



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

May 2010

QUESTIONS TO ASK MYSELF WHEN I STUDY THE BIBLE (5)

As you and I study the word of God, we sometimes come across statements that, at least on the surface, appear to contradict things that are said in other Bible passages. How can we explain or harmonize such apparent contradictions? It requires that we take into account everything that the Bible says on a particular topic. At the same time, it is also imperative that we deal honestly with the message of the text.

Furthermore, we must keep in mind that just because you and I do not have an adequate explanation for what appears to be a contradiction, that does not mean that the Bible is wrong. The needed information may be present and we are just missing it. Also, two statements contradict one another only when there is no plausible explanation to harmonize them. If there is any suitable interpretation that fits the text that is in harmony with the totality of God's truth, then there is no contradiction. Let us look at some Bible statements that at first glance do not seem to harmonize.

John the Baptizer – Was he Elijah, or not? By the Spirit of God, the prophet Malachi prophesied, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Malachi 4:5). When the Jews sent priests and Levites to question John the Baptizer, they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” John's short response was, “I am not” (John 1:21). Yet, when Jesus spoke about John, the Master declared, “And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matthew 11:11-14). So, while John claimed that he was *not* Elijah, Jesus said that John *was* Elijah. How can both declarations be right?

Was John the reincarnation of Elijah? No. Was John Elijah in the flesh? No. Before John was born, an angel of the Lord told John's father, Zacharias, that John would go before the Lord “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). Thus, in spirit and power, John strongly resembled Elijah. It is not uncommon to read in the Bible that a person or place is called by another name, not because the two are identical, but because of similarities in the two. For instance, the Messiah is called “David” (Ezekiel 37:24,25) and Judah or Jerusalem is described as “Sodom” (Isaiah 1:10) because of their common traits.

Do children of God sin, or not? Some who believe in Jesus as the Son of God are convinced that Christians do not sin, and they would point us to 1 John 3:9, where it is written, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin . . .” However, two chapters before that we read that the same writer told 1st-century saints,

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). God has made provisions for Christians who sin to be forgiven. What arrangement is that? The very next verse reads, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” In that one verse, the Holy Spirit twice speaks of the “sins” of Christians and also speaks of their “unrighteousness.” So, yes, children of God do sin.

How, then, can we explain the statement that whoever has been born of God does *not* sin? That sounds like a contradiction, does it not? One key is to finish reading 1 John 3:9. We previously quoted only a portion of it. Now, look at the whole verse: “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” Why is it that a child of God does not sin? Answer: Because God's seed remains in him. The “seed” is the word of God (Luke 8:11). When that seed/word abides in our hearts and we act upon its message, then we do not sin (Psalm 119:11). At the same time, we must note that while Christians do sin, we are not the slaves of sin. Any wrong conduct on our part ought not be an ongoing state of lawlessness, but rather a “lapse” into sin of which we quickly repent.

To forsake family members – commendable, or wrong action? God instructs husbands to love their wives like the Christ loved the church, reminding husbands that they are joined to their wives (Ephesians 5:25,31). Wives are likewise taught to love their husbands and children (Titus 2:4,5). On the other hand, Jesus proclaimed a blessing on husbands and others that forsake or leave their family members, saying, “. . . there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters of father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time . . . and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29,30). So, which is it, should disciples stay with, or forsake, their families?

In another instance our Lord said, “. . . whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). Of what type of forsaking or leaving did Jesus speak in these cases? Not literally leaving family members, but rather *in our hearts* making a commitment to love Him above all others. It is a matter of priorities: Jesus comes first and all other people and activities come after Him (Matthew 10:37). That includes family members, even those who are in the family of God. Let us keep studying diligently.

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE WORLD OF NOAH'S DAY, THE ARK, AND THE FLOOD (2)

Noah, the ark that he built, and the flood that destroyed the world – those are familiar topics to all Bible students. In a previous article, we looked at the world of Noah's day, noting both its wickedness as well as the righteous example of Noah. Now let us look at two more aspects of that era of time.

The Ark – Who was it that came up with the idea to build an ark? Was it someone in Noah's family? No, it was the Lord Himself. After pronouncing that He would destroy the earth, God charged Noah, "*Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch*" (Genesis 6:14). God gave certain specifics about how He wanted Noah to build the ark. Just as Jehovah later gave Moses and the Israelites a pattern for the tabernacle (Exodus 25:9), so He gave Noah a pattern for the ark. God's message to Noah was, "*And this is how you shall make it . . .*" (Genesis 6:15). When God speaks, man needs to listen! When He gives a command, He expects humans to keep it. And, when He gives a command and at the same time says *how* He wants it carried out, then it is our duty to do it like He said – *exactly* like He said to do it! Noah understood that principle, so upon hearing God's will for the building of the ark, "*Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did*" (Genesis 6:22).

What about the size of the ark? By God's decree, it was 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. A cubit is generally thought to have been the length from a person's elbow to the tip of his middle finger. A rough estimate would be that one cubit was about 1½ feet (45¾ cm.), making the ark's dimensions approximately 450 feet x 75 feet by 45 feet (137.2 meters x 22.9 meters x 13.7 meters). The ark was a massive structure, with its length being considerably longer than the playing area of a football field.

But was the ark large enough to hold all of the animals, Noah's family, and necessary supplies? Remember, God "*knows all things*" (1 John 3:20). He knew that an ark was needed, He knew who should build it, and He absolutely knew the proper dimensions for it. His blueprint was perfect. God does not make mistakes. He never miscalculates or miscalculates. Of course, the ark was large enough!

What was the purpose of the ark? The Bible record indicates that when the flood came, all humans outside of the ark died. "*Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive*" (Genesis 7:23). The Bible says that the eight people of Noah's family were "saved" inside the ark (1 Peter 3:20). In this instance, "saved" does not mean saved from sin, but rather safety from physical danger. But, Noah's personal safety was not all that was at stake. The Lord had promised the coming of a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15). In order for God to bring the Messiah into the world, He had to keep the Messiah's ancestors alive. Thus, in the big picture of things, the ark that Noah built was an

instrument to help fulfill God's plan to save sinners through Jesus.

[Be aware of the fact that the Bible mentions more than one ark. Besides the one that Noah built, there was "*an ark of bulrushes*" (Exodus 2:3) in which baby Moses was placed. Also, God instructed the Israelites to build "*the ark of the Testimony*" and place it in the most holy place of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:22).]

The Flood – When did it occur? Using the genealogical record of Genesis 5 and the chronological data included in it, calculations indicate that the flood began 1656 years after God created the world.

How long did the flood last? The rain lasted for 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7:12), and the Bible says that "*the flood was on the earth forty days*" (7:17), but the waters continued to rise and stayed on the earth much longer. Noah's age is given at the time the rain began and again at the time when he came out of the ark. The difference shows that from the first day of the flood until he exited the ark was one year and ten days (Genesis 7:11; 8:14-16). Wow, one year plus.

What about the scope of the flood? Was it universal, or only local? It was a world-wide deluge. Consider the facts. First, "*. . . all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered*" (Genesis 7:19). Second, the destruction of human life and other living things was universal (7:21-23). Third, the very fact that an ark was needed clearly shows that the flood was universal. If it had only been a local flood, Noah and his family simply could have traveled to another, higher area to wait for the flood to come to an end. Fourth, God's own statements after the flood pointed to a world-wide catastrophe. He said the bow is a sign, a reminder that He will not repeat something: "*. . . the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh*" (9:15). Look at those words: "*never again . . . all flesh.*" We might also ask about the rainbow: is it only seen in a certain local area, or is it a phenomenon that can be seen throughout the whole world? Folks, the flood of Noah's day was a world-wide event.

When we think of the effects of the flood, we think of the destruction of the earth and living things. But it also affected the terrain of the earth and its climate. In addition, the flood drastically lowered the population of the human race. We often speak about being the offspring of Adam and Eve, and we are. At the same time, though, each one of us is a descendant of Noah and his wife. The flood brought about a new beginning.

Do not miss the truth that the flood was not simply "a natural disaster." It was a disaster alright. And, it involved nature. But, it all happened *when* and *how* God made it happen. Remember, the flood waters came not only via rain from the sky, but in addition all the fountains of the great deep were also broken up (Genesis 7:11). What caused that to occur? Not "what," but "who." God did.

-- Roger D. Campbell

WHAT CAN HELP ME REMAIN A FAITHFUL CHILD OF GOD?

Are you a Christian? If you are, then ask yourself, "What can help me remain faithful to the Lord?" Let me suggest some things that will help all of us to be like Timothy, who is described as being "*faithful in the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 4:17). There is nothing in the following paragraphs that is new, nothing that would thrill the masses, and nothing that sounds "super special." But, as simple as they sound, they work – in every place and in every generation.

1. Decide that, more than anything else, we want to go to heaven.

If we want to be counted as faithful in the sight of God, then we must have this goal for our life: live a life that pleases the Lord in order that we can go to heaven. Surely we all want to hear the Master say to us, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" (Matthew 25:21). Heaven is only for those people who, more than anything else, seek to go there. Jesus said, "*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*" (Matthew 7:13,14). If a child of God does not really strive to enter the narrow gate, then he will fail to be faithful, and in the end will not make it to heaven. Think about it.

2. Live one day at a time.

It is wise to make plans for our life, but when we talk about the future, let us remember to say, "*If the Lord wills*" (James 4:13-15). Let us be concerned about doing the Lord's will *today* and not worry about tomorrow. If we will think about having to be faithful to the Lord for 10 or 20 or 50 years, perhaps we will say that it is just too difficult, and we will become discouraged and quit serving God. Jesus said, "*Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*" (Matthew 6:34). Let us work for Jesus and do His will *today*. Let us ask God to help us be faithful *today*. If we faithfully serve Him *today*, then today is a success! If tomorrow comes, then let us begin again tomorrow with the same prayer, "Lord, help me to be faithful to You *today*."

3. Spend as much time as possible with other faithful saints.

If we spend most of our time with the children of Satan, then serious danger looms: "*Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits*" (1 Corinthians 15:33). If we can find a way to spend more of our time with other faithful servants of the Lord, then that will be a big encouragement to us. The Bible's instruction is, "*But exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today'*" (Hebrews 3:13). Spending time with other Christians really is a great blessing! It provides us with an opportunity to

exhort one another and help each other to serve the Lord in the right way. Remember this: only God and other Christians can truly understand the difficulties that you and I face in our lives as we struggle to overcome the devil and live faithfully for Jesus.

4. Read the Bible and pray every day.

This sounds so basic, but it is such a powerful source of help. Our communication with God is a big part of keeping us where we need to be spiritually. "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). Studying the Bible helps us to grow in faith and "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18). Remember, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled*" (Matthew 5:6). And what about prayer? "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Pray to the Lord, for "*He cares for you,*" and *He is "our refuge and strength"* (1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 46:1). It is a proven and tested fact that daily Bible study and prayer will bless the life of a sincere saint of God!

5. If you choose to get married, marry someone that is a faithful member of the Lord's church.

Read and learn from King Solomon's foolish decision to marry non-Israelite wives. They were a curse to his life. Solomon started out loving Jehovah (1 Kings 3:3), but his wives turned his heart to them and their false gods (1 Kings 11:3-10). Hear this world-wide truth: for the great majority of people in this world, the one human that influences them more than any other is the person to whom they are married. Think about it. If you marry someone that is not a faithful child of the living God, you will be cleaving or glued to a servant of the devil (Matthew 19:4-6). It is tough to have a good marriage. It is even harder to get to heaven. Marrying one that does not put God's affairs first (Matthew 6:33) is a great way to make yourself miserable and endanger your soul. Is *that* what you want? If pleasing God is what you really desire to do, then marry a person that will help you and your offspring go to heaven!

6. Attend each service of the church.

Each child of God should imitate the attitude of David, who said, "*I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the LORD*" (Psalm 122:1). Willfully missing the assemblies of God's people will weaken His children like few other things can (Hebrews 10:24,25). When we come together to worship or study with a pure heart, then we grow closer to one another as we draw closer to God. It is a great privilege to assemble with other Christians who love the God of heaven with their whole being (Mark 12:29,30). Make plans to be at every service.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Galatians 4:4 – FOUR FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

In Galatians 4:4 it is written, "*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.*" The content of this verse can be divided easily into four parts, each of which sets forth a clear truth or fact. Let us take a closer look together.

(1) "**God sent forth his Son**" – True, this is not the first fact recorded in the text, but all else that is stated hinges on it, so with it we begin. God did what? He *sent*. If God took the action of sending about two thousand years ago, then that means that after He completed His work of creation (Genesis 2:1,2), He did not just pull back out of the picture and forget about His creation.

Whom did God send? His Son. As John later wrote, ". . . *the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world*" (1 John 4:14). What love the Father showed by sending His Son! (John 3:16). And, what appreciation we ought to have for the Son's coming on our behalf!

(2) "**But when the fullness of the time had come**" – This statement answers the question, "*When did God the Father send His Son?*" In similar language, Paul wrote to the saints in Rome that "*in due time Christ died for the ungodly*" (Romans 5:6). So, Jesus came into the world "*at the right time,*" "*the fullness of the time.*" We are made to wonder: "*the fullness of time*" according to whose time schedule? Answer: God's.

When God deemed that it was the very best time in history, He sent Jesus into the world for man's salvation. No sooner, and no later. God did not gather a council of men to seek their advice in the matter of when the Son should come. He did not send out a questionnaire in order to learn man's preference about the time of the Christ's coming. No, God sent the Lamb that had been foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:19,20), and He did it when He deemed it to be the best time.

God had promised that He would bless all nations through Abraham's Seed (Genesis 22:18). The Seed is none other than the Christ (Galatians 3:16). God through the prophets foretold of the Messiah's coming into the world (Micah 5:2; Isaiah 53:3-6). And come He did! When? When God wanted it to happen.

It has been suggested that the time of Jesus' coming to earth was "the right time" because of the contributions that had been made in the Middle East by the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, and the Roman Empire. There is, no doubt, some merit in that line of reasoning. However, the bottom line is this: the Son came when the Father sent Him, and according to God's plan, *that* time and no other, was "*the fullness of time.*" "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*" (Romans 11:33).

(3) "**Born [made, KJV] of a woman**" – The Bible identifies the woman as "*a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph . . . The virgin's name was Mary*" (Luke 1:27). The angel Gabriel told Mary that she was blessed among women and had "*found favor with God*" (Luke 1:28,30). Why did God choose Mary? Was it because she was sinless? No. She herself spoke of God as her "*Savior*" (Luke 1:46,47), so she was not without sin. But why choose her as the vessel through whom the Messiah would come? Again, per God's infinite wisdom, she was the best person for the task.

Note that neither Galatians 4:4 nor any other passage speaks of Jesus coming from a male. No, it speaks of Him being made or born "*of a woman.*" This clearly points to the fact that Jesus' mother was a virgin at the time she conceived Him. The Bible record indicates that she was still a virgin when He was born (Matthew 1:18-25). Any reference to Mary's husband, Joseph, being a parent of Jesus (Luke 2:41,48) has to be understood in the sense that he served as Jesus' adopted earthly father, but not His biological father.

(4) "**Born [made, KJV] under the law**" – Here is a Bible statement that has not yet "hit home" with many people. Jesus lived as a Jew during His earthly sojourn. He lived on the earth when the Law of Moses was still in effect for the Jews. Therefore, He kept/lived under the Law of Moses, "the old law." He encouraged the Jews of His day to obey the Old Testament law (cf. Mark 1:44), and He Himself did the same (cf. instances of Him keeping the Passover).

The new covenant of the Christ could not come into effect until He died. "*For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives*" (Hebrews 9:16,17). If the Christ's covenant came into force only after He died, then obviously He did not live under the new covenant.

Galatians 4:4 contains four plain truths. They are written in a context in which Paul by the Spirit is writing about redemption and being accepted as the sons of God (4:5). Thanks be to God that through His Son, sinners can be redeemed, and by being baptized into Him they can become the sons of the living God (Galatians 3:26,27).

"But don't you think that God could have sent Jesus into the world at a different time, in a different manner, and under a different law?" No need for us to speculate on what He *could* have done. Let us accept what the Bible says about what He *did* do, *when* He did it, and *why* He did it. And, let us be thankful for it!

--Roger D. Campbell

[All quotes from the New King James Version; ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.]

TRUTH is published monthly by the Klang church of Christ in order to help educate, edify, encourage, and equip the saints of God.