Introductory Bible Study



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In referring to angels, the Bible has this verse in it: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14) Please consider the following thought material:

(1) Can you ever remember a time when you had something which you could describe as an angelic intervention?

(2) What is salvation? Do we all inherit salvation by default or do only good people inherit it?

(3) Upon what standard should we judge ourselves good, and bad?
Let's say that we decided that our standard would be the Golden Rule, which is to do unto others as you would have done unto yourself. Then, on this basis, how are each of us doing according to this self-imposed standard? Be honest. For myself, I fall far short upon the basis of the Golden Rule.

I have spent a fair amount of time looking at other religions including Mormonism, Jehovah Witness, and Islam. This is in comparison to Christianity, which I hesitate to call a religion but will do so for the sake of argument. All of the former religions have doctrines that state something like "don't question our infallible authority". The word Islam means submit. Christianity teaches something quite different, that you should test everything. The Bible says in the New Testament: "Test all things; hold fast what is good." (I Thessalonians chapter 5 verse 21)

The Story of Job

Job, pronounced 'Jobe', is one of the oldest books in the Bible. It was written around 1,500 BC and dealt with events which happened around 2000 BC. Job was one of the books found in the caves around Qumran beginning in 1947. These Dead Sea Scrolls as the came to be called were exact manuscript copies of the Jewish Bibles in existence around 200BC. In fact, fragments or complete copies of all of the books of the Old Testament were found there except for one, which was the book of Esther. These finds confirm the unchanged nature of the modern Bible, which has only minor differences primarily in the spelling of names. Job was an old dude that made some pretty amazing statements. You see he was very prosperous and living high on the hog, but according to God, was also a righteous and good man. Job recognized that he was a sinner though, as all of us are. The New Testament reveals a similar view of mankind: "…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Job made an interesting statement in chapter 19, verses 25- 27:

> For I know that my Redeemer lives,
> And He shall stand at last on the earth;
> And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
> That in my flesh I shall see God,
> Whom I shall see for myself,
> And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
> How my heart yearns within me!

Remember that this was written around 2000 years before Christ, most likely during the patriarchal period, well before the Prophets of the Bible. Copies of the book of Job were found among the Dead

Sea Scrolls dating to at least 200 BC. Job said that his "skin is destroyed," but somehow he will stand in his flesh and see God. How could this be? Let's continue with our Bible study, and learning, but testing and questioning everything, remembering what we read in First Thessalonians. 5:21. Yes, Job was looking for a Redeemer way back in 2000BC. The theme of a coming Redeemer was woven throughout the Old Testament Bible. The Bible says that Job was a righteous man: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil." (Job 1:1) Why did Job even need a redeemer, if he was a righteous man? Let's jump to the New Testament, to the book of Romans again, chapter 6 verse 23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This passage says that our wages, or payment, for sin is our death. Sounds like a bad deal to me! Remember what we said in Romans 3:23 that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Yes, Job was a sinner, and died as one, although he enjoyed a long life.

The Bible records that mankind fell into a sinful state immediately after they were created. The story is recorded in the first book of Moses, called Genesis, in Chapter 3. It was after man turned against God that the concept of a sacrifice for sin arose. You see, God immediately killed an animal to provide clothing for our lovely couple Adam and Eve! "Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." (Genesis 3:21) The poor little animal did not sin, but our poor little sheep or whatever suffered the ultimate price for what our human beings did against God! Let's look at it another way. We talked about the Golden Rule as a standard of judging ourselves. And if we were honest, we would admit that we fall short on that general scale. What standard would God use for judging us? Since God is perfect, would He use His own perfect standard? On that basis, who is righteous? Where would Job fall on this scale? Would he indeed fall far short of the perfect standard? Where would we fall on the basis of this perfect scale of judgment? I know that I would fall **far short**.

Prophesy Concerning the Coming Redeemer

Back to the theme of the coming Redeemer that Job was looking for way back in 2000 BC. Most school kids know the name of the city that Jesus was born in — Bethlehem. You may be surprised to find out that some 700 years before Christ (BC) there was a prediction made by a prophet named Micah. This has also been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls which date back to around 200BC. Here is the verse from Micah 5:2:

> But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
> Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
> Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
> The One to be Ruler in Israel,
> Whose goings forth are from of old,
> From everlasting.

Ephrathah is the region in which Jesus' birthplace of Bethlehem was found. You may be surprised to find out that at the time of Jesus, there were two cities called Bethlehem. This prophesy identified the exact village where He was actually born. It also identified that the Ruler would come from an eternal identity and would be everlasting. Only God could have fulfilled this role of eternal Ruler.

There are hundreds of other prophesies in the Jewish Old Testament Bible which not only predict how and when Jesus would come, but also predict how he would die. Isaiah 53 records this about the coming Messiah Jesus:

> Surely He has borne our griefs
> And carried our sorrows;
> Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
> Smitten by God, and afflicted.
> But He was wounded for our transgressions,
> He was bruised for our iniquities;
> The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
> And by His stripes we are healed.
> All we like sheep have gone astray;
> We have turned, every one, to his own way;
> And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Sidetrack: Why You Can Believe the Bible

During my research to prove the existence of God, I discovered that there were at least four types of evidence for proof of truth in the Bible. Here is what I found:

(1) Prophesy evidence, like we just looked at.

(2) Historical evidence, what history writers have said about Jesus and events in the Bible from primarily non-Christian authors such as Josephus.

(3) Manuscript evidence, which means looking at the number of copies of the Bible and the lack of variation between the copies. We find that there are many thousands of copies of the Bible with almost no difference between them. This is one of the best documented facts of history.

(4) Statistical evidence, in which the science of probability and statistics is applied to the Bible. For an excellent analysis of this, I suggest the book A Skeptics Search for God by Ralph Muncaster.

(5) Evidence of changed lives, in which people have left lives of drug addiction, alcoholism, pornography addictions, and a variety of other ills.

Back to the Study!

Most of us would not doubt that Abraham Lincoln lived, in the same way we trust that Jesus also lived from a historical perspective. From the same historical perspective you will notice that many folks visit the grave of Abraham Lincoln, but there is no grave for Jesus Christ because Jesus is alive in Heaven. Even with all of the false prophets on the TV screen these days, none are talking about visiting a grave containing the body of Jesus. During the time that I attended a Roman Catholic Church, I viewed the TV preachers like Ken Copeland as somehow representing the entire non-Catholic Christian church. I found out later that these folks were, in my opinion, false prophets

— liars, which the Christian church abhors. Their ministries, which seem to be chiefly designed to take away people's money, do so at the additional expense of their follower's eternal souls!

Previously, we saw the beginnings of the practice of sacrifice of an innocent for our sin. This practice was a hallmark of the Old Testament Bible. We also read about what the New Testament book of Romans said about sin – that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and that the power of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 3:23 and 6:23) According to God, the gift of eternal life is something that cannot be earned, but it must be received. Unless you receive it, it's not your gift. Think of your family Christmas tree where a small gift somehow got lost behind the tree and was not located until after the New Year. Even though it was purchased for you, it was not YOUR gift until you found it and opened it. This is a crude analogy to the way that Salvation comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus bought your redemption, but you have to trust and believe in the gift — it will not be forced upon you.

The Old Testament records the following in regards to our inherent nature to sin. The book of Ecclesiastes was another one of the books found in the Dead Sea Scrolls dating to 200BC. This passage reads much like the New Testament statement we read in Romans. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says: "For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin." We see continuity on the theme of our imperfect human, sinful nature. In the following section on Exodus, we will find the description of the law provided by God to Moses. The law convicts us of our sin.

The New Testament book of Galatians in chapter 3 verse 19 says: "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator." The purpose of the law was to show us that we are sinners. In our conscience, inherently, we know what is sinful and what is not. We know that murdering a person is wrong. We know that stealing is wrong. The Old Testament law simply codified this. The law made a firm standard for what was wrong, and showed us how when we sin we can be forgiven, because all of us are of a sinful nature. The

beginning of the law was really when God condemned Cain for killing his brother Abel in which the specific act of murder was condemned. But the formal law came about through what we know as the Ten Commandments. These were delivered by God to Moses who is the person that delivered the Hebrew people from their slavery in Egypt. This is the history revealed in the book of Exodus.

The Exodus

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, we find the order from God to Moses for the Hebrew people to flee from their slavery in Egypt. This was during the time of the Pharaohs, mummies, and Pyramids. Moses predecessor Joseph was highly favored among the Pharaohs. Once Joseph died, the Egyptians turned against the Jews and made them their slaves. The commandment to kill an innocent lamb and spread the blood on the door posts was made by God with the promise that all of the first born children would be spared throughout the land in any home in which this was done. The Jews followed this commandment and were saved through faith in the promise by God, and all of the first born of the Egyptians died that evening. Here is the story In Exodus Chapter 12:

> Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you.Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household.And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb.Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire–its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire.And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and

> will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. (Exodus 12:1-17)

Through faith in the sacrifice of an innocent lamb, the death of the first born of all the Jews was prevented. This was also commanded to be done in future generations in remembrance – known to Jews as the **Passover** feast. This is what the Jews celebrate to this very day — Passover. Of course the Egyptians did not follow this commandment from God, and as a result they lost all of their firstborn children (and animals). This led to Egypt allowing the Jews to flee. Almost immediately though, the Egyptians had second thoughts and pursued the Jews into the Red Sea where the Lord parted the waters for safe passage. Once the Egyptians were part way across the sea, God caused confusion among the pursuing soldiers and disabled their chariots. When all of the Jews were safely on the other side, the sea was closed again and death came swiftly to the pursuing army.

We talked about the Golden Rule, which is a common standard for judging ourselves. What standard do you think that God would judge us by? Does it seem sensible that he would use His own standard? If so, and God is perfect, then where would we fall upon His scale. The Bible says about Heaven in Revelation 21:27: "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causesan abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."

On that basis, who would be good enough to enter Heaven when they die? Even if we had <u>one</u> single sin, even if it was a sin revealed only in our consciences and not specifically through the law, God would keep us out of Heaven.

Now we shall return to the subject of the Redeemer that the Old Testament prophets spoke about. John the Baptist was a man that was born shortly before Jesus. He came announcing the

arrival of the much predicted Messiah Jesus. In the Gospel of John, which was a man by the same name but was one of Jesus' disciples, John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God. John 1:29: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God **who takes away the sin of the world**!" (emphasis added) You see, the birth, life, and death of Jesus were the fulfillment of thousands of years of prophesies going all the way back to our old friend Job, and our lovers in the Garden of Eden; Adam and Eve. God knew from the eternity past that the only way to redeem mankind was to present Himself into the form of a man and offer this perfect sinless sacrifice for all of the sins of mankind. This is not something that can be earned – we cannot earn the acts of a sovereign God in sending Jesus, but we must accept it in order for the gift to be **OUR** GIFT. Revelation 3:20 records "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Ephesians 2:8-9 says: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,not of works, lest anyone should boast." Another name for the gift, is grace, which means "undeserved merit." Actually, we deserve eternal punishment in Hell for our sin. John 3:3 says: "Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

We are born physically alive, but spiritually dead. When we believe, we can be born spiritually and we will see a great change in our lives. We may not have a feeling, but we will know that something is different. This is what we call being born again. When you begin to believe in the absolute truth of God revealed in the Bible, you have to realize that you can either be absolutely right, or absolutely wrong. In either case, you are still a sinner. But when you are born again, you have HOPE. Hope is what differentiates a born again believer from someone that has not trusted in Jesus. Jesus, in the New Testament book of John records: "Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6) Jesus is the only way. Our Good works won't do it. Church attendance won't either. Only Jesus can. Jesus is the Passover Lamb that died for our sins! All that we have to do is believe. I need to make one more very important point here. If you are curious about what God has shown you through the Bible verses

that you have read, then without a doubt you are being called. You should continue to seek God and answer the call. Talk to others around you that you know are Christians. Ask them what God has done in their lives.

> **Nor** is there salvation in any **other**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by **which** we must be saved. Acts 4:12

You may ask if I believe, what must I do to be saved. The answer can be found in Romans Chapter 10:

> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.For the Scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. (Romans 10:9-13)

Does this sound too simple? It is. Salvation is a free gift. Our main problem is that we want to do something to earn it. We cannot, it has been purchased for us. All we have to do is to seek God, and He guarantees you that He will show Himself to you. I have watched God work in the lives of dozens of people. I am absolutely sure that He will work in your life! I know that I called upon God and He answered me!

The next things that we need to discuss are the attributes of God. Many people have a personal view of God which may or may not be correct. They may be absolutely wrong in their view. Or their god may not really be God at all. For years my god was myself, I sought pleasure as my source of personal fulfillment. Here is what God says about Himself in His book, the Bible.

(1) God is a Holy God.

The word holy means separate. When applied to God, holy means apart from sin. Heaven as a place of God is holy. "And there shall in no wise enter into it [Heaven] anything that defileth…" (Revelation 21:27 KJV). People measure themselves by many different standards. These include (A) their own standards, (B) society's ever changing standards, and (C) their church or other religious institution's (or cult's) standards. It is worthwhile to ask ourselves where we fall upon these standards of judgment. Are we at the top of our class in our own standards? What about the standard set by our society? Since God is holy, He measures us by His holy standard. If God measured us according to His holy standard, where would we fall? The answer according to God, is FAR SHORT. Remember, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) If we measured anyone against this standard, where would they fall? Again, they would fall FAR SHORT.

Since God is Holy, and Heaven is God's home and is also holy, would anyone be good enough to earn his or her way to Heaven?

(2) God is a God of Justice

The Bible records in Genesis 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25c) God must do right. Let's suppose that a person measured up to God's standard of perfection, he fulfilled all of the requirements. What would God have to do? The answer is that He would have to let him into Heaven.

Here are several illustrations that help to explain the concept of justice.

(A) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge, and he let me go. Would that be just?

(B) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge and told him I am sorry I won't do it again. Then the judge let me go. Would this be just?

(C) Suppose that I killed a person, went to the judge and told him that I'm sorry, I won't do it again, and I will do some good deeds to make up for the murder of the person. Would that be just?

The key concept of God's justice is that sin demands punishment. God cannot excuse or overlook sin.

In light of God's holiness and justice, who deserves punishment and is anyone good enough to earn their way to Heaven? The answer is ALL deserve punishment, and no one is good enough to earn their way to Heaven.

(3) God is a God of Love

God cannot violate His holiness or his justice. He cannot tell us that I love you; I know that you have sinned, and technically you cannot go to Heaven but I will let you in anyway. God's love cannot violate his holiness and justice. He has to satisfy them. How? To satisfy God's justice, someone has to pay the punishment for our sins. We need a substitute. I cannot pay the punishment for your sins because I have also sinned. The only one that can pay the punishment for our sins is somebody who has never sinned. The only one that has never sinned is God. How can God die for our sins? The only way that God could die for our sins is to become a man.

> For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (Gospel of John 3:16-17 KJV)

> But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 KJV)

Jesus Christ died for your sins past, present, and future. Does that mean that everyone is going to Heaven? No. What determines who goes to Heaven? What is the difference between the sinner, and the redeemed forgiven sinner? There is a condition that must be met for those that are going to Heaven. Those who meet the condition MUST go to Heaven. Those who do not meet the condition MUST go to Hell. This condition is shown below.

(4) God is a God of Mercy

The condition that we must meet in order to go to Heaven is found in the book of Romans, and it reveals God's attribute of mercy. The Book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to Gentiles (non-Jewish people) like myself:

> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.For the Scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls on the name of the LORD **shall be saved**. (Romans 10:9-13)

What does the Bible promise if you meet the condition of God's mercy? The answer is, you WILL BE SAVED. When we look at the passage in Romans above, we see several things.

> (A) You must believe that you are a sinner and as a condition of God's justice is headed to **Hell.**
> **Hell = No Hope**

> (B) You must receive the free gift of salvation without believing that you can earn it by good works. After this God's justice and mercy requires that you go to **Heaven.**
> **Heaven = Hope, through the Promise by God through saving faith.**

The Bible says:

> "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (Revelation 3:20)

You have to believe and answer the calling from the Lord Jesus to save you. He will not force you to do this.

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