

WARNING

**DON'T
IGNORE
THE**

SIGNS

**OF
GOD'S
GRACE!**



Jason D. Robinson

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the Signs of
God's Grace

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Foreword

To my darling wife, Tammy, who is an inspiration to me in more ways than she knows. Your faith in God and the grace you have shown me helped me to write this book.

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Introduction

The world is a cruel, unforgiving, and hateful place filled with violence, war, death, and disease. The greed of men's hearts and the pride of their souls demand they pursue self-preservation and self-promotion and self-reliance at all cost regardless of how their actions impact the lives of others. So long as self is cared for, then all is well in the minds of such people. At the same time, these same people question why there is such violence and death and disease in the world not realizing they are resultant of their own decisions and behavior. These conditions exist in the world because mankind ultimately rejected his Creator in the very beginning. This rebellion became encoded in the DNA of humanity with each successive generation inheriting the ills and destruction of their fathers only to translate that evil into modern examples passed on to their progeny. It is a vicious cycle of death that consumes men and women generation after

generation. Despite the fact that no one is born perfect or free from this inheritance of evil, there is a plan in place to alleviate mankind's ills and destructive nature. Violence and death do not have to reign supreme in the lives of people; it only does so by their choice. In eternity past before the earth, the universe, and humanity were created, there was and still is in effect a plan to remove man's plight and redeem him from the curse upon the whole of humanity and all of creation. The Creator, God, knew before He made mankind that His ultimate creation would turn against Him and sever the relationship He desires with us once mankind was given free moral choice. Yes, you have the authority and power to decide how you want to live your life, but there is a cost associated with making the wrong choice.

Because God knew of this future rebellion of mankind against Him, He provided a "back-up plan" if you will to re-establish the connection we had with

God before evil came into the world. He offered His one and only Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice to pay the debt owed to the Creator for man's rebellion. "Well, what is this rebellion you are referring to?" you might ask. Rebellion against God is living life independent of Him. When we choose to live life as we see fit rather than as He designed for us, we rebel against His authority, His design, and His will (or desire) for our lives. When God created Adam (the first human), He did so with perfection. Adam was without defect, without evil, and without rebellion. God gave humanity the freedom to choose between life (living as God wills) and death (living as we will). Because Adam chose to do what God said not to do, he chose to live life independent of God. He took matters into his own hands and thus brought evil, death, sickness, and violence into the world.

Again, you may be asking, "What does all this have to do with me?" or "Why should I even read this book?" The truth of the matter is that Adam

passed on his evil (sin) nature to all of humanity when he had children, who then went and populated the earth. We are all born with an evil (sin) nature. None of us is exempt from it because we are born of man. Thus we inherit this evil nature that puffs itself up and desires to rebel against the Creator, our God. It is this sin nature (evil) that separates mankind from having a personal Father-child relationship with God. "But how do we correct this situation?" you ask. Well, we cannot fix anything; God is the only One who can. God loves the world so much that He gives us a free gift called grace, which is His unmerited, undeserved favor. The world does not recognize this gift normally because of the hardness of and evil in their hearts, which the devil uses to blind people spiritually from seeing this gift and receiving it. Thus, God gives mankind another gift called faith by which we are able to believe in an invisible God and by which we receive the grace He

extends to us. Without grace and faith from God, there is no alleviation of the plight of mankind.

Additionally, God requires a payment for our sins through the spilling (or shedding) of blood. At one point in time (from Adam to Jesus) this payment was temporarily paid through the blood of animals, but that blood could never erase or pardon the sins of man forever. A permanent accounting for sin was required, hence, Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth as the Son of man to live among us as one of us and be the human sacrifice that would pay for your sin and mine. God took on the form of humanity to do what no one else could do. Furthermore, there were *signs* of this coming redemption in and through Jesus that God gave to humanity across the ages. He wrote out the plan for us to follow in order for us to be reconciled to Him and have our sins pardoned for eternity. However, mankind is so full of evil that he generally and usually rejects these *signs* of God's grace that lead us to this thing we call salvation, or

being saved from hell and eternal separation from God.

Hell was not created or intended for humanity; it was meant for the fallen angels, demons. Humans go there because they, like the demons, reject God's authority and desire to live independent of God. Thus for these acts of rebellion a fitting and just punishment must be given to the offenders, or sinners. We are all born sinners, but God's grace is given to us as the opportunity to turn from living life as we want and live it as He wants. So, take the time to delve into this book to learn of the *signs* of God's grace that have been given to mankind and what they mean to all of us. Do not be like the people in the Bible stories you will read about in the coming pages, who rejected these *signs* of God's grace and grace itself. There is a devastating consequence for doing so. Instead enjoy your time in this read and allow God's Spirit to talk to you about where you are in life. If you are a Christian, then

take a closer look at what you are doing to share this grace of God with others. If you are not a believer, then allow the Spirit of God to entice you and convince you to join us as a member of the family of God. There is a short piece at the very end of this book on how to do just that - become a follower of Jesus, the Christ/Messiah/Anointed One. May this book bless you and introduce you to the grace and love and mercy of the one, true, living God. Thank you.

Chapter 1

In the Beginning

In the Garden of Eden, Adam, the first person, had no need of cultivating crops or raising livestock for food because God had created all manner of food-bearing trees from which he could eat. When Adam later disobeyed God by eating of the forbidden tree, a curse came upon all of creation. God then said, “Cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life...and you shall eat of the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Genesis 3:17-19). Thus, to this day, we must plant, cultivate, and harvest crops in order to have food to eat and sustain life, as we know it.

Fortunately, there is coming a day when the people of God will be given a new body, an eternal body that does not require food to survive. The very Word of God will be the only food necessary to

sustain them. For when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness by suggesting He turn some rocks into bread (because Jesus had been fasting for 40 days), He turned and looked at Satan and said, “It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Thus, since the days of Adam, mankind has plowed fields, planted seeds, irrigated fields, harvested crops, and prepared food for subsistence.

In addition, man began to raise livestock and herd animals for clothing and food as time progressed. Accordingly, the art and science of husbandry evolved from these practices during the earliest days of our existence upon the earth. Also, throughout time many, if not most, of the ancient world's cultures operated as agrarian societies until the advent of the Industrial Revolution when mankind began to increase in knowledge and invent machines and various technologies that now allow

him to simplify the process of cultivating crops and raising livestock.

It did not have to be this way. If Adam had simply stopped and refused to eat the food Eve gave him and instead obeyed the Word of God, a verbal *sign*, not to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, none of us would have to sweat from our brow to grow and harvest crops for food. The earth would simply bear forth its abundance of which all could partake; however, through his disobedience, Adam brought sin into the world and passed it on to all his descendants, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, see Romans 5:12). The Tree of Life existed in the Garden of Eden, of which Adam could have eaten and lived forever in the physical realm, but he chose to be rebellious and brought death upon humanity. He ignored the spoken Word of God, which served as a *sign* to him pointing him toward Life instead of Death.

Thus, let us journey through the Bible looking at *signs* of the times to gain a better understanding of why the Bible contains so many *signs* pointing us toward the path leading to Life and sparing us from eternal death. Also, today's Bible readers tend to struggle with relating to illustrations in Scripture teaching God's timeless truths because they are so far-removed from the cultures of the Ancient Near East (ANE). Prior to the current technology explosion of the last 50 years, the average person's familiarity with the ANE consisted of tales in books and possibly film, which further distanced them from ANE cultures.

However, in this Digital Age information can be disseminated globally in seconds through computer-based technologies like cell phones, the Internet, and satellites. The distance from these ancient cultures is literally now a mouse click away where we can access and understand ANE cultures in context of the Bible.

Through these *signs* we will learn of the need to "Go, and make disciples of all...nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father...Son and...Spirit, [and teach] them to observe all...I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Chapter 2

The First Messenger

The story of Adam and Eve, the first humans, is well known by most people. We all know from the story that the serpent, possessed physically by Satan, deceived Eve into eating of the forbidden tree. She in turn convinced her husband, Adam, to do likewise. Thus, all of humanity became cursed with sin because of this one man's disobedience. He separated the whole of humanity from the presence of God because he chose to do what he wanted rather than what God had said. Remember that the Bible says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Then we read further in the Garden account of how they clothed themselves with fig leaves to hide their nakedness, but God went and clothed them

with the skins of animals (Genesis 2:21). The life of a living creature was required as payment to atone, or to make amends, for their wrongdoing (sin). Thus, God slaughtered an animal, shedding its blood and temporarily paying for Adam and Eve's sin, and subsequently provided them coverings.

Centuries and generations of people would come and go until we reach the days of Noah. In his day the descendants of Adam and Eve had mired themselves in sin so greatly that God decided to step in and do something about it. In fact because of man's great wickedness, the Bible says,

The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." (Genesis 6:5-7)

God found only one of all of earth's inhabitants to be righteous; his name was Noah. He and his family would be the only humans spared from total annihilation.

Before God brought sudden, swift judgment upon mankind, He instructed Noah to build a large ship, the ark. In this ship, Noah's family of eight and two of every living creature (seven for those God considered clean) would be the only living creatures to survive and re-populate the earth. Many stories abound about how long Noah preached prior to the flood, how long it took to build the ark, and whether it had ever rained where he lived prior to the flood. None of these questions can be answered directly from the Bible because there is not sufficient information. However, we do know from New Testament accounts the following:

- “For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking,

marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away” (Matthew 24:38-39a);

- “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Hebrews 11:7);

- “The Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (1 Peter 3:19); and

- “God did not spare...the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness,

bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:4-5).

So then we can gather that Noah did preach a message, possibly one of hope and repentance, which is typical of God throughout the Bible especially if we look at the Hebraic passage that states Noah condemned the world by preparing an ark, an act of faith that pleased God and evidenced him as a man of righteousness of which he, “became an heir...according to faith.” If we tie this verse in with Peter's words, we understand that God, “the Divine longsuffering waited [was patient with the evil people] in the days of Noah” and permitted time to pass, possibly with intent to allow people's turning away from their sins.

However, the Bible clearly shows us, “the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). God in

his omniscience knew these evil people were not going to turn from their wickedness, and hence, we have Noah and his family being the only people chosen by God to survive the coming judgment through water in order that humanity might continue. Even the very words of Jesus from Matthew's account above remind us of the debauchery that filled the hearts and minds of the people prior to the Great Flood. They were eating, drinking, and making merry until the flood came to devour them, of which they were completely unaware. In other words, their minds were so dull and hearts so hardened that they rejected the message of righteousness Noah preached resulting in their death and damnation under God's judgment for their sins and depravity.

Eventually the floodwaters came after 40 days and nights of massive raining and covered the face of the earth. Any living organism on the earth drowned in these waters. We can only imagine the

panic, terror, and screams of people as they ran for higher ground as the flood waters crept ever higher and higher until there was no longer any place to go. They reached the summits of the highest points in their lands only to take a final breath of air as the water engulfed them for the last time. They would be no more. They were lost to God, to time, and to humanity. Why? Because they refused to turn their hearts toward God and live righteously as Noah did.

Noah and his family lived aboard the ark for nearly a year until the waters receded at God's command and uncovered dry land to the point that they could exit the ship and begin to live again on dry ground. Once Noah exited the ark and lived a short while on land, he heard from God, who established a covenant with Noah and his descendants for all time. These are his words,

This is the *sign* [emphasis added] of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is

with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the **sign** [emphasis added] of the covenant between Me and the earth.

It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.

And God said to Noah, “This is the **sign** [emphasis added] of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.” (Genesis 9:12-17)

So then what is the purpose of addressing the story of Noah and the wickedness of the people in his day? There are at least two **signs** that God

presented to mankind as a warning of his judgment and his salvation. One of which was completely ignored while the other He made impossible to ignore. These *signs* should serve as reminders to us that although “God is love” (1 John 4:8); He is also a just God, who metes out punishment on those who reject his gift of salvation. Do you doubt me? Read Paul's words from his letter to the Roman church, “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Death here is more than just the cessation of life; it is the eternal separation of a person from God. How can we be sure of this idea? Read Paul's counter to the wages of sin, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (ibid.).

The first *sign* from Noah's story is the ark itself. This massive ship looked nothing like the ark we see depicted in literature, film, and elsewhere. It was rectangular in shape per the instructions God gave Noah. Looking back at the limited details of the account, we can conjecture some of what might have

been pondered by the people of his day. We are unsure of the types and sizes of floods that occurred in his day or even as to the amount of rain they encountered, but one thing is sure. They never saw a flood of this magnitude before nor would anyone else, which will point us later to the second ignored *sign*.

Can you pause and just imagine, though, what his neighbors thought when they saw this incredibly old man along with his sons constructing an enormous ship, perhaps the likes of which they had never seen or would ever see again? Think of this - a massive shipbuilding yard being constructed in the middle of nowhere. Noah was most assuredly many miles inland. He erected massive rigging in order to hold the sections of the ship in place while it was built. All the while his neighbors continued to watch daily as this seemingly delusional old man worked all hours of the day on this ship and to what end?!? He knew that certain destruction was coming upon

the whole earth and all of creation as God had said. By faith, he continued to chip away at the wood, hammer in the nails, seal the joints with pitch, and trust in God.

By the time the ark is fully constructed, we can just hear the jeers and see the leering gazes of nearby onlookers as they taunt Noah and his sons for the toil they invested in this monstrosity of a ship. In total disbelief of the coming destruction they continued on with their lives as though nothing could or would happen to them. They did just as Jesus said, “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage [right up until the day God closed the door on the ark when]...the flood came and took them all away.”

Rather than taunt and poke fun at Noah and his family, the people should have recognized God's salvation staring them in the face – that monstrous ark of which they ridiculed Noah, which represented

the salvation of God that would later come through Jesus on the cross. However, these people were so hardhearted, rebellious, and self-centered, they saw an object of scorn that provided them entertainment and sport at the expense of God's righteous servant when they should have seen it as the only means by which they would escape the coming judgment. Thus, rather than submit themselves to God in repentance for their wickedness, they laughed at and jilted Noah despite his continued work on the ark and his constant sharing with them the message of God's righteousness.

This more-than-likely reality of Noah's day reminds us of another account in the Bible of a man who was so arrogant that he lost his life over the very same reason - wickedness (see Luke 12:15-21). One might say he did not learn how to read the *signs* of the times, or he may have been just an outright evil man. Either way, his rebellious attitude toward God brought his downfall.

This man, who is nameless to us, was rather wealthy because his farming produced him great wealth through abundant harvests. His farming was so successful that he could not contain all the produce, so he faced a terrific business proposition. Should he sell off some of his yield or enlarge the storage capacity of his granaries, barns, and the like?

The Bible teaches us that a righteous man would use the increase of his crops to honor God for the bountiful harvest by giving of the harvest to the temple, priests, and even to the poor. However, this rich man did none of these charitable acts and chose instead to tear down his storage barns and build bigger ones. (In modern terms, he reinvested the profit from his business to increase the bottom line. He was extremely greedy.) He thought nothing of giving to God, as had been commanded under the Mosaic Law which was the governing body of law in his day, and he refused to give to charity: the poor, the destitute, and the widowed.

Under the Mosaic Law, he was to leave his fields untouched after the harvest, but he more than likely harvested them down to the last kernel of wheat he had planted. He thought that by razing his barns and building bigger, better ones, he could store all his crops and goods in them and be secure knowing they were taken care of and were under the watchful eyes of his staff. In fact he even boasted to himself about how much he had laid up for himself when he remarked, “I will say to my [self], '[Self], you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry” (Luke 12:19).

We might think of him as someone who invests in the stock market through IRAs and annuities and other investment strategies that would provide for his “retirement” one day. Unfortunately, this greedy businessman forgot one important detail. All that he thought he had accomplished could not be taken with him in the event of his unfortunate demise. God reminded him of this fact shortly after he uttered

those ill-fated words and said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” (Luke 12:20).

Thus, in his arrogance about his wealth, pride, and self-sufficiency, the rich man died in his sins and lost all for which he had worked so diligently. He ignored the *signs* God had given him through the eternal scriptures. For even Solomon, the wisest of the wise, learned early on of the importance of honoring God in one's endeavors. He said,

He...will not be satisfied...who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes...but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep. There is a severe evil, which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt. But those riches perish through

misfortune. When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a severe evil—Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. (Ecclesiastes 5:10-16)

This man, assumedly a Jew, would have known of Solomon's writings and wisdom, yet he did not heed the warning (*written sign*) given by the king. Jesus in his telling of this parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:15-21) concluded it with these words, which we all should remember, “So is he [a rich fool] who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). Jesus had mentioned at the opening of this parable, “one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). Do you see a *sign* of our times that speaks to the heart of this very matter?

Accordingly, the people of Noah's day were of the same mindset. “Why should I have to worry about anything? I've got all that I need. Let's eat, drink, and be merry.” They disregarded the **sign** of salvation staring them in the face, Noah's ark. As Solomon so aptly noted centuries later, they could not take anything with them. From dust they came, and to dust they returned. They would have rather partied “like it's 1999” than to humble themselves before God, repent of their wrongdoing, and rely solely upon the Creator, whom they rebelled against and hated.

The second **sign** we see in the Great Flood story is the mark of the covenant between God and Noah (hence all mankind) and all of nature. God presented the earth with a **sign** in the skies as a promise that He would never again flood the entire earth. That unique **sign** is the beautiful rainbow that we can see during or after a rainstorm. It is a visible **sign** from God of His faithfulness to humanity. As

much as the ark was a *sign* that was rejected (as Christ would later be) concerning God's salvation and judgment, He gave us the rainbow as a permanent *sign* that could not be forgotten. Its very existence is a continual reminder to God and to us that His faithfulness will never allow total human destruction or that of the earth by a flood. Just as it serves to remind us of God's goodness and grace, it should also serve the purpose of reminding us that there is a consequence for living a rebellious, arrogant life independent of God, which is sin. We learned earlier that the wages of sin is death, eternal death. Let us heed both *signs* as markers on life's road to serve, love, and rely solely on God for everything.

Chapter 3

Fire and Brimstone

From the tenth and eleventh chapters of the book of Genesis, we learn that Abraham, father of faith, was a direct descendant of Noah, and he had a nephew, Lot. The story of Abraham begins with him residing under the tents of his father, Terah, where they dwell in the land of the Chaldeans, modern-day Iraq. God tells then Abram to pick up his belongings and family and emigrate to the land of Canaan, the fabled land “flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). It is in this passage that we learn of the prophetic announcement of the coming blessing of Abraham, “you shall be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3). A slightly more detailed version of this account would come after Abram's name was changed to Abraham. However, in between these two time points, we will examine the story of Abraham's nephew, Lot, and the coming judgment of the cities

of the Jordan Plain, a fertile area good for growing crops and raising livestock.

After living in the land of Canaan for a while, Abraham and Lot become quite wealthy, and the size of their herds increase so much that the land was no longer able to support them both. Verbal arguments broke out between the men's herdsmen about whose livestock could graze where. Abraham met with Lot and told him there was plenty of land in the area for them both, but they would have to part company and spread out to accommodate their people and livestock.

During the discussion Abraham gave Lot first pick of the land and agreed to head out in the opposite direction of whatever Lot chose. Lot, seeing the lush valley of the Jordan Plain in front of him, ventured off in that direction and took his tents, belongings, people, and livestock with him to settle in that region. Abraham, true to his word, went in

the opposite direction into the land of Canaan to make his home. Then, God instructed him to walk its length and breadth and said to him that all the land he sees will be his and will be inherited by his descendants, from whom the Lamb of God, Jesus, would come (Genesis 13:14-17).

As Abraham settled near the “terebinth trees of Mamre” (Genesis 18:1), Lot chose to dwell in the city of Sodom, one of five cities of the Jordan Plain along with Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. The land was good for farming and raising livestock, but the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were filled with spiritually depraved people. In fact the Bible notes God's words to Abraham concerning their depravity,

Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great [emphasis added], and because their sin is very grave [emphasis added], I will go down now and see whether they have done

altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know. (Genesis 18:20-21)

The level of debauchery and gross sin grew to such heights that God himself came down to earth to investigate whether the claims against these cities were true. When the LORD informed Abraham of his intention to destroy these cities for their grave sins, Abraham interceded for the deliverance of the cities because his nephew, Lot, lived there with his family. Thus, Abraham pleaded with the LORD to spare the cities if he could find 50 righteous people living there, and the LORD agreed to spare them. Then he pleaded again with the LORD to spare them if there were only 45, then again 40, then 30, and then 20. Finally he pleaded with God to spare the cities if there were only 10 righteous people in the cities, and again the LORD agreed (Genesis 18:16-33).

Then God sent two angels to Sodom to investigate the situation. (See Genesis 19 for the text

of this account.) Once they arrived at the city square, they prepared to spend the night there. However, Lot saw them and invited them to stay with him and insisted they do so. They agreed. Once the angels were inside his house, the people of Sodom surrounded the house and demanded Lot release the angels to them. They desired to have sexual relations with them, but Lot refused and offered his daughters to the crowd instead. The mob refused them and sought to destroy Lot for his refusal of turning the angels over to them. Then the angels pulled Lot back inside the house and blinded the mob (because of their immorality), which caused them to stumble around in the darkness.

Then the angels questioned Lot about any family other than his wife and daughters he had living in the area. He told them that his two sons-in-law lived there also. Lot then went to his sons-in-law and pleaded with them greatly to leave the city and the surrounding area because God was going to

destroy the area because of the evil of the people. (Note: In this epic saga, we see here where God extended mercy and grace to the family of Lot and offered them a chance to escape the coming judgment. Lot, his wife, and daughters were considered the only righteous living in the city. God was willing to even include his sons-in-law as part of the group to be spared, but we will see they refused the Lord's salvation, much like the people in Noah's day.)

The story concluded with Lot exiting the city with his wife and children, a total of four righteous people, six people short of the ten needed to spare the city according to the agreement between God and Abraham. The angels gathered together Lot and his family and ushered them out of the city because they could not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah until Lot had reached safety. As Lot prepared to leave, the angels forewarned him and his family not to look back upon the destruction of the cities or face

judgment themselves. When Lot and his family were out of the city, “the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground” (Genesis 19:24-25). However, Lot's wife disregarded the angels' warning not to look back upon the destruction of the cities. As she gazed upon the sight, she transformed instantly into a pillar of salt, literally.

Early the next morning Abraham went to the place where he and God had met. He then looked in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah and saw the smoke from the remains of the Jordan Plain rising up across the sky. Furthermore, God remembered that Abraham's nephew, Lot, lived among the cities of the Jordan Plain and sent him away from the area prior to its destruction. He extended grace to Lot because of His love for Abraham (Genesis 18:27-29).

Thus ends the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah and the rescue of Lot's family from there.

So, what do we gather from the story of Lot and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah that are applicable to us today? First off, we can see that this tale shadows much of what we learned in the story of Noah and the Great Flood. Again, we have a large population of people whose depraved indifference toward God led them to live life as they saw fit and ultimately end up being judged guilty by God for their rebellion and hence their destruction.

Apparently Lot, being raised in Abraham's family, knew God and believed in God. While living in Sodom, he spoke to the people and addressed their moral depravity. The evidence of this is seen in the words of the crowd, "This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge" (Genesis 19:9). We can say with certainty that Lot did know of the pending judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, as

evidenced by the arrival of the two angels warning him to flee the city before judgment fell.

However, we cannot say with certainty what the content of Lot's prior message(s) to these morally depraved was, but from their reactions, we can deduce that the Word of God he shared with them pricked their hearts. Why else would they respond in the manner they did? "He keeps acting as a judge," (Genesis 19:9). If he were just another crazed citizen of Sodom, would they have not ignored him altogether? Instead the mob wanted to destroy Lot for intruding upon their impromptu festivities when they said, "now we will deal worse with you than with them" and proceeded to "[press] hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door" (ibid.). They cared nothing for the life of their fellow citizen, Lot, because they desired sexual relations with the newly arrived angels. Their hearts were exactly as God described the hearts of mankind prior to the flood, "the wickedness of man

was great, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

Secondly, because their hearts were continually evil and having no intent of repenting, they forced God to exact His righteous judgment upon them and destroy them. He brought sudden, swift punishment upon them in the form of fire and brimstone instead of raging torrents of water because of his promise to Noah, as given through the *sign* of the rainbow. God promised Noah and all creation that He would never again flood the earth all at once to destroy it. Thus, being the faithful and true-to-His-Word God that He is, he abstained from using water and leveled the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to the ground with a rain of fire and brimstone.

It is of interesting note that the LORD was willing to spare these two cities per Abraham's intercession if He could have found just ten

righteous people living there. God's investigation produced only six people He would spare from the coming destruction, but of those six, three chose to reject God's love, mercy, and grace and subjected themselves to the same fate as their morally depraved neighbors. Did we not see a strong similarity here to the behavior of those in Noah's day? We supposed that, as Noah built the ark over many years, he must have proclaimed to people the coming deluge that would destroy all of humanity, yet they scoffed at him (again we must suppose so) and ignored his warning. Lot's sons-in-law did the same thing. He warned them, "'Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!' But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking" (Genesis 19:14). They did not take him seriously, and so, for their arrogance, they perished along with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Additionally, they were not the only ones to disregard the *sign* of the impending doom given by

the angels. If we remember, Lot's wife turned around and looked at the fire raining down on the doomed cities. She blatantly disobeyed the Word of the LORD given by the angels. For her rebellion and disobedience, she joined her sons-in-law and fellow residents of Sodom in a fiery grave; however, for Lot's wife, being entombed in a pillar of salt was her fate.

Accordingly, the third item we take away from this tale that emulates the story of Noah is that we should never ignore the warning *signs* God puts in front of us regarding His mercy, grace, and justice. God gave us the story of the Great Flood as a continual reminder of what happened to the people of earth born between Cain and Noah's sons. The rainbow is that constant reminder in the heavens (1) of the doomed fate they suffered for their continually evil hearts and moral depravity and (2) of God's faithfulness to never globally flood the earth again. The utter and total destruction of

Sodom and Gomorrah also serve as a perpetual reminder of God's mercy, grace, and justice.

For centuries, the exact physical location of these two ill-fated cities has been the subject of many a scholarly debate. Even to this day, the pinpoint location of Sodom and Gomorrah remains speculative at best. Many believe them to have been located in the region of the Dead Sea. Regardless of their ruins' actual location, one fact remains the same: they no longer exist. They were burned to the ground in a fiery rain of sulfur from heaven. The ashes of these ungodly people would be all that would have remained. Even then, the desert animals most likely would have “licked up” the salt deposits left by the vaporization of their bodies. After all, humans are approximately 70% water and 30% chemical salts. To give us a modern-day comparison to the power unleashed on Sodom and Gomorrah, we have to consider the destruction released upon the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during

WWII. The utter destruction released by the two bombs dropped here pale in comparison to the fate of these “cities of the plain.” To get a mental picture of the horror done to these Japanese cities go to <http://www.gensuikin.org/english/photo.html>.

The late Ron Wyatt, a self-acclaimed archaeologist, declared to the world that he had located the ancient ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Israeli desert near the famed ruins of Masada. The evidence he presented made a strong case for his claim. Many have since traveled to this debated region and have viewed these supposed ruins of the Jordan Plain cities. Many argue the validity of Wyatt's claims as those of a fraud and hack; however, regardless of others' thoughts, you be the judge. Vast amounts of video and photographic evidence of the area and artifacts (balls of brimstone) do exist. For a pictorial view of these suspected sites, visit the following website: <http://www.discoverynews.us/DISCOVERY%20MUSE>

UM/BibleLandsDisplay/Sodom_and_Gomorrah/sodom_and_gomorrah_1.html. Further video evidence can be viewed online at this web address also - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwTVFk1HK3Y>.

The author has never been to said locations but has held and examined artifacts of sulfurous material purported to be from these ruins, and the author must admit that the yellow-sulfurous rocks stunk and appeared to be nearly pure sulfur, as reported by Wyatt and those in the above-mentioned websites. The apostle Peter remarked in his epistle,

For *if God* did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and *did not spare the ancient world*, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; and *turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who*

afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)— then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. (2 Peter 2:4-10, emphasis added)

Notice how Peter refers to the destruction of the ancient world, both of Noah's day and of Sodom and Gomorrah. These two cities were burned to the ground and left as ash heaps for the world to see particularly “to those who afterward would live ungodly.” We have further confirmation of God's intention of displaying the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah for the world to see in Jude's epistle,

But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; *as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.* (Jude 1:5-7, emphasis added)

Did you notice that Jude echoes the words of Peter in his epistle? The Bible says, “by the mouth of *two or three witnesses* every word may be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15). Thus Peter and Jude confirm God's intention of letting the ancient ruins (ash heaps) of Sodom and Gomorrah serve as a continual reminder to the world of what happens “to

those who afterward would live ungodly.” Now do you understand the importance of knowing how to read the *signs* of the times all around us? Some have been forged in the annals of history, some are taking place as we speak, and others are yet to occur. Nevertheless, the prophetic *signs* of the Bible are 100% accurate and have never failed to pass. Why? God spoke them to his servants the prophets and apostles, who recorded them for all to see and read. God is true (Jeremiah 10:10), faithful (Deuteronomy 7:9), and cannot lie (Titus 1:2). You can trust him because of these things. The ancients did not and decided to live according to their will, which resulted in death (see Adam in Genesis 3, people of Noah's day in Genesis 6-7, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18-19). We will continue our journey by looking at the beginnings of Israel, who refused to repent of their wickedness and turn to God, in the next chapter. They were of the house of Jacob and wandered the desert for 40 years after

the exodus from Egypt until an entire generation died off (Jude 1:5).

Chapter 4

How Long O House of Jacob?

Thus far we have reviewed the condition of man's heart from the beginning of Creation until the time of Abraham and his nephew, Lot. Once Adam disobeyed God's Word, all of mankind, even to the present day, inherited his sinful nature, a rebellious heart toward God. The world fell into complete moral depravity within a few short generations of Adam's creation, so much so that God annihilated the entire human race save eight, Noah and his family. A few more generations passed, and another wicked, cataclysmic event occurred but on a smaller scale, the saga of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Instead of an entire planet being judged and punished for their wickedness by a great flood, two cities were burned to the ground by the fiery judgment of an angry God. One would tend to think that the memorials of the ever-present rainbow in

the sky and the ashen remains of Sodom and Gomorrah would be enough to turn the hearts of men toward God given the utter destruction that followed these time periods. But alas, the Word of God rings true yet again, “every intent of the thoughts of *his heart was only evil continually* [emphasis added]” (Genesis 6:5).

Thus, a different approach for dealing with man's sinful condition was needed; one that involved direct intervention by the Creator himself. Hence the reason God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations and the one through whom the Messiah, the Anointed One, would come and save the world from its doomed fate of eternal separation from God. In the book of Genesis we learned of Abraham's calling by God to go to the land of Canaan and depart from his father's family. While living in this foreign country, Abraham received God's promise that he and his progeny would inherit this region as their own homeland. God also

promised him, “In your [S]eed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). Abraham would go on to have a son, Isaac, through a miracle of God when he was 100 years old (Genesis 21:5). Isaac would be given the same promise his father received, “In your [S]eed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 26:4), and he would go on to have a son, Jacob, who would receive the same promise as his grandfather, “In your [S]eed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 28:14). Jacob then had 12 sons of his own, who became the leaders of their respective tribes of the nation of Israel. However, God also prophesied to Abraham that a foreign master would enslave his descendants for 400 years, and then God would raise up a leader, who would set His chosen people free from captivity. Therefore, we will examine the beginnings of the nation of Israel and their time of rebellion taken from accounts in the books of

Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and very briefly from Deuteronomy.

Jacob's younger son, Joseph, was a bit of a braggart. One day he told his brothers of a dream he had where they would all bow down to him in the future. His brothers, in a jealous rage, sold their brother to traveling merchants, who took him to Egypt and sold him into slavery to an Egyptian noble, whose wife later falsely accused him of rape and had him imprisoned for the crime. While in prison, he interpreted dreams for two fellow prisoners, one of whom would be freed and later recounted this event to Pharaoh, who had also been troubled by a dream without an interpretation. God gave Joseph the answer to Pharaoh's dream, which later saved Egypt from economic ruin. Pharaoh, then, rewarded Joseph by freeing him and promoting him to the position of prime minister of Egypt. In this position, Joseph saved his family and subsequently the nation of Israel by bringing them

to Egypt and securing the most fertile land in the country where his people could live, raise children, and farm. The original family of 70 plus people grew into an entire nation of over 1 million. Long after Joseph died, his people fell out of grace with the Pharaohs of Egypt, who forgot Joseph's good deeds. Then the Hebrews slaved away for 400 years under the whips of the Egyptian taskmasters building the great cities of the empire.

The people cried out to God because of their suffering at the hands of the Egyptians. God heard their prayers and raised up from among them one who would lead them out of captivity and into their promised future homeland, a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). This leader was a Hebrew child, who grew up in the house of Pharaoh and received the best education, training, and discipline possible. He would need this training to lead God's people, Israel, out of Egyptian bondage and into promised freedom. His name was Moses.

One day, Moses killed an Egyptian for killing a Hebrew slave and then exiled himself to escape punishment from Pharaoh. For 40 years Moses wandered the deserts surrounding Egypt. He encountered the God of his fathers in this desert wasteland and later returned to Egypt to free his people as God instructed. Israel's freedom came about by the working of God's miracles called the 10 great plagues. These plagues devastated Egyptian livestock, homes, and possessions, brought sickness and disease upon them, and even took the lives of all firstborn males of every Egyptian household.

The house of Jacob, the Hebrews, avoided the slaughter of the firstborn because God told Moses to have the people slaughter a yearling male lamb and paint its blood upon the top and sides of the doorjamb. That fateful night when the angel of death passed from house to house killing all the firstborn males within, he passed over the houses marked with the lamb's blood. Anyone who remained inside a

house marked with this blood was safe from certain death and would be saved by God. Those not covered by this blood and who were firstborn sons were found dead in their homes and in the streets. It was the final act of God that broke Pharaoh's stubborn pride and forced him to release the Hebrews allowing them to leave Egypt. All of the other devastating plagues, judgments, were not enough to shake Pharaoh and cause him to heed the Word of God. His heart was only evil continually.

The next morning, after the slaughter, all of Israel marched out of Egypt and headed across the desert toward the land of Canaan. Once the Hebrews were gone, Pharaoh realized the grave economic mistake he made by releasing them and then set off in hot pursuit to recapture his cheap labor source, the slaves of Israel. He chased them across the desert and pinned them in against the backdrop of the Red Sea. Immediately, the Hebrews cried out against Moses and complained about being led out into the

desert to die. In turn, Moses pleaded with God as what to do next, and God told him they would walk across on dry ground through the middle of the sea. So God parted the waters and led the people to the other shore, but Pharaoh, still hot to retrieve his quarry, marched his troops into the middle of the sea likewise. Once the Hebrews safely reached the other shore, God collapsed the walls of water upon the Egyptian army and drowned both horse and rider. The waves of the Red Sea crushed the army by God's mighty hand and outstretched arm. The Hebrews were free and clear of Egypt's cruelty.

Now that the people were safe from Pharaoh's reach, they began their trek toward their promised homeland; however, the people of Israel were no different than any other person who had lived since Adam. They were a rebellious bunch, who complained about the lack of food and water they had while living in the desert. God gave them manna, bread from heaven that angels ate, and later

water that gushed forth out of rocks in the middle of desert, to satisfy their hunger and thirst. He even gave them a written code of laws by which they were to govern their lives and live in relationship with their God, as He desired.

Over time He brought them to the very border of the promised land of Canaan and had Moses choose 12 spies to reconnoiter the land. When the spies returned with their reports, 10 of the 12 spoke of a race of giants living there that appeared to be so formidable and imposing based on their appearance alone, there was no way the people could overtake the land. Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, gave reports countering these claims and said the people could take the land and overcome the giants if they would but have faith in God.

No matter how much God provided for His chosen people, Israel, they always complained against Him in doubt and unbelief despite the

mighty acts He performed before their very eyes: the destruction of Egypt through the 10 plagues, the crushing defeat of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, the miraculous provision of food and water in the desert, and the giving of a divine set of laws to govern their lives. None of this mattered to these people. They marched on their stomachs and served their own desires over those of the Creator to be His specially chosen people.

Because the 10 spies gave a negative report that caused the people to fear entering the land of Canaan, the people complained against Moses and Aaron,

The whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one

another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt." (Numbers 14:2-4)

This outcry infuriated God so much He wanted to destroy the entire lot and start over again with Moses, but Moses interceded for the people. Thus, God relented from destroying them because of their rebellion and unbelief. God's reply was,

Because all these men who have seen My glory and the *signs* which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.

The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered...from twenty years old and above. Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land, which I swore I would make you dwell in.

But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised....and you shall know My rejection. (Numbers 14:22-23, 29-34)

And so, the Hebrews marched around the desert for 40 years until that evil generation over the age of 20 died out. God even prevented Moses from entering Canaan because of his outburst of anger and disobedience to God. The people needed water, so God told Moses to speak to a rock, but in his anger he hit the rock with his staff to make water come out (Numbers 20:10-12). When God determined it was time for Israel to enter the Promised Land, God took Moses to the top of Mount Nebo, where he could see the Promised Land. Moses passed away after that and was personally buried by God in parts unknown even to this day (Deuteronomy 34:1-6). Then the next generation under the leadership of Joshua, son of Nun, led them into the Promised Land.

Again we have an entire people group whose hearts were bent toward evil continually despite the LORD himself giving them a divine set of laws by which to live and govern their lives. They witnessed firsthand the destructive power of God's judgment on the Egyptians time and time again. When what seemed like the point of no return and being hard-pressed between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army, Moses told the people, “Do not be afraid. *Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you* [emphasis added] today” (Exodus 14:13). Here we have the prophet of God standing there telling this group of complainers and whiners the LORD is going to show you His salvation and to just watch and see.

These folks had no faith in God. Their hearts were so hard that even being at ground zero of the plagues that decimated Egypt was not enough to convince them to trust in God to provide for them. As bad as that was, they watched God send an East

wind to wedge apart the Red Sea and dry up the ground for them to cross over to the other side and avoid being recaptured by the Egyptians. If that was not enough, He closed the water in on the army drowning them and saved His chosen people, Israel. Even God recounted the ten times He rescued them, including the manna and the water from the rocks; however, the Hebrews would not relent from their stubborn ways.

Their rebellion forced God to exact judgment upon them as He had done with the pre-flood humans and the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the Jordan Plain. The Hebrews did not exhibit complete moral depravity as did the previous two examples, but their rebellion and ungratefulness was so great they condemned themselves. Instead their crime was continually tempting God to do something. In other words they baited God and even challenged Him to prove His ability to provide for them despite the awesome

displays of power He exhibited right in front of their very eyes! These people had so many *signs* around them that it staggers the imagination. Think of it: deadly and devastating plagues, parting of the sea, drowning of an army in the sea, bread from heaven, water from rocks in the desert, and a future homeland that “flows with milk and honey.” The story of Sodom and Gomorrah was not that ancient to them nor was the ever-present rainbow that appeared after rains and in the clouds. They were firsthand recipients of God's love and saving grace, yet they squandered it and refused it to the point of death.

The story of Jacob's rebellion did not stop with the evil generation that died out while wandering the desert for 40 years due to their testing of and treachery toward God. The next part of the saga covers approximately 1,400 years of continuous rebellion toward God by His chosen people, Israel. After Joshua died, God sent various

judges to rule over the people during a time known as the era of those who did “what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 17:6, 21:25). Then with the birth of Samuel, God ushered in the time of the prophets (1 Samuel 3:20), but the people of Israel were not happy with having a man of God around telling them how to live righteously before God, who was their King.

Instead, the people of Israel wanted to be like all the nations around them and have a human king lead them, so God had Samuel anoint a king over Israel and warned them of the terror that an earthly king would bring. They remained stiff-necked and refused God's provision. God had warned the people of Israel time and time again through Moses, Joshua, Samuel and other prophets that the nations around them would be their undoing and downfall because they would learn the ways of pagan religions and stray away from the one true, living God – Jehovah. Their first king, Saul, also rebelled against God and

had the kingdom stripped from him by God. Then God raised up David as king, “a man after [God's] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).

David ruled Israel and did all that God commanded him, which brought great prosperity to the land; yet David was not perfect and did some ungodly things. His actions brought great trouble upon the kingdom, so much so that his sons would lose control of the kingdom and see it split into two nations: Judea and Israel. The northern kingdom never did follow after God from that point forward despite God sending prophet after prophet warning them to turn from their wickedness and return to Him. Eventually they were sent into exile at the hands of the Assyrian Empire.

The kings of Judah were a mixed bunch of whom some followed in the footsteps of King David while the others were as ungodly as any king from Israel. God sent many a prophet to the Judeans

warning them likewise to turn from their wickedness and to return to Him, but they never did. In fact the people became so stiff-necked that when Jeremiah tried to warn them one time to turn back to God, they said, “That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart” (Jeremiah 18:12). They, too, were sent into exile at the hand of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. The nation of Israel was seemingly lost for good.

After a 70-year exile in Babylon, the people of Judah, (southern Israel) returned to their homeland of Judea once more. God sent priests, teachers, and prophets with the people to guide them and lead them under His direction. The kingdom was lost, but the nation survived. Israel would remain under foreign rule for centuries to come. Malachi would be the last prophet to speak to Israel on behalf of God for 400 years. Even after having their kingdom stripped away, their temple destroyed, being sent

into exile, being dispersed among the nations of the world, and being given another opportunity to start again, the people never truly came back to the LORD their God. Despite all of this rebellion, there were always remnants of Israel and other peoples who believed in, loved, and trusted Him. Israel was first chosen by God, then cast out of His presence, and returned to Him for a while., The prophets spoke God's Word to Israel, but she continued to rebel against Him. Then all was quiet for 400 years until one still, quiet night, God made the loudest proclamation ever but in a genteel, unobtrusive manner. The Messiah had come. We will see that this *sign* the greatest ever given to mankind will be as rejected as any prior to His arrival. Even His own people, who had anticipated His coming, would deny Him.

Chapter 5

The Coming of Messiah

Of all the **signs** that have been given to man speaking of God's grace and justice the greatest was given in the years between 25-30 A.D. when Jesus hung from the blood-stained cross where He gave up his earthly life as payment for the sins of humanity. His name, alone, tells us of his mission on earth, for the angel Gabriel instructed Joseph, “you shall call His name JESUS, for He will *save His people from their sins* [emphasis added]” (Matthew 1:21). His coming had been foretold for millennia beginning in the Garden of Eden. The full purpose of His coming would not be completely realized until after Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father and the message of the gospel preached among the nations of the world.

Throughout the Old Testament the coming of the Messiah had been foretold by God through His

own Word and through the voices of His servants, the prophets. There are well over 300 messianic prophecies in the Bible, most of which have been fulfilled with some awaiting fulfillment during the Millennial Reign of the Messiah here on earth. We will look at select prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah, whereas a detailed, in-depth study of the topic goes beyond the scope of this book nor would there be enough room in one writing to accurately or adequately address this issue. So, let us delve into the writings of the prophets and learn of the greatest *sign* ever given to man. From it we pray that many will come to accept it, embrace it, live it, and become members of the family of God for which Jesus died and paid the ultimate price.

As mentioned above, the first prophecy given about the coming Messiah came from God, Himself, in the Garden of Eden upon His “discovery” of Adam's sin. Let us revisit the Garden scene found in Genesis 3. The serpent and Eve discussed the “truth”

of whether she and Adam were permitted to eat of the forbidden tree. The serpent finally convinced her to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, the fruit of which she shared with Adam, who ate it willingly. Their “eyes” were opened, and they realized they were naked. Thus, they made clothing from fig leaves to cover themselves and then hid in the trees from God. God found out of their actions through the first blame game in history from Adam to Eve to the serpent, who received the first curse (judgment) from God. He turned to Satan and said,

Because you have done this [deceiving Eve to eat the forbidden fruit], You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field...And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel. (Genesis 3:14-15)

Here we see that God revealed the first *sign* of the coming Messiah, “her Seed...shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” When Jesus lived on earth, Satan did “bruise His heel” by executing Him on the cross, but what he did not know was that doing so would “bruise his head.” Satan's defeat, or bruised head, came through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Satan had thought he defeated God's plan of salvation and redemption of man from sin that started in the garden with Adam's disobedience, but the truth is that Jesus' death unleashed Him on the works of Satan and gave Him total authority over death, hell, and the grave. Jesus took back the deed to earth from Satan, which Adam had given to him through his disobedience.

To prevent Satan from thwarting His plan of man's redemption, God piecemealed His will over time through the prophets. Much of the messianic prophecies were given through King David and the seer, Isaiah. We will look at some of their writings

about the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One. Of great importance to the redemption story was the fact that the Messiah would be born of a virgin - “Therefore *the Lord Himself will give you a **sign*** [emphasis added]: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel [God with us]” (Isaiah 7:14). (Notice that God through the prophet Isaiah forewarned Israel of their coming Messiah through a **sign** - His birth through a virgin.) There is great importance in this prophecy because the One to redeem mankind could not be born of man.

When Adam sinned, God's curse on him for his disobedience transferred to every human descended from him, “For all have sinned and come short of God's glory” (Romans 3:23). Had the Savior been born of man, and not a virgin woman, the sin of Adam would have been inherited by Jesus and thus automatically disqualified Him to be the

sacrificial Lamb needed to atone, pay for, the sins of mankind caused by Adam.

Because Jesus the Messiah was born of a virgin woman, there was no sin in him - “For He made *Him who knew no sin* [emphasis added] to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). God artificially inseminated the chosen virgin, Mary, with the Seed (sperm cell) needed to create the human, Jesus - “And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God'” (Luke 1:35). Jesus was born “sin-free,” which enabled Him to be the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Jumping back in time we can go to the story of Abraham and Isaac momentarily. God spoke to Abraham and told him to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to God, which was really just a test of his faith in God. God did not allow Isaac to be killed by his father.

Prior to the attempted sacrifice, Isaac in bewilderment asked his father where the sacrificial lamb was because they had the altar prepared with wood and fire but no animal for the sacrifice. Abraham replied, “My son, *God will provide for Himself the lamb* for a burnt offering” (Genesis 22:8), a messianic prophecy in and of itself.

So, why do we need to look at the sinless state of Jesus, as the Messiah? It all goes back to the Passover meal and thereafter in the burnt offerings offered on behalf of the people of Israel on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, to pay for, or atone, their sins before God. On the night the Angel of Death went throughout Egypt slaying the firstborn of all Egypt, each Hebrew household slew a young male lamb, whose blood was painted on the top and sides of the doorpost to signify to the angel those houses he was to "pass over" because the price for sin had been paid that night (See Exodus 12:13, 23).

There were certain conditions that the lamb had to meet in order to be worthy of being the Passover lamb: (1) “Your lamb shall be without blemish” and (2) “a male of the first year” (Exodus 12:5). The Messiah had to be male, as we clearly see, but more importantly, the Messiah had to be “without blemish” both physically and spiritually. As the Passover lamb had to be physically perfect, so was Jesus. However, to fully atone for the sins of mankind, the ultimate Passover Lamb, in the form of Jesus, had to be free from sin. Had He been born of man and not of God, He would have inherited sin and been separated from God spiritually at birth and thus disqualified as the sacrificial Lamb.

But, why was a human sacrifice needed instead of just the animal sacrifices that had been offered in the past? The Bible tells us,

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same

sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For *it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins* [emphasis added].

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.' Then I said, 'Behold, I have come - in the volume of the book it is written of Me - To do Your will, O God* [emphasis added]."

Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He

may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. *And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever* [emphasis added], sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days," says the LORD: "I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. (Hebrews 10:1-17)

We can see that God never intended for animal blood to wash away the stain of sin from the lives of

humans. It had to be through the blood of a perfect, sinless human being. The only way that was ever going to happen was for God, Himself, to provide the Lamb, Himself, as that sacrifice just as Abraham prophesied centuries before. What the blood of animals failed to do, the Messiah, as sacrificial Lamb, did do – save man from his sins and restored the relationship God had with mankind prior to Adam's sin and fall from grace. Again, had Jesus been born of man's seed rather than God's Seed, He would have been born in sin and unworthy to be the “one sacrifice for sins forever.”

Satan attempted twice to stop God's plan of redemption from occurring: once in the life of Moses, a foreshadowing of the second attempt, and once in the life of Jesus. When Moses was born, the Pharaoh in power feared the Hebrews were growing too large in number and could possibly overthrow his government. Thus, he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all males born to Israel, but they

refused. In retaliation and out of fear, Pharaoh had all male children born to Israel drowned in the Nile River to decrease the Hebrew population and prevent an uprising. Moses, the greatest prophet outside Jesus, was spared from this slaughter of the innocents. Had Satan stopped Moses' birth, he might have temporarily stopped the exodus and formation of Israel as a nation, and hence the coming of the Messiah, but God would not let His plan be thwarted.

Then when Jesus was born, the rich astronomers of the East came to King Herod inquiring of the One “born King of the Jews.” This news greatly upset him because he feared, as did Pharaoh, that a king would come along and take over his kingdom. Herod inquired of his seers where this “King of the Jews” would be born. According to the prophet Micah (5:2), the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea (See Matthew 2:1-2 for the fulfillment of this messianic prophecy). In fear of losing his kingdom, Herod had all males up to age

two slaughtered in the town of Bethlehem, but we know that Gabriel came and told Joseph to take his wife and the Child to Egypt to escape the massacre. Of course, they stayed in Egypt until Herod died, which fulfilled another messianic prophecy from Hosea 11:1, “And out of Egypt I called My son.” Both slaughters of the innocents were foiled and crushed Satan's attempts to prevent the coming of the Messiah. Hence God revealed pieces of His plan over the centuries to foil Satan's plot of preventing mankind's redemption. The next attempt would take place on the cross at Golgotha, the place of the skull (Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; and John 19:17).

Because Satan could not prevent the virgin birth of Jesus, he thought that the physical death of Jesus would surely stop God's plan. Fortunately for all of humanity, God revealed pieces of His plan to humanity and not all at once. Otherwise, Satan would have known NOT to kill Jesus and thereby

shed the blood of the perfect, sinless sacrifice worthy of wiping out mankind's sin debt.

The prophets David and Isaiah foretold many of the messianic prophecies of Jesus' death long ago. The 22nd Psalm is known as the messianic psalm. David wrote nearly 100 of the Old Testament messianic prophecies in the psalms alone. On the other hand, Isaiah wrote over 130 messianic prophecies. Together, these two men provide us the bulk of the messianic prophecies, but what do they have to say about the actual sacrifice offered by the Lamb of God, who was, by the way, “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8)? Now, we will see the story of the crucifixion as told by these two Old Testament prophets.

Jesus was to be born the Savior of the world, “but You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother’s breasts I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s

womb...” (Psalms 22:9). He would be raised in humble conditions, “For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2a) and be of average appearance, “He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isaiah 53:2b). He was to be God's servant, “By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many...” (Isaiah 53:9b) by being the “Good Shepherd,” “The LORD is my shepherd...” (Psalm 23:1).

However, during His life here on earth, Jesus was an outcast to society, “He is despised and rejected by men” (Isaiah 53:3). No one would believe that this One born of a virgin would be the Messiah, “Who has believed our report?” (Isaiah 53:1). In fact they hated him without reason, “Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies; Nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause. (Psalm 35:19) and thought God cursed him,

“yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4c).

Prior to His arrest and trial en route to the cross, He was betrayed by His own disciple Judas, “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me...Nor is it one who hates me...But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance” (Psalm 55:12-13). This arrest came shortly after He had poured His heart out to God in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane,

Deliver me out of the mire, And let me not sink; Let me be delivered from those who hate me, And out of the deep waters. Let not the floodwater overflow me, Nor let the deep swallow me up; And let not the pit shut its mouth on me. Hear me, O LORD, for Your lovingkindness is good; Turn to me according to the multitude of Your tender mercies. And do not hide Your face from Your servant, For I am in trouble; Hear me speedily. Draw near to

my soul, and redeem it; Deliver me because of my enemies. You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; My adversaries are all before You. Reproach has broken my heart, And I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; And for comforters, but I found none. (Psalm 69:14-20)

However, when He was arrested, the disciples abandoned Him quickly, “I am a reproach among all my enemies, But especially among my neighbors, And am repulsive to my acquaintances” (Psalm 31:11) and “we hid, as it were, our faces from Him” (Isaiah 53:3d). From there they took Him to the Sanhedrin for the trial where false witnesses came forth to testify against Him, “Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence” (Psalm 27:12). Because the Jewish leaders wanted to stop His “sect” from infecting the rest of Judea and taking away their power, they plotted His execution

on the cross, “For I hear the slander of many; Fear is on every side; While they take counsel together against me, They scheme to take away my life” (Psalm 31:13). Yet, He did not say a word against them, “Silent before his accusers; And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7b).

The Jews could not put a man to death, so they drug Jesus before Pilate, the Roman potentate, to be judged for the crimes of heresy and blasphemy, “For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken” (Isaiah 53:8b). Upon review of the case, Pilate declared Jesus innocent of all crimes charged against Him, “Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth” (Isaiah 53:9b). The Jewish priests demanded His execution and insinuated that Pilate might be a sympathizer to a man calling himself a king when only Caesar could be king. Thus Pilate had Jesus imprisoned and

scourged, “He was taken from prison and from judgment...” (Isaiah 53:8a). Part of the scourging included the traditional 40 lashes minus one, “And by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5c). Before the Romans finished the beating they stripped Him of his clothes, “I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me” (Psalm 22:17) and then put a robe on Him with a crown of thorns driven into His head and mocked him.

Once the scourging was complete, the soldiers marched Jesus to Golgotha to be crucified. There they nailed him to the cross, “They pierced My hands and My feet” (Psalm 22:16) and placed His cross between that of two criminals being executed along side Him, “And He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12c). While on the cross, He suffered great distress and torment from sheer physical exhaustion until death overtook Him.

I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. (Psalm 22:14-15)

Meanwhile the crowd around Him continued to mock and scoff at Him, “All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head” (Psalm 22:7). On the way to the cross, they even spit on Him, pulled out his beard, and threw stones at him, "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6) and “So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men” (Isaiah 52:14). Then while Jesus hung on the cross, the people jeered Him and cried, “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him” (Psalm 22:8). As He

hung there in agony, he became thirsty, “And My tongue clings to My jaws” (Psalm 22:15), but they gave him gall and vinegar for Him to drink and dull the pain, “And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21). He refused the drink to keep all of His senses about Him as He hung there dying for the sins of man. Then the Roman soldiers took his clothes as war trophies for themselves, “They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots” (Psalm 22:18).

Nearing the end of the suffering, Jesus cried out in agony as He realized the end drew near, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Psalm 22:1). Then realizing the end had come, He looked toward heaven declaring the work was done and ceased living, as he died saying, “Into Your hand I commit my spirit” (Psalm 31:5). As the night approached along with the coming Sabbath, the Jews wanted to get His lifeless body down off the tree of death, cursed for the sake of all humanity. The

soldiers broke the knees of the other two criminals to speed up the process of death, but they noticed Jesus had already died. Thus, they did not desecrate His body, “He guards all his bones; Not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:20). To ensure He had died, they pierced His heart with a spear, “My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me” (Psalm 22:14). Then Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy Jew, went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus to bury it in his unused tomb, “And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death” (Isaiah 53:9a). Three days later Jesus would rise from the dead just as He said He would: “He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days” (Isaiah 53:10c).

Why was all this predicted about the death and resurrection of the Messiah? It was (1) God's plan for mankind's redemption, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief” (Isaiah 53:10a), (2) for Jesus to be an offering for our sins, “When You make His soul an offering for sin” (Isaiah

53:10b) because “...the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6b), and (3) to provide the peace necessary to reestablish the relationship between God and man, “The chastisement for our peace was upon Him” (Isaiah 53:5b). However, we have to remember way back in the Garden of Eden that God originally prophesied that Jesus would bruise Satan's head while he would bruise Jesus' heel. Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, God did fulfill the Garden prophecy and overcame Satan's usurping of earth from Adam by deception. David noted this fact when he wrote, “Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth, And from the horns of the wild oxen!” (Psalm 22:20-21).

Through revelation by bits and pieces God announced to the world the coming of His Savior of mankind, the Messiah. The Hebrew prophets, including Isaiah, were the heralds announcing this

plan - the coming of the One, "...[W]ho brings good news [the gospel], Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, " Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:6-8).

Chapter 6

His Amazing Grace

Thus far we have read of God's pronounced judgment upon Adam and Eve (and the serpent), the descendants of Adam until Noah, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, the children of Israel in the Sinai desert, and exile and dispersion of Israel. Then we examined the greatest *sign* ever given to the whole of humanity, the virgin birth of Jesus that led up to the crucifixion. Whereas the cross once represented a torture device created to punish the wicked (even in an earthly sense), now it serves as a continual reminder and message of hope that God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only (begotten) Son, Jesus, as the payment for mankind's sins with the benefit that whoever believes on Jesus would not die spiritually but would have eternal life with God (John 3:16). Now we need to look at the message of saving grace contained within the stories of Adam & Eve, Noah, Lot, the

ancient Hebrews, and Jesus. It is the same story told in pieces bit by bit until God reveals the full message to the world after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

First, let us review and examine the meaning of “grace.” Dictionary.com (retrieved December 31, 2010 from <http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/grace>) lists the following meanings for grace: elegance or beauty of form, manner, motion, or action;

1. a pleasing or attractive quality or endowment;
2. favor or good will;
3. mercy; clemency; pardon: an act of grace; and
4. in theology -
 - a. the freely given, unmerited favor and love of [G]od,

- b. the influence or [S]pirit of God operating in humans to regenerate or strengthen them,
- c. a virtue or excellence of divine origin: the Christian graces, and
- d. also called state of grace. the condition of being in God's favor.

Since the creation of man, God never intended or willed for man to be disobedient to Him. No, He desired for all people to live in perfect bliss in union with Him and with Him at the center of their lives, as in Adam's day prior to the Fall. Accordingly, when Adam sinned, God had to exact judgment upon sin because God can have no place or part in sin. He is holy and just and requires those in union with Him to be likewise. If He permitted sin to go unchecked and unpunished, then those that perpetrate sin-filled lives would not be in union to or subject to

Him. If we remember from the Creation story, God made tunics (clothing) for Adam and Eve from animal skins. Implied in that statement is the notion that God sacrificed the animal for them, spilling its blood as payment for their sin of disobedience. Payment was required then and there on the spot. Through this act of sacrifice, man was temporarily pardoned from his sin by an act of mercy from God. God passed judgment of death upon mankind, not immediate death but death in the form of eternal separation from Him. God extended His grace to Adam and Eve by allowing them to continue to live out their natural lives until they expired their last breaths.

Additionally, God demonstrated His grace by proclaiming the coming of the One, the Savior of mankind, who would “bruise the head” of the serpent, Satan. This prophecy began the process of man's redemption through the extension of God's grace to man. He did not have to do any of those

acts of loving-kindness. The immediate deaths of Adam and Eve were warranted, yet God showed them (and us by extension through their continued existence) first His mercy followed by His grace. Adam and Eve, and hence the world, did not “deserve” either God's mercy or grace; however, He, from the beginning, demonstrated His love for mankind by giving His one and only Son, Jesus, to be an offering for sins committed by mankind.

Looking at the life of Noah, we find another wonderful account and example of God's grace. The world (descendants of Adam) had spiraled into such a maelstrom of moral depravity that God repented (literally changed His mind) about having created humanity. He regretted doing so because of the lewdness and pure evil that dominated the lives of people. Their depravity rose through the heights of heaven as a stench in His nostrils, “So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing

and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them'" (Genesis 6:7) with a great deluge of water known as the Great Flood. Of the entire human race that was annihilated, only one man, "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8). This man was Noah, "a just man, perfect in his generations...[who] walked with God" (Genesis 6:9).

The condition of mankind in his day could be summed up in the words, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (Genesis 6:11-12). Therefore, God took note of the situation, "and...said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth'" (Genesis 6:13). Although God considered Noah, "a just man, perfect in his generations," Noah was still a son of Adam and therefore inherited the same sin-filled nature that

corrupted the rest of humanity. Even Noah's three sons, wife, and daughters-in-law all possessed this same self-willed, sinful nature. None of them “deserved” to be spared from the coming judgment God intended for humanity, BUT the Bible tells us, “Noah found *grace* [emphasis added] in the eyes of God.” God decided that this one man, and his family, who walked right before God should pass through His judgment within the safety of the ark during the flood in order for them to survive and to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). Noah's sons would restart the process of replenishing the earth's human population in hope of correcting what Adam had corrupted.

Furthermore, the need for and hope of a Savior for mankind was not eliminated because of Noah's rescue and future mission. The sons of Noah, as mentioned above, still possessed their sinful natures; thus their progeny would inherit sin. If sin still had a hold on humanity, there was still a need

to be saved from it. This then-present and futuristic condition of man's heart required continued expressions of God's grace because every person with sin in their lives deserves nothing but death. If we were ever without God's grace and power through the Holy Spirit, then no one would be able to be a part of His family, ever! Noah's extension of grace was found in the ark, a type or foreshadowing of Jesus, who would die as atonement for the sins of all humanity. By faith Noah entered into the ark and was saved from imminent doom and by passing through the waters was baptized, all in faith. Noah did not have the blood of Jesus to wash away his sins, yet, but he trusted in God by faith for the day when Jesus would come to save him from his sins. He looked forward to His coming. It foreshadowed the message that Paul teaches in Romans and again in Ephesians 2:8a, "For by grace you have been saved through faith..."

In the story of Lot we see a very similar story on a smaller scale. Noah's story was a macrocosm of the human condition whereas Lot's predicament was microcosmic. The moral depravity in Sodom and Gomorrah, if you will recall, had reached the heights of heaven as a stench and forced God to move in judgment upon the cities. When the LORD appeared before Abraham prior to the destruction and informed him of what was to transpire, Abraham interceded for the cities because of his nephew, Lot. Abraham bargained with God to save the city if there were 50 righteous people there and continued pleading with God for their deliverance all the way down to ten righteous people. God found none but Lot, his wife, two daughters, and their husbands by extension of being Lot's sons-in-law. Again, under the postulate we developed in Noah's story concerning death, as punishment for sin, not even Lot or any of his family deserved to escape the peril facing Sodom and Gomorrah. However, God decided

that Lot and his family should be spared because they followed after Him, as did Abraham. Lot's family “found *grace* [emphasis added] in the eyes of God” much like Noah did although the Bible does not expressly say so. We derive this from the handling they received, which is comparable to Noah's treatment by God.

Of interesting note is the fate of Lot's wife and sons-in-law. Here we see two similar yet different groups of people. Lot's wife knew of God and most likely worshiped God along with her husband, and their sons-in-law may have come along side them and joined them in their faith. However, we know from the text of Genesis 19:14 that they thought he joked with them about the coming fiery judgment of God to be rained down on the city. Having been raised in the city of Sodom, they were influenced by the prevalent sin that saturated the entire area. These men did not give credence to the Word of God that came to them from Lot via the angels.

Unnecessarily, they perished along with their fellow countrymen because of unbelief. They missed out on God's grace that came to them in the form of permission to flee Sodom and miss the fire and brimstone, which burned the city and everything in it to an ash heap.

Likewise, God afforded Lot's wife the same opportunity to avoid the death and destruction coming upon Sodom and Gomorrah and was given explicit guidance not to turn back or look upon the devastation left behind by the fiery judgment (Genesis 19:17). Their safe passage out of the city was an act of God's mercy, for the Bible says, “the men took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, *the LORD being merciful to him* [emphasis added], and they brought him out and set him outside the city” (Genesis 19:16). (His mercy is different from His grace, yet people are undeserving of either.) She obviously had some attachment to the city because she ignored the Word

of God and looked back upon the burning city. Her heart was not fully committed to God, and because of such, she rebelled against God and suffered the same fate as the rest of the ungodly, being turned into ash. (The human body, when cremated, is nothing more than an ash heap of salts left from the evaporation of water from the body.)

Lot and his daughters did not deserve to escape this judgment either, but we know from the text that God extended grace to Lot in his words, “Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life” (Genesis 19:19), and the angel replied, “I have favored you concerning this thing also...” (Genesis 19:21), meaning God showed favor, or grace, to Lot. Furthermore, Lot's righteousness (doing good) did not rescue him from this judgment but rather God chose to save Lot for Abraham's sake, as read in the text, “God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of

the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt” (Genesis 19:29).

The remainder of the Old Testament speaks to God's grace (and mercy) being extended to his chosen people, Israel. From the time of the judges to the coming of the Messiah, the Hebrew (Jewish) people abandoned their God, Jehovah, to prostitute themselves in worship before other gods made from wood, metal, or stone, and they even worshiped the celestial bodies in space and angels too. God had given them plain, simple instructions in the 10 Commandments with the first one being, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3) and the second commandment, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20:4-5). Israel continually sought after the gods of the peoples around them and was given over to their

enemies for doing so. Then they would cry out to God to save them from their enemies, and God rescued them time and time again out of His mercy because He loved His people so much. He showed them grace, first off, when He chose them to be His chosen people. They did not deserve such status; it was His doing and choosing. Because He loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God continued to extend His grace to the children of Israel despite their continual rejection of Him. He had made the same promise to each of the patriarchs and being faithful as He is, God honored His Word to bring forth the Seed, who would bless all the nations. That Seed is Jesus!

Under the Old Covenant God's judgment upon sin was often enacted quickly upon the guilty party(ies). If sin was committed, then judgment was forth coming almost immediately. God, however, had devised a plan of grace for all mankind that culminated in the death, burial, and resurrection of

His Son, Jesus, who died to take away the sins of the world. A New Covenant sprang forth giving men a new lease on life, abundant life. Through the sacrifice of Jesus' blood on the cross, man's sins were atoned. The relationship that Adam enjoyed with God prior to the Fall was re-established. Men no longer had to try and earn righteousness that came through strict observance of rules and regulations contained in the Mosaic Law. There is now a newer, better righteousness - the righteousness of God - that comes only through believing that God raised Jesus from the dead and confessing, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9-10).

As previously mentioned, Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, "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" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The reason Adam & Eve, their descendants until the time of Noah, the citizens of Sodom & Gomorrah, and the ancient Hebrews

suffered the judgments of God as they did resulted from their vain, human efforts. We learned in Genesis 6 that God saw the continual evil that emanates from the heart of man even from youth. Solomon summed it up this way, “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25). These people thought “their way” was the “right way” only to learn later that their way led to death. Jesus would later state it this way, “for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction [death], and there are many who go in by it” (Matthew 7:13).

Jesus came as God's gift of eternal love to redeem mankind from sin because God knew that man did not possess the innate ability to observe His law completely in order to enter heaven. Instead the law was given as a mirror to reflect the sin within man (Romans 7:7) to point him to the cross where he could obtain salvation by God's grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). In the Ephesian epistle, Paul

tells us that God saves us by His grace through faith in Him. When we believe on Jesus as the Son of God, who was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit, and confess, “Jesus is Lord,” we are saved from eternal damnation. It is a work of the Holy Spirit and by no other means. So then, why does God choose to save us by His grace rather than through observance of the Mosaic Law? Because observance of the Law would mean that we did the work required to enter into heaven and thereby nullify the work of the cross and the blood Jesus shed rather than salvation being, “*not of yourselves; [for] it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast [emphasis added]*” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Again, why would God want to save us Himself instead of allowing us to earn it through works or some other means? First, it is a gift of God's love (John 3:16, Romans 6:23, and Ephesians 2:8). Second, and more importantly, God spoke eons ago that He does not share His throne with anyone but

Himself. “And My glory I will not give to another” (Isaiah 42:8, 48:11), He said. Remember that God is the King of kings, and in a kingdom, there can only be one King. It is the King that extends grace to His subjects not the other way around. Solomon wrote, “Luxury is not fitting for a fool, Much less for a servant to rule over princes” (Proverbs 19:10). Can you imagine what the world would be like if God ever abdicated His rule and His kingdom to humans? What chaos would ensue? What terror would control the universe? God forbid! "So when you see standing 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel....for then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again. If those days, had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:15, 21-22).

God's grace consists of His desire and ability to save you from your sins and then to empower you

to live a life worthy of His calling not by your own works (Ephesians 2:8) but by the power of His Spirit. Zechariah (4:6) put it this way, “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the LORD of hosts.” Many years before Zechariah, Solomon had this piece to add, “Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1). But why do they labor in vain? Because it is an act of human effort, a showing of human power and human might. When God builds or does something, it is done with perfection, without flaw. Human efforts will fail time and time again because we are flawed and possess that sinful nature from Adam, which desires to sit on the throne of God in our hearts undeservedly and will do all it can to rule it. God gives us His grace to overcome sin and live a Godly life “by [His] Spirit.” Then when we have learned to “walk in the [power of His] Spirit...[not only will we not] fulfill the lust of the flesh,” (Galatians 5:16), we will be able to make the same

statement Paul made to the Corinthians about his apostleship but in general regarding ourselves, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain...yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

The whole point of God's grace is that it is not about us! It is all about Him! First and foremost, “we all have sinned and come short of God's glory” (Romans 3:23). Thus, we all deserve nothing short of death because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), but God in His infinite love for humanity “gave His [one and only] Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish [eternal death in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death] (see Revelation 21:8) but have everlasting [eternal] life” (John 3:16), which is “the gift of God...through Jesus [the Messiah] our Lord” (Romans 6:23). If we deserve nothing short of death, the gift of eternal life from God means we receive a

gift God wants us to have based solely on His love for humanity.

Therefore, when we sin against God and take Him down off of the throne of our hearts to elect and erect another god in His place, we reject that gift of grace and salvation. This reason is why the people of the Old Covenant perished under God's judgment as they did in the examples we reviewed. People living now in this Age of Grace have the same option: receive God's grace and salvation or perish in the judgment to come, which will not be water but “the lake which burns with 'fire and brimstone'” like that which rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah that serve to this day as an example of what will happen to those who choose to live an ungodly life after learning of such judgment (2 Peter 2:6) and will “[suffer] the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 1:7). Can you begin to see the importance of God's grace to all people everywhere?

Paul considered God's grace to be at the center of everything he did and at the center of all we do. Examine the opening and closing of each of Paul's epistles. They all begin with the words, “*Grace* [emphasis added]...and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, and Philemon 1:3). He concludes these same letters with a combination of these words, “*grace* [emphasis added] be with you” (Romans 16:24, 1 Corinthians 16:23: 2 Corinthians 13:14, Galatians 6:18, Ephesians 6:24, Philippians 4:23, Colossians 4:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:28, 2 Thessalonians 3:18, 1 Timothy 6:21, 2 Timothy 4:22, Titus 3:15, and Philemon 1:25).

Paul the most prolific writer of the New Testament thought it worthy to begin and conclude his writings with God's grace, do you not think there

must be something to it? In fact was it not Paul who wrote, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever” (Romans 11:36), “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16); and “by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:20), and “God, who made the world and everything in it...for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:24,28). God did it all! And, He gives us life eternal when we accept this gift through Jesus our Lord.

Chapter 7

Sharing God's Grace

Let us recall that this book focuses on the **signs** of the times that God has given to humanity throughout the millennia. We started with the **sign** of Adam's fall and the death it brought to humanity and then progressed to the rainbow followed by the ashen remains of Sodom and Gomorrah to the Diaspora of the Hebrews and then on to the virgin birth of Jesus and execution stake (cross) upon which He died. We then determined that all of these **signs** pointed to one thing: God's grace extended to and redemption plan for the whole of humanity. From the examples we examined, there appeared a pattern of some frightening proportion. Most people choose to refuse God's grace granted to them. They would rather die in their sin, so that they remain supreme in the rule of their lives rather than submit to God's will and become part of His extended family. Remember that the only way to gain entry

into that family is “by grace you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

And even then, one must enter in by the narrow gate of Jesus,

Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from. (Luke 13:24-25)

And again He said elsewhere,

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep....Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever

came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:1-2, 7-10)

Also, He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). As you can see, there is no other way to God the Father except through God's grace by faith in Jesus. Anyone who tries to get to God through some other means or method is a thief and robber and does nothing but come to steal, kill, and destroy.

There are many people in the world who think that they can work their way into "heaven" or earn it through recognition or some other vain manner or even buy their way into heaven. All the religions of the world teach that man can get to eternity through human might and power, but God's Word has clearly

shown us through the *signposts* of life and history that there is no other way except through Jesus. Jesus tells us, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the Father except through Me” (John 14:6), and Peter added by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name [Jesus] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

God did not give His Son to die in vain. Paul explains this matter a little clearer for us,

A man is not justified by the works of the law [or by works of any other sort either] but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law [or works of any kind] no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!

For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. (Galatians 2:16-21)

In the previous chapter we learned from each of the biblical examples given that God extended grace to those who had sinned against Him. He always offered an opportunity for the sinning offender to repent and change their ways even though they did nothing worthy of such grace. God chooses to allow us the opportunity to serve Him because He desires it and wills it, not us. From the beginning, God shared His redemption plan starting in the Garden of Eden and then fully revealed it to

His apostles. That plan was for Jesus to die as a perfect, sinless sacrifice to atone mankind's sins and bridge the chasm that separated us from God and redeem us from a fate that was originally intended for rebellious angels, not us humans (Matthew 25:41). Those who choose to refuse God's grace will join the fallen angels in the everlasting fire reserved for them because of their sin. Additionally, God wills that everyone would serve Him, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9) and again, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways!" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Beloved, we are faced with a mission that is paramount to everything else we do in life. Jesus gave us the Great Commission, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark

16:15) and “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). He commands us to do this work. Paul even encouraged the young pastor, Timothy, “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5). We are called to partake in the work of the evangelist, witnessing to the lost by sharing God's grace with them through the telling of the gospel message and making disciples of all who come to the Messiah. What was good for Timothy is definitely good for us all.

Jesus noted to the disciples on one occasion, “lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:35-36) and another time, “The harvest truly

is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray [to] the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38). We, the believers are those laborers needed to bring in the harvest; why else would Jesus have given us the Great Commission? The world cannot see the *signs* God has given us with the hearts because the evil one, Satan,

The god of this age has blinded [their minds], who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

Who does Paul say here is to preach the light of the gospel? We are, that is all believers.

The problem Paul notes is that in the last days there will be people who come to pervert the truth as well as those who are as morally depraved as Sodom and Gomorrah or Adam's early descendants. They will be, “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:2-5). We can look all around us and see many people who fit into one or more of these categories. All we have to do is pick up a newspaper or listen to or watch a news program and learn of all the greed, violence, and destruction going on in the world.

It does not take a college degree to see the truth of Paul's warning. In the years 2008-2010 we saw the greatest upheaval in recent economic history: (1) country after country around the globe

has threatened to go bankrupt because of their bad lending and spending practices that nearly collapsed their monetary systems, to include the USA; (2) Bernie Madoff, the prime example of the ultimate greed that lurks in the hearts of men, made off with billions of dollars that people trusted him to invest and make more money for them. All the while he was pilfering their money by “robbing Peter to pay Paul;” and (3) people invested in the housing market thinking they could buy property at a low rate and then turn around and flip the house for even more money, which is not all bad. The problem with this last example is that the US and other world governments encouraged moneylenders to put people into homes with mortgages they could not sustain or were even qualified to pay back to the investor. Thus, we can clearly see that greed runs rampant globally because this situation affects many nations that face the possibility of going bankrupt.

Need I mention the steep rise in abortion rates, homosexuality, or other sins of the world?

Then of course, we have to look at what Peter said would also happen in the last days,

Scoffers will come...walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:3-7)

He speaks of the hypocrisy growing in the church and of false prophets and teachers who will come in teaching lies trying to convert people "to

the dark side.” He notes here two of the examples of antiquity, which we examined: the pre-flood era and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He reiterates what this book looked at in length. People forget about these *signs* in the earth that remind them of what happens to those who refuse God's grace and gift of love. They do not want to face the truth that entering into eternity with God requires people to give up their own wants and desires for the will of God by believing in Jesus and confessing that He is Lord.

Next Paul takes us back to an elementary problem with people coming to the Messiah and receiving God's grace. Jesus told us to pray for God to send laborers into the field, but if the believers are not those laborers, then who will do the work? Paul puts it this way,

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." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:11-14)

Notice how Paul works through the process. First, people have to call on God to be saved, but they also have to believe on Him, Jesus. It is impossible for people to believe in God if they have never heard of Him. Thus, for people to hear about Jesus, preachers must be sent to proclaim the good news (tidings) of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. This is where we, the believers, come into the picture. Paul adds that unless the preachers are sent they cannot preach. If we sit back on the

sidelines in the pews of our churches and never get out into the game (or grab a scythe and start harvesting grain), then the crop will be left to rot on the vine (or stalk) and perish. The idea of one person perishing in hell sent chills all down the spine of the apostle Paul. He declared,

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. (1 Corinthians 9:16-17)

(Note: In context Paul addressed an issue about people preaching the gospel for money and getting the accompanying reward, which for him was not preaching the gospel for money and not abusing his authority in the Messiah as an apostle.) What we want to take away from this last quote is the sense of urgency Paul had concerning his preaching of the gospel, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” His

woe stemmed more from what he thought would come to him for not doing what God commanded, but he may have been referring to his deep desire for the lost to come to God, both Jew and Gentile. He expressed to the Colossian church,

I now rejoice in *my sufferings for you*, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, *for the sake of His body*, which is *the church*, of which *I became a minister* according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, *to fulfill the word of God, the mystery* which has been *hidden from ages and from generations*, but *now* has been *revealed to His saints*.

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor,*

striving according to His working which works in me mightily. (Colossians 1:24-29, emphasis added)

There is a big world out there numbering nearly 7 billion people, the majority of whom do not know God or Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. Many have never heard the gospel message of God's redemptive plan to save them from sin and give them the gift of eternal life through Jesus the Messiah our Lord. He has charged us with the mission of spreading that message starting first in our own neighborhoods and then into our workplaces, our counties, our states, our nation, and ultimately our world. Not everyone can be the evangelist or missionary who takes the message globally or even nationally, but we can all share the good news of Jesus. Paul said, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, [emphasis added] for the Jew first and also for the Greek*”

(Romans 1:16). Let us take on the same mindset that Jesus had regarding the gospel, “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Peter and Paul both worked to spread the good news of Jesus to all they encountered, even as Jesus did to the point of death.

Will you join us in this Godly endeavor and mission? There is a hurting world out there just waiting on you to bring the good news of Jesus to them. They have seen the *signs* all around them, but Satan has blinded their minds and filled their hearts with the cares of this world, which have filled them up and left no room for the Messiah, Jesus. To the unbeliever the gospel message is like driving through a tunnel without the headlights on. They can see none of the dangers that lie in front of them. They cannot see the black hole into which they are falling called hell. The flames of hell grow higher with each passing day awaiting their prey of unrepentant

sinners. However, when one sinner heeds the Holy Spirit's conviction and turns from his wickedness, all of heaven erupts into joyous celebration (Luke 15:7). Therefore, let us go out into the fields white unto harvest and gather the crop for the Lord of the harvest.

The Bible does not say there will be a great gathering of souls in the last days. On the contrary it says that there will be a great “falling away” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). The disciples asked Jesus about the *sign* of His return, to which he replied,

Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various

places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then *many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.* But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And *this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.* (Matthew 24:4-14, emphasis added)

Because the Bible addresses the “love of many [growing] cold” and not a large in-gathering of souls until the time of the Great Tribulation (see Revelation 14), this does not mean we, the believers, are to sit around and just wait on a “free ride” to heaven. No! We do so at their peril. Instead, we are to be about our “Father's business” as Jesus

commissioned us to do. Even one soul that goes to hell is one too many. It should break your heart that one person dies and goes to hell just as it breaks God's heart. Let us share the grace of God with everyone.

Do not miss the *signpost* in front of you. It is the cross. It is the largest *sign* the world will ever see. To ignore it is to write oneself a death sentence. If you are a believer, then take to heart the words of this book and the Bible, the Word of God. If you are not a believer, then let me invite to come to know the Lord and Savior of the world, Jesus. He stands ready to receive you into His family. His servant, John, wrote, "Behold I [Jesus] stand at the door and knock, If any man hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and dine with him and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Remember that God does not want anyone to die and go to hell along with Satan. Hell was originally created for him and his rebellious angels. They deserve hell. You do too, but God made

a way for you to escape that awful place. It is a place “where their worm does not die [and will eat your body forever] and the fire is not quenched [so the flames burn your body forever]” (Mark 9:44, 46, 48), but you will never die a physical death again. You will instead endure this torment for all eternity and be separated from God. Would you not rather be in the presence of the almighty God who loved you enough to die for you sins and save you from that place? That is God's grace. He took your place on the cross, went to hell where you should go, defeated Satan, and came back to life all so you could be free. Let us invite Him into our hearts and lives today by saying the prayer on the next page.

“God, I believe with all my heart you raised Jesus from the dead by the power of your Spirit, and I confess aloud with my mouth, 'Jesus is Lord!' I confess my sins to you now and ask you to forgive me. The Bible says that when I confess my sins, You forgive them (1 John 1:9) and remember them no more (Jeremiah 31:34). Be Lord and Master of my life. Thank you for saving me from my sins. Seal this work in the name of Jesus, Amen.”

