

PROPHETIC STUDY SERIES

THE PROPERTIES OF FAITH

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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

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The Properties of Faith

I once had a phone call with a friend and our conversation progressed to the topic of faith. We discussed the relationships between religious paradigms, traditions, culture, knowledge, devotion, behavior, and faith. Near the end of the discussion, he suggested that I create a presentation on faith's properties.

He was convinced that others would also enjoy investigating the different, and sometimes confusing, aspects of living by faith. Most Christians agree that faith is an important topic because the Bible teaches that salvation comes through faith!¹

Let me make a statement to consider as we proceed: Strangely, it is often our desire for salvation that hinders our understanding about faith. For example, biblical faith is not a form of self-deception. Some people have accepted the notion that God saves a person on the basis of personal conviction; that is, if a person believes with all his heart that he is saved, then he is saved.

The Bible does not teach that personal conviction determines eligibility for salvation. Salvation is not a ticket, a life insurance policy, or an intellectual belief that avoids hell. When a sinner responds to the prompting of

¹ Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 3:11

the Holy Spirit and totally surrenders himself to God's will by becoming eager to go where God wants him to go, be whom God wants him to be, and do as God directs him to do (“go-be-do”), he immediately becomes an heir of salvation. Let me clarify, an heir does not have *what* is promised, but he has *the* promise.

God promises to give each heir of salvation eternal life at the Second Coming. Until the Second Coming, the issue that confronts us as heirs of salvation each day is whether we are living by faith. Jesus told each of the seven churches¹ that He will give salvation to overcomers at the Second Coming. He also told His followers, **“Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”**²

Faith Saved Two-Thirds of the Angels

The relationship between faith and salvation is timeless and universal. Consider the role that faith played in heaven before God created Earth. Lucifer and all of God's angels were joyful and selfless before sin began. They loved God, enjoyed His presence, lived in His house, and ate from His generous table.

Over time, Lucifer became jealous of Michael and discontented with the Father. In an effort to win the allegiance of the other angels, Lucifer skillfully framed

¹ Revelation 2 and 3

² Mark 13:13

God's policies and actions to make Him appear to be evil and unfair. Eventually, one-third of the angels believed Lucifer's lies, and when their contempt for God reached maturity, rebellion followed.

These angels bought into Lucifer's sophistry because they had the ability to reason, they had the power of choice, and they believed Lucifer was right and God was evil! There is only one way a finite being can cheerfully live in the presence of an infinite God. Because God's ways are not our ways, created beings have to blindly trust God's wisdom at all times.

We have to be patient with God's long-range plans and we have to be faithful and obedient even when it seems God is absent or ignoring us. His timescale is eternal and our knowledge of His ways is limited, which means waiting on God can be very aggravating. Let's face it, "We want what we want." Consequently, our impatience can lead to bitterness which can lead to rebellion. Fortunately, God understands.

Lucifer sought his friends in this deception because he wanted the type of adoration and loyalty that only belongs to God. To redirect the faith and love which the angels had for God, Lucifer concocted lies which were used to "reason" with the other angels. For example, Lucifer claimed God was unfair because He had a law demanding that sinners must die.

Lucifer claimed this law was God's way of keeping the angels in line because the minute one of them did something that God did not like, he would die. I believe Lucifer challenged the angels with a question that went like this: "How can God claim angels have the power of choice? The minute we exercise our choice and do what He doesn't like, we are condemned to die! This isn't love! This is tyranny." What could the angels say?

God gives all created beings the power of choice. What we choose to do with that power is up to us. We can choose to blindly trust in God or we can choose to do otherwise. If we believe God and trust Him unconditionally, we choose to believe that God sees us, understands our daily needs, hears every prayer, and deeply loves us. We believe that God's wisdom is always present, working things out for the best possible result. Choosing to wait on God can be very trying (ask Abraham and Sarah) and choosing to maintain a nonnegotiable faith in God can be hard to do when we are suffering, irritated, worn out, distressed, or discouraged.

Living by faith can be very difficult. Two-thirds of the angels chose to believe God was right and Lucifer was wrong. Their faith in God allowed them to remain in heaven, and ultimately, all God's creation will see that the angels' faith saved them from eternal death.

Faith in God means remaining confident about what He promises. Faith in God always produces a wonderful result.¹ It may not be what we wanted or expected, and in some cases, we may not live to see it, but ultimately there will be a day of fulfillment beyond our expectations with rejoicing that cannot be contained.

Each time God fulfills His purposes, His children become wiser. God gives them spiritual insight to grasp a more fulfilling result than they would have otherwise asked for or imagined. Choosing to live by faith is difficult, but faith in God always results in exhilarating joy and when viewed in reverse, it always makes sense.

Faith Defined

The Mirriam-Webster.com dictionary defines faith as:

1. a: Allegiance to duty or a person, loyalty;
b: (1) fidelity to one's promises,
(2) sincerity of intentions.
2. a: (1) Belief and trust in and loyalty to God;
(2) belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion;
b: (1) firm belief in something for which there is no proof;
(2) complete trust.

¹ Romans 8:28

3. Something that is believed especially with strong conviction
especially: a system of religious beliefs.

The Bible mentions the word *faith* 247 times in the King James Version. I believe faith is mentioned so many times because God wants us to understand the properties of faith. The Bible offers diverse examples showing many different dimensions of faith. In this booklet, I have chosen topics that go in different directions to highlight some of the properties of faith.

Faith: Obeying a Direct Order from God

We need to examine faith within the context of obeying a direct order from God. Many people think faith would be a lot easier to exercise if God plainly told us His will. If you have contemplated this idea, you might want to rethink it. Notice this verse: **“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.”**¹

Notice that Noah became an heir of the righteousness which comes through faith. We know that an heir is someone to whom a promise is made. An heir does not have what is promised, but he has the promise. Noah

¹ Hebrews 11:7

did not receive eternal life because of his faith; rather, he became an heir of eternal life.

I need to clarify an important point. Thus far in human history, very few people have been saved; that is, very few people have had eternal life bestowed upon them and taken to heaven. For purposes of discussion, a saved person is someone who is not an heir of salvation.

A saved person is someone who is no longer subject to death (saved from the curse of sin). People in this category include: Moses, Enoch, Elijah, and the twenty-four elders. The righteous dead remain heirs of salvation. They are asleep in their graves and will be resurrected at the Second Coming, and at that time given eternal life when they meet Jesus.

During the Great Tribulation, the entire world will receive a direct command to worship the Creator.¹ Those willing to put their faith in God and obey this command will be persecuted by those who are unwilling to obey God. Living by faith is not easy, but everyone who chooses to live by faith becomes an heir of the righteousness that comes through faith.

To put Noah's experience with a direct order in perspective, here is a short parable:

¹ Revelation 14:7

One day, as Noah was walking with the Lord, the Lord said, “My son, I am sick at heart with the way life on Earth is deteriorating. I have decided to destroy the entire Earth with water so deep that the highest mountains will be more than 20 feet under water.¹ I have chosen you and your sons to build a big boat to save the faithful and the animals.”

Noah asked, “My Lord, when will this happen?”

The Lord said, “One hundred twenty years from now.”

Noah was shocked. Stumbling for words, Noah gasped, “My Lord, it is true. The world is evil and violence is an epidemic. How will this water appear?”

The Lord answered, “I will send torrents of water from the sky and squeeze the great aquifers below the surface of Earth. I will melt the ice stored on the mountains, as well as the ice frozen at the north and south poles. This planet will be totally covered with water just like it was before Creation week.”

After walking along in thoughtful silence, Noah spoke, “My Lord, how big should the boat be?”

¹ Genesis 7:20

The Lord handed Noah the blueprints and said, “The boat is to be 450 feet long. The construction of this boat would normally take 40 years, but it will take you 120 years because of persecution, ridicule, and extortion.”

“Extortion? What do you mean?”

“Because you and your family will become the laughing stock of the world, hiring people to work on the boat will be very difficult. You will eventually have to pay five times the usual wage for laborers.”

“How much will this project cost?”

“The boat could be built for about \$25,000,000, but cost overruns, construction delays, and extortion will bring the total close to a \$100,000,000.”

Noah stammered, “My Lord! I have not heard of or seen anything like this. Where do you want it built?”

“Build the boat at the crossroads. I want everyone on Earth to see you build this boat. I want people to ask about it. It will be a symbol of my deep grief with mankind. This boat will testify that I intend to cleanse Earth with water, and will prove to be a vehicle of salvation for those willing to believe My Word.”

Noah looked over the blueprints and responded, “My Lord, I am willing to do all that you ask. Through the power of your Spirit and His guiding providence, I will build the boat, but may I ask how the boat will be financed? I don’t have \$100,000,000.”

“Noah, you must go and sell everything you have to get the project started. You are to build a small temporary house near the site where the boat will be built. When the time comes to enter the boat, dismantle the house and put it in the boat. After the flood, you can remove the house and carry the pieces down the mountain.

“It will be shelter for you and your family. As for funding the construction of the boat, I will impress the patriarchs, people like Methuselah and his family, to generously support this project, and there will be saints who will not live long enough to see you enter the ark. They will also support you. You are not to worry about the money. It will come as needed. Your most frustrating challenge will be dealing with the malice of mankind.”

The walk ended and Noah returned home. With the help of his believing family, Noah began selling his property. Noah's obedience demonstrated his faith, and his faith made him an heir of the righteousness which is necessary for salvation.

If we look closely at Hebrews 11, we find that Noah's faith was consistent with many other heirs. God commanded Cain and Abel to kill a lamb as a burnt offering. Abel killed a lamb; Cain did otherwise. God called Abraham to leave home and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Eventually, Abraham grew weary of waiting for the Lord to give him and Sarah a son. They let their faith in God wane and Abraham had a son through Hagar. This greatly displeased the Lord. Ultimately, Abraham renewed his faith in God's promise and Sarah brought forth the promised son when she was 90 years old.

Earlier, I mentioned an heir does not have what is promised, an heir only has the promise. Consider this verse: **“All these people were still living by faith when they died [Abel, Noah, Abraham, etc.]. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.”**¹

I believe the stories of faith in Hebrews 11 are connected with salvation, but not in the way many people think. When a person lives by faith, he transitions from rebellion and intellectual assent to having an attitude of humility toward God's great authority. This attitude is demonstrated by an eager willingness to go-be-do.

1 Hebrews 11:13, insertion mine

When we choose to have this submissive attitude, living by faith begins and we become an heir of the righteousness necessary for salvation. Jesus gives His righteousness to everyone who lives by faith. His righteousness is the wedding garment everyone needs to attend the coming banquet.¹

What Are the Properties of Faith?

A person who lives by faith has a life that is part intellectual (knowledge), part spiritual (believing), and part physical (doing right regardless of the consequences). People who have a faith experience with God are happy, filled with peace, and eagerly await the Lord's return.

Worries and concerns do not cloud their thinking. They believe God's Word and know He will save everyone who lives by faith. They have chosen to believe Christ's righteousness provides everything necessary to save sinners. People who live by faith choose to believe God knows them and cares for them!

The only valid relationship a sinner can have with God is a life of faith.

God is not our equal. He is not a make-believe buddy or guardian angel. God is real and He reveals himself to His children in different ways known only to those who choose to put their faith in Him. When a person

¹ Matthew 22:1-14

lives a life of faith, he receives an incredible gift. He becomes an heir of the righteousness necessary for salvation; a righteousness which the Father has provided through the life of Jesus. **“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed—a righteousness [that is not manmade, a righteousness] that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”**¹

Faith versus Faith

Knowledge and faith have crucial differences. Knowledge often causes faith to be exercised in opposing directions. This phenomenon is common in politics, science, and religion. For example, some persons believe the Koran is the Word of God, and others believe the Bible is the Word of God. Interestingly, based on their knowledge of the Koran and the Bible, millions of Muslims believe that Christians are infidels and millions of Christians believe Muslims are pagans. This is a classic example of faith versus faith.

Faith is not limited to religion. There is endless debate about the origin of life on Earth. Some people believe in a “theory” called evolution and others believe in a “theory” called creation. Many people think this is simply a debate between intellectuals and science (evolutionists) versus believers and the Bible (creationists), but both

¹ Romans 1:17, insertion mine

sides of this debate share the same common denominator: Faith!

Human beings were not alive to witness Creation Week as it occurred. Obviously, they had not observed evolution occur over the eons. Therefore, the debate over origins can never be settled because knowledge alone cannot resolve every question. It becomes obvious then that where knowledge ends, faith begins.

Notice the consequences that can come from faith versus faith. If I choose to accept the theory of evolution (simple life forms evolving into complex life forms over millions of years), I choose to reject the biblical account of creation.¹ If I choose to believe the biblical version of creation, that God created mankind in His own image on the sixth day of the week, I have to reject the assertion that human beings evolved from a piece of slime.

The Bible says that God made the visible out of the invisible. If you choose to accept God's Word, then **“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”**²

A thousand years before Hebrews 11 was written, King David wrote, **“Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke,**

¹ Genesis 1 and 2

² Hebrews 11:3, italics mine

and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.¹

Later, David summarized the creation of everything saying, **“Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his *command* they were created.”**²

Evolutionists argue that it is hard to imagine that the entire universe came into existence because God spoke it into existence. On the other hand, creationists say it is just as hard to imagine that a big explosion took place billions of years ago and matter, life, and an environment that supports it randomly appeared out of nothing. Renowned physicist Steven Hawking claimed that over time, everything we see today occurred without the necessity of, or any input from, God, who does not exist.

Belief in evolution and creation are both matters of faith. Supporters of each side claim they have evidence to win a debate and claim the other position is deficient. Similarly, the Catholics teach that the Jewish faith is deficient. The Muslims believe the Hindu faith is deficient. The Protestants claim all these groups are wrong. This is what faith versus faith looks like and we see this conflict in economics, politics, science, and religion.

Does it Actually Matter?

Does it matter what we believe about the origin of life on Earth? Please consider three possible scenarios:

1 Psalm 33:8, italics mine

2 Psalm 148:5, italics mine

1. When a person chooses to put his faith in evolution, the Bible is denigrated to the level of a myth which causes a new problem. It creates a void leaving no explanation for the most obvious and most serious problem on Earth, which is the curse of sin. People who believe in evolution do not have a redeemer and they see no need for redemption. To them, sin is what exists between people (the last six commandments), not between God and man (the first four commandments).

The nature of evolution forces evolutionists to look backward. Why do you think NASA is spending billions of dollars searching for life on Mars? Believers in evolution are more concerned with man's origin than man's destination. Evolutionists do not believe in a resurrection and have no hope of one. As they study fossils or geologic strata, they see no evidence of a glorious hereafter with God, family, and friends. Advocates of evolution exalt the authority of science and intellectual reasoning as though evolution is factual, but the premise underlying their cherished theory is built on faith. Evolutionists claim the big bang is the best explanation on the origin of life, but they are totally silent about the curse of sin which kills everything that has life.

Personally, if I were a gambling man and the odds in the debate were 90/10 in favor of evolution, I would

still place my bet on creation because a 10% chance for eternal life is better than a 100% chance for eternal death.

2. There is also a confusing difference between faith and intellectual assent. Intellectual assent occurs before we are old enough to choose a life of faith. Each child absorbs the language, culture, and religion around him as he grows up. If a child grows up having parents who believe in creation, he will accept the idea that God created everything out of nothing more easily.

Even if he does not challenge the concept of a literal creation for many years, the idea remains. Our natural alignment with ideas believed to be fact, or taught as fact, is called intellectual assent. Intellectual assent is a casual agreement with something believed to be true. For example, a person can believe that George Washington was the first president of the United States and he can also believe that Jesus came to Earth and died on a cross for sinners. A person can embrace both of these beliefs without the beliefs having any influence or effect on his life.

Each child inherits the God of his parents. This God may be Allah, Jesus, Jehovah, or Buddha. Atheism does not have a God, but is a religion based on the

belief that there is no God. A child may not practice the religion of his parents when he becomes old enough to do as he pleases, but nevertheless, the religion of his parents is his religious start. Usually, this intellectual assent remains intact until an event challenges his belief system and he is forced to consider his beliefs and make a choice.

Because intellectual assent is a collection of casual or assumed facts, college-aged young people are often willing to change their beliefs to what they believe is a better set of "facts." This willingness to exchange beliefs explains how young adults often abandon their inherited religion for one that better fits their chosen lifestyle.

Few young people have lived by faith because they have never had a compelling reason to do so. Therefore, the natural default is intellectual assent which comes through traditions, culture, and contemporary knowledge. In complete contrast, living by faith requires a price, and maintaining faith in God when the consequences are painful demands determined commitment.

3. Our behavior exposes whether we are living with intellectual assent or genuine faith in God. It reveals who we really are and what we really believe. Faith renders obedience at all times and in all circum-

stances, while intellectual assent excuses transgression. If a person is living up to all that he knows to be right and true, he is living by faith. Faith and obedience are inseparable. God sees our hearts and knows what we are thinking. He sees each transgression when there is a separation between knowledge and behavior.

Faith is a commitment to the knowledge we have and it is also a commitment to growth. Many people have a right heart (they live by faith), but a wrong head (their knowledge is messed up). As the Holy Spirit prompts an individual to learn more about God, the person's discoveries can go in many directions. If a particular discovery compels him to obey God's greatest commandments (Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind and soul and thy neighbor as thyself.¹), his behavior will prove his growth in knowledge is going in the right direction. As he commits to pleasing God, it shows he is living by faith. James wrote, **"I will show you my faith by my deeds."**²

There is a big difference between wholesome faith and toxic religion. Toxic religion does not have two great commandments. Toxic religion is all about "loving God supremely" while treating our neighbors as outsiders or

1 Matthew 22:37,39

2 James 2:18

unclean. Toxic religion is destructive, harsh, critical, arrogant, and self-righteous.

The Pharisees in Christ's day are an example of toxic faith. They worshiped their religion and it caused them to crucify the Creator of mankind.¹ Religious systems that express hatred and diminish the value of others do not spring from God.² Religious systems that uphold the Word of God and love their neighbors as themselves spring from God. Regardless, all religious systems eventually produce good or bad fruit. Jesus said, **“Thus, by their fruit, you shall recognize them.”**³

Did Jesus Come to Earth?

I believe there is sufficient evidence from outside sources, such as Josephus and the writings of early Christian believers, that proves Jesus came to Earth, died on a cross, was resurrected, and taken to heaven. If a person chooses to believe the biblical account of creation and the fall of man, which brought about the curse of sin,⁴ then the death of Jesus on the cross makes a lot of sense.

Redemption of sinners is only possible because God loves mankind. Redemption is necessary because sinners cannot save themselves from the penalty for sin. On the other hand, the theory of evolution has no need

1 John 1:1-14

2 John 8:44

3 Matthew 7:20

4 Genesis 1-3

of a Savior because evolution does not consider the curse of sin or the penalty for sin.

Since I grew up in a Christian environment, I inherited and intellectually accepted as fact that Jesus loved sinners so much that He was willing to come to Earth and die for us. However, Jesus' life on Earth and His death on the cross did not have a transforming effect on me until I was an adult. I only became seriously interested in Jesus when I realized that there is nothing beyond this short life unless I become an heir of the righteousness of Jesus.

Personally, when I felt the weight of my sins and began to grasp the penalty that loomed over my head, I realized I needed a Savior. When I began to comprehend what Jesus had done for me, I was overwhelmed. As is so often the case, I went along in life happily unaware of my condemnation. I did not sense my need for a Savior, but fortunately the Holy Spirit changed this.

Scripture reveals that God has a wonderful proposition. God says to sinners, "If you are willing to believe in me and live by faith, I will make you an heir. I promise to give you the righteousness necessary for salvation. I will also give you a new life that is far better than anything you can create for yourself. You will experience a peace that words cannot express. And at the end of sin's drama, you will not be hurt by the second death. All of

this is possible if you are willing to live by faith.” Living by faith means to go-be-do as God directs.

Faith renders obedience at all times in all circumstances. In contrast, intellectual assent excuses transgression. When a person lives up to all that he knows to be right and true, he is living by faith. Obedience and faith are inseparable. God sees the motives of our hearts and minds. He clearly sees each transgression when there is a separation between knowledge and behavior.

Faith That Overcomes Fear

We could describe faith in God as a form of heroism. An ordinary person becomes a hero when he willingly risks his own life to save another life. Heroes are exalted because their actions are an expression of supreme love. Jesus said, **“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”**¹

From God’s perspective, living by faith is a heroic act because a faithful person puts God’s will above his own. A person reveals his faith in God when he faces threatening situations and chooses to do right in God’s sight without regard for the consequences.

This may seem strange, but faith is not detected on Easy Street. In fact, a person’s faith and true character are not revealed until he or she is tested. This is

¹ John 15:13

why He designed a testing time for everyone during the Great Tribulation. Jesus spoke to His faith-full believers at Philadelphia saying, **“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from [during] the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.”**¹

Faith and character are often hidden from view until they are tested. One way faith in God grows is through personal study and prayer. Similarly, character grows from test to test. As we study the Bible, the curtain is pulled back to reveal the successes and failures of people in the past. Even more importantly, God reveals His involvement and response.

God sees everything. In fact, the phrase “the eyes of the Lord” is mentioned 88 times in the Bible. **“For *the eyes of the Lord* range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”**²

Jesus taught that faith in God is not measured by size because it can be as tiny as a mustard seed and still move mountains!³ Faith in God is a choice. We demonstrate our choices with each challenge that comes our way. When confronted with a test, those who live by

1 Revelation 3:10, insertion mine

2 2 Chronicles 16:9, italics mine

3 Matthew 17:20

faith grasp the promises and providences of God, and through His strength, they overcome their fear. For example, consider the actions of King Jehoshaphat:

“After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to wage war against Jehoshaphat. Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, ‘A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. It is already in Hazezon Tamar’ (that is, En Gedi). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.

“Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the Lord in the front of the new courtyard and said: ‘Lord, the God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. Our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, ‘If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence be-

fore this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.

“But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. Our God, will you not judge them? *For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*’

“All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord.

“Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly.

“He said: ‘Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. *For the battle is not yours, but God’s.* Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel.

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.” ’

“Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

“Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, ‘Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.’ After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

“‘Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever.’

“As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.”¹

¹ 2 Chronicles 20:1-22, italics mine

The faith of one man inspired a whole nation to have faith in God! To demonstrate his faith in what God could do, King Jehosophat placed an unarmed choir at the head of the army. As the column marched toward the enemy, they sang praises to God who had promised victory. What finer words could be used to end the story, **“and they [the enemy] were defeated”**? Blessed is the person who gains victory over fear through faith!

Total Surrender — Even unto Death

The most difficult dimension in faith is total surrender even to the point of death. Jesus gave us the perfect example of this kind of faith. A few hours before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed: **“‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.’ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”**¹

The Father did not remove the bitter cup that Jesus had to drink, but the Father did send an angel to strengthen Jesus.

Many people do not realize this, but God may not answer prayers as they anticipate for the following three reasons:

¹ Luke 22:42-44

1. Divine wisdom and foreknowledge.

God sees tomorrow with the same clarity that He sees today. God always knows what is best. In many situations, we may pray for an outcome that would not be good for us or others. In this case, divine wisdom and love may prevent Him from answering our petition in the way we think is best. For example, what loving father would give the keys to the car to his ten-year-old son? From time to time, even human wisdom has to say, “No.” So, when Jesus asked the Father to remove the bitter cup, the Father said “No” because the redemption of sinners required the death of a sinless sacrifice! Therefore, the Father sent an angel to strengthen Jesus so He could fulfill His mission, even if it meant dying on the cross. Jesus lived a life of faith and He accepted His own death as the Father’s will. Jesus’ faith is astonishing!

2. Justice and fairness.

God is love. His actions and policies are based on the principles of love, but He must be unquestionably fair. For example, God does not send miracles very often; but when He does, it is usually in a setting where He can accomplish several objectives at

the same time.¹ For instance, millions of sick people worldwide pray for healing. It would not be fair for God to answer some petitions and ignore others. God does not cancel the law of cause and effect, and He is not cancelling the curse of sin right now. However, He does the next best thing to help everyone by increasing knowledge and giving people the ability to help one another.

God loves everyone² and He gives us a great deal of freedom which enables us to grow in knowledge and exercise our faith in Him. Of course, God knows tremendous injustice is occurring on Earth. God sees the suffering caused by predators, and believe me, He keeps records and He will deal with those who have hurt others and preyed on the vulnerability of the poor, sick, and elderly at a time He has chosen.

Of course, human beings want justice executed immediately, but God has ordained that justice will be served after the drama with sin is over. He will deal with all of the wicked and be sure they receive the appropriate punishment for the sins they have committed. Be assured, the wicked are heirs, too – only they will receive God's wrath when the time is right. No crime will go unpunished.

1 Acts 14:3

2 Matthew 5:45

3. The curse of sin.

Until the curse is lifted, God must allow the consequences of sin to bring about sorrow, suffering, and death. God has ordained that the curse of sin will last long enough to accomplish His objectives and not one day longer.

I understand there are also three reasons for God allowing the curse of sin to exist for six millennia.

First, God foreknew that it would take 6,000 years to produce enough saints to repopulate heaven. Right now, heaven is two-thirds full. When redemption is accomplished, I believe heaven will be restored to three-thirds – a full house!

Second, God foreknew it would take 6,000 years for the curse of sin to mature. Since God is determined to prevent a third episode with sin, He has allowed the consequences of sin to develop. God wants the knowledge of good and evil to be completely revealed so there is no question regarding His actions. Going forward through eternity, there will be no excuse for sin or rebellion. No one will be able to create lies or arguments against God's character or government because the truth about God will have been demonstrated. No questions will remain about the supremacy of God's government or the purity of His character.

Finally, at the end of sin's drama, God will show the universe:

- Who Jesus really is.
- That Lucifer's character changed and he became a liar and a murderer because of sin.
- That given time and opportunity, sin makes predators of every sinner.

God will also show the universe:

- The great price that was paid to redeem sinners.
- That He has perfect foreknowledge and even though He knows the end from the beginning, He will not treat His children according to His foreknowledge, but based on His love.

When Jesus creates the new heaven and new Earth, it will far surpass His first Earthly creation. Everyone living in His house will understand the horrific consequences of sin. The knowledge of good and evil will be complete as well as the knowledge of God's purity and perfect love. What a wonderful way to press the reset button and begin eternity all over again!

Knowing all this helps us to understand why God turned down Jesus' prayer to escape Calvary. However, the Father knew that the death of a perfect sacrifice was required to redeem sinners. His hands were tied by love for us ("For God so loved the world") and His hands

remain tied by the curse of sin. Do not be discouraged. Rejoice!

The day is coming when God will righteously annihilate the wicked and purify the universe of sin.

Not one of us has escaped the curse of sin, but we do have the promise of salvation and that is good enough. Tests and trials come and go, strengthening our faith in God, and each one comes with commensurate grace from God. His grace is sufficient for any challenge when we surrender to His will.

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