

## HEZEKIAH: THE MAN WHO LIVED TOO LONG

By Danny Boggs

The true story is told three times in Scripture - in 2 Kings 20, 2 Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 38 and 39. He did not outlive his health. He did not outlive his mind. But Hezekiah may have outlived his love for God.

King Hezekiah brought sorely needed religious reform and restoration to Judah. When he fell sick, God's prophet Isaiah told him that his time was up. He was only 39 years old! "Thus say the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; and not soon recover.'" Hezekiah was as rattled as you and I would be by such news. He wept bitterly, and he prayed fervently. Graciously, God sent Isaiah back with a promise of fifteen more years as a result of Hezekiah's prayer.

In his prayer, the king asked God to remember how he had walked before Him in faithfulness and with a whole heart and how he had done what was good in God's sight. He vowed to walk in humility all of his days if he was allowed to recover.

God answered Hezekiah's prayer, but Hezekiah did not keep his promise.

In foolish pride, he showed off his wealth to foreigners who would come back as greedy enemies. Three years after his desperate prayer, Hezekiah's first son was born to him. What joy! But that son, Manasseh, would become king at age 12, reign for 55 years, and lead the people "astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel." And to think he never would even have been born if Hezekiah had died at 39. Isaiah came back to warn Hezekiah about how bad things would turn out in his family and his country after he died. The only bottom line that Hezekiah cared to see was that "there will be peace and security in my days."

I don't know what the original illness was that threatened his life, but by now Hezekiah had a serious heart condition. I hope that he did not die with it, but it seems like Hezekiah lived too long.

What would you do if death was knocking hard on the door? If you prayed, and God responded with assurance of a specific bonus span of

time to your life, what would you do with that extra time? Would you spend it selfishly or give it back to God in faithful and grateful service?

Here's the real question: what are you doing with the life God has given you today?

Think about the rest of your life this way: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit' - yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." (James 4:13-17.)

Pray like Bernard of Clairvaux did: "O make me thine forever, and should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee."

— Neosho, MO

## NO, BABIES ARE NOT BORN LIARS!

By Mark Lindley

The old doctrine of Original Sin is still alive. Every now and then, one might hear a preacher state that we all have "Adam's nature," and that we are "born in sin." The doctrine is referred to as Original Sin or Total Hereditary Depravity. Many denominations of our day believe it.

The doctrine suggests that after Adam sinned in the Garden, he passed on his "sin nature" to all people. Every baby is born "defiled in body and spirit," and is "totally depraved," not because the baby has sinned but because Adam sinned.

Some believe that Psalm 58 teaches this doctrine: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stops her ear; Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. Break their teeth, O God, in

their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord." (verses 3-6.) Based on this passage some have said that "babies speak lies" because they have inherited "Adam's nature."

Let me assure you that babies are pure, innocent, and are not born in sin! Further, babies have never inherited a "sinful nature" from Adam! This is an ugly, false doctrine that should be opposed by all who respect God's Word.

Well, what about Psalm 58? I affirm that Psalm 58 does not teach Original Sin as seen by the following: 1) The passage is describing David's enemies, not innocent babies; 2) The passage says that the ones under consideration "go" astray, not that they "are born" astray; 3) Newborn babies cannot talk, much less "speak lies"; 4) The ones David describes have "teeth," but babies do not have teeth; 5) Neither Adam

nor Adam's "nature" is mentioned in this passage; 6) This passage is an inspired exaggeration, designed to show the wickedness of David's enemies who were also God's enemies. Obviously, the language is not to be taken literally. Babies do not "literally" go astray "as soon" as they are born; rather, wicked men make wicked choices early in life and go astray. That is all the text teaches. No passage teaches that babies are born sinners!

Adam did not have a "sinful nature." God created him pure and sinless. But Adam chose sin. This is precisely how people become sinners today. We choose sin and therefore commit sin. "Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4.) Sin is committed, not inherited.

— Ripley, MS

# Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

## IS THE VIRGIN BIRTH IMPORTANT?

By Danny Tunnell

"Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14.)

Jesus' birth was not ordinary. He was not an ordinary child. His mother, Mary, was a virgin, having had no intercourse prior to conception and birth.

The angel said to Mary, "Fear not, for you have found favor with God. You shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus." (Luke 1:30,31.)

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, seeing I know not a man?" The angel explained, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you." (Luke 1:35.) An angel told Joseph, "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20.)

All things are possible with God. Things that seem impossible to men are possible with God.

It is no secret that some have attacked the virgin birth of Jesus. Some have ridiculed it as a fairytale or as make-believe. A college professor told his philosophy class to reject the virgin birth because it violated "common sense." He said, "This sort of thing doesn't happen in the real world, the natural world." The Bible says, "The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14.) We are not told to walk by "common sense." The Bible tells us to walk by faith, and not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7.)

Some have fancied themselves as too highly educated and too intelligent to believe the Bible's account of the virgin birth. Some pride themselves in their knowledge of ancient Hebrew words. They argue that the prophecy about the virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14 is simply speaking of a young woman and not a virgin.

It is true that the Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 is "almah" and not the usual, technical term for virgin, "bethula." But the Greek word "parthenon" (the word used in Matthew 1:23, where Isaiah 7:14 is quoted) clearly means virgin. By combining both passages we see that Mary was both a young woman, and she was also a virgin.

Is the virgin birth of Jesus really that important? The answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

Why is it important? If the virgin birth is false, the historical reliability of the Gospel accounts is seriously undermined. Also, the virgin birth shows that Jesus was truly human and truly divine. If Jesus had not been born of a human, how could we believe in His full humanity? But if His birth was like any other human birth (through the union of a man and a woman), we would question his full divinity. The virgin birth shows both Jesus' human nature and His divine nature.

— Miami, OK

## "I WILL . . ."

By Joe Slater

Our God makes neither vain promises nor empty threats. When He says He will do something, rest assured He will do it. Twenty-three times in Hosea chapter two, the Lord told His people of the northern kingdom (Israel) what He was going to do. The first nine pertain to His chastening of the apostate nation, while the last fourteen deal with His plan to restore His beloved people.

Scripture teaches us that "whom the Lord loves, He chastens." (Hebrews 12:6.) And Israel desperately needed chastening! Consider what God said He would do in this regard:

"I will . . . not have mercy (v. 4); hedge up your way with thorns (v. 6); take away grain & wine (v. 9); take back wool & linen (v. 9); uncover her lewdness (v. 10); cause all her mirth to cease (v. 11); destroy her vines & fig trees, make them a forest (thicket, v. 12); and punish her." (v. 13.)

How awful! Was this to be the end? By no means! The very next sentence begins an even lengthier list of things God would do to bring His precious people back to Him:

"I will . . . allure her (v. 14); bring her into the wilderness (as when He brought their ancestors out of Egypt, v. 14); speak comfort to her (v. 14); take from her mouth the names of the Baals (v. 17); make a covenant with them (v. 18); shatter the bow & sword, make the people lie down safely (v. 18); betroth you to Me (vv. 19 & 20); answer (vv. 20, 21); sow her (v. 23); have mercy on her (v. 23); say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!'" (v. 23.)

How thankful we should be that God does not easily give up on His people! Even in severe discipline, His goal is redemption. He gives us every incentive to repent and return to Him. That was true 750 years before Christ, and remains true today!

— Justin, TX

"That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation . . . This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." (Hebrews 6:18,19.)

## “YOU DON’T KNOW CRABS!”

By Ron Stough

I once read the story of a young boy sleeping beside his basket of freshly-caught crabs. A passerby awakened him and told him his crabs were climbing up the sides to get away. “Mister,” said the boy, “You don’t know crabs! Just about the time one crab is ready to crawl out, all the other crabs start dragging him back down.”

Isn’t that the way human beings act sometimes? They try to drag down those around them. Often their actions are prompted by envy. When a person resents the good fortune of another he will too often criticize, slander, and attack in order to pull the successful person back down.

Envy and cruelty go hand in hand. Proverbs 27:4 tells us “Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?” The cruelty suffered by Joseph from the hands of his own brothers was the result of envy. “And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him.” (Acts 7:9.)

In fact, envy is credited with the most heinous crime of all time - the death of the Son of God. In Matthew 27:18 Pilate recognized the reason the people had delivered Jesus over to him: “For he knew that for envy they delivered Him.”

Envy’s companions are dark and sinful as well. Titus 3:3 speaks of “malice and envy”; Galatians 5:21 mentions “murder and envy”; and Romans 13:13 talks of “strife and envying.”

Envy destroys innocent people, but it ends up making the envious man miserable as well. Proverbs 14:30 says, “A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy the rottenness of the bones.”

Let’s make sure that envy is not a part of our thinking, and that we are pulling others up from the depths of sin rather than back down into it.

— Duncan, OK

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.) “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.” (1 Peter 3:8.)

Editorial . . .

## IS THE CHURCH PERFECT?

By Dalton Key

Questions simple to put forth are not always so simple to answer. Consider the question, “Is the church of Christ a perfect institution?” The answer could just as easily be “yes” or “no,” depending on your perspective.

The church described in the New Testament is both divine and human; built and bought, cleansed and sanctified of heaven, yet comprised of people. The church’s divine side has always reflected the majestic wisdom and absolute perfection of God. (Ephesians 3:10.) The human element, that aspect of the church concerning humans such as you and me, has been - from the very beginning - anything but perfect.

Why were the epistles penned? Were they not written, largely, in order to correct the errors, difficulties, and people-problems of the first-century church? Look again at the Corinthian and Thessalonian letters. Here were congregations of the church built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, and thus perfect in purpose and divine design. Yet they were fraught with glaring and obvious imperfections, many of which make our more modern-day problems look wonderfully benign by comparison.

The church of our day is likewise both perfect and imperfect; perfect in divine purpose and God-given instruction, yet imperfect in human performance.

As we come to acknowledge and embrace this dual nature concerning the Lord’s Body, we will find ourselves in a better position to understand one another. Some among us, considering only the divine side of the church, refuse to admit the possibility of an “imperfect church,” and label as heresy any suggestions at change. Yet we must admit that while the church needs neither structural nor doctrinal improvements, she is ever in need of betterment with respect to the labor and love, the faithfulness and zeal of her members. Others among us, who choose to see nothing beyond the church’s human side, scoff at the very mention of the Lord’s “perfect church,” and seem content to allow us to join the ranks of manmade denominational bodies from which Scripture urges we must remain distinct. And again, while it is true that as fallible people we need improvement in many areas of means and methods, plans and projections, we must never forget that the church is already perfect as designated by New Testament Scripture and doctrine. We should not - we must not - go beyond what is written.

In short, God is perfect; we are not. The church as purposed, planned and presented by God is perfect. She requires no restructuring, no fundamental improvements, no elemental changes. But from the perspective of frail and fallible humans such as ourselves, the church will always be, as all of us are, in need of constant and ongoing improvement.



## WHAT WILL BE JUDGED IN THE JUDGEMENT?

By Milton Smith

The question posed in the title of this article is not “who” will be judged on Judgment Day, but “what” will be judged. We know that every soul will be judged on this day. Jesus, Himself, said in Matthew 25:31-32, “When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.” Consequently, we know that every soul who ever lived will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. But “what” will be judged on that day? In other words, exactly how and in what manner will each person be judged?

Revelation 20:12 tells us, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And

the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works.” Paul tells us, “. . . every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.” (1 Corinthians 3:8.) It seems quite obvious that each person will be judged by his own obedience, conduct, and faithfulness. Even our motives will be considered. There are some people who do many good works in this life, but they often do those things for the wrong reasons. I’m sure there are even some atheists who do certain “good” works. But God will judge our motive as much as our action.

Paul tells us that we are going to be judged according to the things done in the body, “whether it be good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10.) We thus know that our conduct in this life will be part of our own judgment. Jesus also tells us that our service to our fellow man will be a part of our own judgment. (cf.

Matthew 25:34-40.) Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:13 that “every man’s work shall be made manifest.” Every feature of our life will be judged on that day. Obedience, motive, conduct, service and faithfulness will be the type of things that will judge us. It will be those things viewed by God as having eternal value that will prove to be worthy of eternal reward.

— Tulsa, OK

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” (Revelation 20:11,12.)

## REASONS TO TRUST GOD WHEN WE PRAY

By Wayne Robbins

When things are going well we don’t have any trouble trusting God with our prayers. However, when things are not going so well, and our situation continues for a long period of time, and especially if suffering is involved, we have the tendency to think God does not care. After all, if we were God we would have taken care of our problem long before now. But we are not God. What we must do is trust God implicitly - no matter what. Here are a few reasons why:

God has promised that He will be ever present to help us. He will never leave us or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5.) He is not very far from any of us. (Acts 17:27.) He is ever present when we need His help. (Psalm 46:1.) We must trust that He will be there for us.

God wants to help us. God knows what we need before we ask Him. (Matthew 6:8.) Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. (James 1:17.) God wants to give us good things. (Matthew 7:11.) If we ask according to His will, He hears us and gives us our petitions. (1 John 5:14,15.) He asks us to cast all our cares upon Him for He

cares for us. (1 Peter 5:7.) God really does want to help us.

God knows the best way to help us. God knows all things. (Psalm 147:5.) God is all-powerful. (Genesis 17:1.) He knows absolutely the right things to do with our prayers. This may not be to our liking because most of the time we want instant action and relief. But God is not limited by our human emotions and shallow thinking. Every prayer is answered with God’s unlimited wisdom and on His timetable. When we pray, we are limited in our scope of vision. But God is not limited and sees the big picture that our prayers involve.

We must trust God implicitly. He will answer our prayers in the best possible way, even though it may not be to our liking or timetable (and, yes, sometimes He says, “no”).

We are not God! God is God! We must trust Him.

— Arkansas City, KS

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we

ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:26-28.)

### Old Paths

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