giving to me.

The more that a believer resists God, the more they forfeit what He has for our life. Any believer can step outside of the God’s boundaries anytime they choose, but contrary to what many believe, they cannot step back into it at the same place. The more they resist God in their life, the more they forfeit in their life. No one yet knows what God’s blessings are going to be. He does not reveal beforehand how He is going to bless the believer’s obedience. So each believer is called on by

God to respond in faith. They must believe that **“God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”**. There are those particular things that someone can do, like Esau, that remove them from the place of God’s blessing. There are those particular things that will cause the believer to fall away, to draw back, and to drift away. If so, there may come that time in their life where they are no longer useful to God and thus they are placed on the shelf. **II Timothy 2:19-21** says,

¹⁹Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” ²⁰But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

The implication here is that some people are not useful because their life is not clean. Unfortunately, many people have probably reached that place in their life, where for the most part they are no longer useful to God. Remember where this study started in **Hebrews 6** looking at the oath that God made against the children of Israel. They had seen the Passover, gone through the Red Sea, seen God on the mountain, had the commandments etched in stone by the finger of God, yet when they came to the Promised Land that God had for them, they said, *“We cannot go in, we are like grasshoppers.”* And God swore in His wrath that they would not enter into His rest, but would die in the wilderness. There was the straw that broke the camel’s back. There was that sin of unbelief that was a spiritual point of no return and carried with it great discipline. Those Israelites clearly had been,

“...enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the

good word of God and the powers of the age to come...”

It should be understood that this is the age of grace and that the believer should never lose sight of that simple and encouraging fact. We are not the Israelites in the wilderness, but Christians living in the overwhelming grace of God. However, the Israelites just mentioned simply refused to believe God and to obey God, and it is important to learn from their failure that God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His rest. Where is that point in someone’s life today? No one knows and they should never want to find out. Whatever needs to be done, whatever it takes to maintain a repentant heart, that is what God wants every believer to do. The encouragement from this is to simply “examine yourself” to see if you are truly and genuinely walking faithfully with Christ and if you individually

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