

FRIENDS OF THE NAZARENE©

An on-line Biblical Studies Magazine

“They Follow the Lamb No Matter Where He Goes”

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Nazarene Saints Publishing© is a Bible research group for a better Scriptural understanding. We are dedicated to the preservation and publishing of Christian writings which aid *Friends of the Nazarene*© to "follow the Lamb no matter where he goes." (John 15:14; 3 John 14; Revelation 14:4) The *Friends of the Nazarene*© are a spiritual community of Messianic Christians. We are apologists dedicated to the defense of the truth that "God is One" and not three. The Bible is our creed. We view this "God-breathed" Book as inspired alone, while the thoughts of men about it are not. We wish to show respect for our multitude of Christian brethren. (1 Peter 3:15)

[Mark Miller / Senior Editor (California, USA); Ralph Slaney / Senior Spanish editor (Almeria, Spain); Luis Padilla / Associate Spanish Editor (Whittier, USA); Andy Weeks / Associate Editor [Webmaster] (Chicago, USA); Christian Gorny / German Editor (Wales, England); Andrew Foss / Hebrew editor (Tustin, California, USA)]

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ?? **ACTS OF THE APOSTLES** in the *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© is now complete and may be requested as an email attachment. In time it will be posted on the *Friends of the Nazarene* web page. It is 175 pages in length with 1,130 footnotes. It is a complete, new rendering of the Greek of *Acts of the Apostles* and contains all the features of the other books of this Christian Bible.
- ?? **NAZARENE COMMENTARY 2000**©: Part of *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© is the new rendering of the Christian Bible with a footnote commentary. All of the books of the New Testament except *Luke* are now available as a single download at the *Friends of the Nazarene* web site. It takes about 25 minutes to download this commentary of about 2000 pages, 12,000 footnotes and 1.8 million words. We hope to have the completed Christian Bible on CD-ROM which will contain 3,500 pages, 12,000 footnotes in 2.4 million words.
- ?? **REVELATION** is now available in a new format as part of *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©. It has been slightly edited so that now all words and phrases drawn from the Hebrew Bible are in blue with the source verse provided. This is a new rendering of the Greek language in 130 pages and 950 footnotes. Every phrase has been compared with other versions and key words are footnoted.

Important Greek words are referenced. Each verse has a brief commentary and cross references. Word studies are complete throughout Revelation. Each chapter and paragraph have topical headings and each chapter has review questions.

?? **RECENT WORKS** just added include the Gospel of Mark. Currently work continues on the final book, Luke. A new version of *Nazarene Apocalypse 2000* is being prepared.

===== END =====

FAITH PERSPECTIVES

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT:

I would also like to thank you and the other members for the good work that you do in providing translations and perspectives on faith. – MD

>>>>>

Please keep up the good work. -- S

>>>>>

I have been doing some non-trinitarian research and found your site. Thanks for the info ... and the great web site. – Jeff

>>>>>

Please send me Acts. Thank you again, and again, and again! – Doug

>>>>>

Mark and brothers and sisters:

Just a quick line to say hello and thank you for all the hard work you're doing on the *Friends of the Nazarene* site. At the moment, aside from the scriptures themselves, the materials on the site are a primary source of spiritual food for me, and I feel extremely grateful for the extraordinary amount of effort and research you have put into the site.

I was brought up 'in the truth' (as a JW), always took it extremely seriously, and viewed it a privilege from being a small child to be part of the 'one true religion', Jehovah's organization. I was a happy regular pioneer for most of my teenage years and young adult life - there was only one problem - much as I loved Jehovah, the brothers and the truth, I was a serious enough student to see that certain teachings were contradictory, or worse, made me doubt whether Jehovah should be worshipped if effectively not everyone would have the same chance. I was also worried by not partaking of the emblems - what seemed to be a clear command to all Christians. This and other serious doubts made me fear for my sanity. [Of course it turned out it wasn't my sanity that was in question.] I was determined to '*let God be found true, though every man be found a liar*' and I now have much more satisfactory answers, and I think a more Christian, more loving outlook on my worldwide family - ie, all those striving to live as Christians.. and not just Christians either.

I still love the brothers, (but not just the brothers - I'm pleased to have a broader understanding of humanity and Christianity) but naturally my association is limited or non-existent.

I am grateful to Jehovah and Jesus who knows his sheep and feeds them – I believe you are a channel for food that has been provided to those who are at this stage of their questioning. I also appreciate your non-dogmatic/respectful approach which shows appreciation for the spiritual conscience of others.

I'd be grateful to receive the commentary on Acts in Word format. It just so happens to be where I'm up to with my Bible reading at the moment, so impeccable timing!

Thanks also for the daily Bible thought. I had missed having the daily text -- old habit but a good one I think.

With warm Christian love to you all - may Jehovah bless you and keep you. Thanks again. I'll keep in touch if you don't mind.

Best wishes,

Eva

>>>>>

Thanks for the chapters of "Mark". I print the chapters as they come and read them just before going to sleep, a good way to close the day. God bless, dear brother. Jack

>>>>>

Thank you for all your efforts! -- HP

>>>>>

Thanks for your interesting site: I browsed through the exposition of Matthew 24 and found it very sensible. – AB

>>>>>

Just dialed into your site, as a recommendation of [someone else]. Have not had a chance to do much other than take a look at the various pages, and print a couple of documents to read. I sense a Loving Spirit. During the years of my searching and growing The Father has taken me into some wonderful places in Him. He is truly bringing us out of "man's system" and drawing us into that relationship Jesus asked Him to bring us into: of being one with Him. He is calling His people out of a people and inviting us to 'enter into His Presence'. May He richly bless you as you minister His Love. In His service. -- RJ

>>>>>

I'm sure you can tell that I enjoy studying the Word of God. I would appreciate it very much if you could help me in my endeavours. You have a lot of excellent research materials that I could really get into. Thank you for such a wonderful website. -- AM

>>>>>>>>>

“Directing Interest to the Organization”

I was thoroughly trained as a door step preacher to try and start Bible studies with interested people. In the Pioneer School I learned that I should always “direct interest to the organization.” Never was I told to direct interest to Jesus or the Bible – but the organization. I only discovered later that this was a method

of distracting attention to the Bible and Christ, so that those who “joined the organization” were always looking to it as the sole “channel” of spiritual food. After a more careful look at the Bible I discovered that such an idea occurs no where in the Scriptures. However, Paul does write: “Fix your gaze on ... Jesus.” [Hebrews 12:1] I learned that if I “looked intently” at Jesus Christ and his teachings I would never be misled by men. -- M

===== END =====

WHAT WE LEARN FROM YOUR LETTERS

We can learn a lot about a person by reading their letters. If we take half a dozen pieces of correspondence from a man or woman we will learn something of their character, personality, likes and dislikes, love and hate, and numerous manners and ways of expressing themselves.

Suppose we had letters written by Christ. What would we learn about him? Would we learn something of his bent of mind, his mental attitude, his personality? Would we learn what he loved or hated? Would we learn what he valued and praised highly? Would we learn whether he could frighten by his language? Would we learn about the promises he could make?

Most serious Bible students know that in the Gospel record there is no example of Christ ever writing anything. Though some who accept the account about the adulterous woman in John 8 will see that the Nazarene was writing in the dirt, in the Gospels we have no letters from Christ. What if we were to discover hidden, secret letters written by Jesus? Letters no one knew about decades after his death?

As it turns out there are such letters. Seven of them. They were dictated over 60 years after his death to his most trusted and closest friend, the apostle John then nearing one hundred years of age. These Christine epistles are found in chapters two and three of the *Apocalypse*. They were written to the presiding officers of seven different congregations in a region of modern Turkey. Each of the letters followed a similar format:

- ?? **A description of the Sender of the letter**
- ?? **A statement of the Sender’s awareness of activity with commendation**
- ?? **A rebuke in a variety of tones**
- ?? **A promise to those who overcome**
- ?? **And the same caution to each**

What will we learn by examining these letters from the standpoint of trying to learn more about the Sender? Many have come to view Jesus Christ is somewhat of a warmly affection person who is generally passive and all-forgiving. Others believe that the only thing he is interested in is faith and love. Some have gone so far as to convince themselves that nothing the believer does can ever break the relationship with Christ. What do these seven letters reveal?

We may divide the seven letters into two categories: a] five of them are written to someone who receives a rebuke; b] two are addressed to two men who are only praised and encouraged. We learn about Christ different things from these two groups. To one he is quite stern and even threatening. To the other he is warm and caring. From this we can learn that our Lord may behave in different ways depending on the focus of his attention.

Note the five different types of angelic presbyters and how Christ introduces himself to these:

- ?? The elder in Ephesus has left his first love and so Christ introduces himself as the One who controls the angelic presbyters and walks among the congregations as an inspector or overseer.
- ?? The elder in Pergamum tolerates false teachers in his congregation and so Christ introduces himself as the One with a double-edged sword.
- ?? The elder in Thyatira tolerates immorality in his congregation and so Christ introduces himself as the One who has eyes of fire and feet that can walk anywhere.
- ?? The elder in Sardis was among the hypocritical walking dead and so Christ introduces himself as the One who possesses the seven spirits as well as the seven stars.
- ?? The elder in Laodicea is a lukewarm materialist and so Christ introduces himself as the faithful Witness who was the beginning of God's creation.

Thus, when dealing with those who deserve his rebuke Christ presents himself in serious tones, sometimes threatening. However, with those who receive only his praise he has a softer edge.

- ?? To the faithful elder in Philadelphia Christ introduces himself as the One who possesses a key to open doors to possibilities and blessings.
- ?? To the poor but faithful elder in Smyrna Christ introduces himself as the One who died and came to life.

Thus, our Lord has not just one side to himself. He may be firm and strong, even fearfully threatening, where is needed, or kind, warm and encouraging to the faithful afflicted.

What is one of the main interests of the Lord when it comes to his concern for the presiding elders and their congregations? One word keeps repeating itself in all of these seven letters – works. He condemns bad works and praises good works. [Revelation 2:2, 5, 6, 19, 20, 26; 3:1, 2, 8, 15] No one can read Christ's letters and not see the importance of works. Indeed, he states everyone will be judged on the basis of their works. [Revelation 2:20] Christ himself says that his love is manifest by reproof and discipline. [Revelation 3:19]

This does not mean other matters are not also praised by Christ in these letters. He mentions faith a number of times. [Revelation 2:11, 13, 19; 3:14] He also mentions endurance often. [Revelation 2:2, 19; 3:10] The word "love" occurs at Revelation 2:4, 19; 3:9 as do the subjects of service and labor.

What does Christ hate within the congregations? He writes that he hates "the work of the Nicolaitians." This appears to be a sectarian influence leading the congregation members away from Christian love and truth.

What turns Christ's stomach? What makes him want to vomit? He writes to the angelic presbyter in Laodicea and his congregation that the lukewarm materialistic Christian who feels little spiritual need will be vomited out of his mouth. [Revelation 3:16]

This brief consideration of Christ's apocalyptic letters makes it clear that our Lord is not a passive forgiver of all. If anything it ought to make us aware that he does walk among the congregational lampstands, fully aware of what each individual Christian is doing for good or bad. He is particularly demanding of those men who would be congregation teachers and shepherds. [James 3:1, 2]

Surely all may learn this lesson and hear the words spoken to each of these congregations: *"Let the person with ears listen to what the Spirit says to the congregations!"*

==== END ====

WHAT KIND OF CONGREGATION WILL YOU BE?

Not all congregations or churches are alike. This is one reason why some Christians move around until they find “the church of their choice.” One of the key factors in remaining in a certain congregation is the pastor. Another is the members of the church themselves. However, if you are currently a member of a congregation, what kind of church is it?

What do we mean? Well, if Christ were to judge your church and its pastor what would be his opinion? Or, does Jesus even do such a thing? Perhaps he is content with any pastor and his church no matter their spiritual or moral condition? Perhaps Christ just accepts all just as long as they are known to be Christian?

We do not have to speculate about this. For the Bible contains seven inspired epistles written to seven real congregations of the 1st Century in what is today the country of Turkey. We find these letters in the Bible's last book *Revelation*. What can we learn about individual congregations and their pastors when we read these letters?

In the opening chapter of Revelation our Lord Jesus Christ is described as a Heavenly Overseer who walks among the congregations making his invisible inspections. As he makes his unseen visits he examines the pastor and his congregation. These congregations are likened to lamps whose spiritual light is shed in the community. The presiding minister or elder [presbyter] is compared to a star or angel. As an angel the presiding elder of a church is also something of a messenger who supplies news and information to the whole congregation.

Revelation chapters two and three contain seven letters written to “the angel of the congregation.” Some understand this to mean the presiding officer or presbyter of the congregation. The letters all use the Greek singular “you” indicating the main thrust of the material is directed to the angelic presbyter. In some cases the other members of the congregation are mentioned.

In these seven congregations it is the judgment of Christ himself that only two of these angelic presbyters receive only praise. The other five come in for reproof and rebuke, sometimes in the sternest language. These letters tell us much about the Sender. [For details see the article *What Can We Learn From Your Letters*.] However, let us assume that we were back there almost two thousand years ago as members of these churches. Modern elders could see themselves as each of these angelic presbyters. As we examine these letters briefly we can ask ourselves: What kind of church do I belong to? Am I guilty of Christ's censor? Am I part of the problem or part of the solution to it? How will I respond to Christ's censor and rebuke? Will I repent and come into alignment with my heavenly Lord? What will happen to me if I do? What will happen if I refuse?

With these questions in mind let us take a quick look at each of these congregations and their angelic presbyters. [Revelation 2:1-3:22] Let us imagine that we are members of these seven congregations.

TO THE ANGEL OF EPHESUS WRITE –

The first congregation “angel” is addressed in the singular “you” indicating that this message is directed to him as the presiding elder. After introducing himself as the one who controls the “stars” – as well as walking among the congregations as an invisible visitor – the Sender of this Christian epistle says: “I am aware of your works.” Christ lists these as labor, endurance and intolerance of bad or harmful men. Also this angelic presbyter has tested out pseudo ‘apostles’ and also endured under the burden of Christ's name. Here it sounds as if we have a fine presiding elder in our congregation.

However, the invisible Inspector offers a rebuke. We wonder what is lacking in our presiding elder. Christ says, “*You have abandoned your first love.*” We are shocked to hear this as we thought our church guide to be a fine example of faithful endurance. But, Christ sees the heart and realizes that this man no longer

has that fire that originally burned in his breast. He has fallen from his first zeal for good works. Perhaps we in the congregation have been subtly affected by this? May we also examine ourselves to see if we have lost that first love of ours?

What counsel does our Lord give to this angelic presbyter? Christ tells our "angel" that he ought to think about the past and how far he has fallen from this first love. He should feel regret over this and turn to doing the "first works." It is not his faith that is in question. But rather his "works." No doubt when he first became a Christian his "works" of charity, service to others, and the spreading of the Gospel were one-hundred percent, but now they have become a mere shadow walk. In words and time, yes, there appears to be an enduring and faithful presbyter. But, down deep, where Christ can see, the mere spiritual appearance is not the same. The great flame has become mere flickering coals in danger of growing cold. [Matthew 24:12]

Even though our presiding elder hates some of the things Christ also hates, he needs to follow the instructions of our Invisible Lord. We need to listen carefully. For the Sender of this letter to our congregation concludes with a warning given to all the congregations: "*Let the person with ears listen to what the Pneuma is saying to the congregations.*" Those who do and become victorious will be given the authority "to eat from the Tree of Life that is in the Paradise of the God."

TO THE ANGEL OF SMYRNA WRITE –

Now we are members of the second congregation in Smyrna. Our angelic presbyter has received a letter directly to him. We rejoice to learn that our elder is a spiritually rich man despite his physical afflictions and poverty. We rejoice that our loving and faithful elder does not come in for any rebuke. We knew he was a good man, who though poor and afflicted labored for us in the congregation. We are so grateful he did continue to minister to us despite his difficulties.

We are not surprised that great difficulties lie ahead for all of us in the congregation. For our Lord wrote: "*The Devil is about to throw some of you into prison.*" [Revelation 2:10] We realize this will test all of us for "ten days" as it were. Our Lord writes to us: "*continue to be faithful unto death and [I] will give you the crown of life.*" We do want to be those with ears who listen to what our Lord is telling all the congregations. We know if we do this we will never be harmed by the Second Death. [Revelation 2:11]

TO THE ANGEL IN PERGAMUM WRITE –

We are now members of the third congregation and our angelic presbyter has also received a report from our Lord who walks among us. We are startled to learn that Christ is not the passive, all-forgiving person we assumed him to be. For he introduces himself to our elder as the One who has a long double-edged sword. We are pleased that Christ knows where we live – right in a center of Emperor worship "where the throne of Satan is." We are pleased that he is aware we still claim to be Christians despite recent persecution when our beloved brother Antipas was martyred.

However, we are somewhat shocked when our Lord tells us that he does have something against our angelic presbyter – and likely we other members of the congregation. We know there have been certain elements in the congregation. Some whose teachings have not been in harmony with our Lord. We have heard them speak and teach things that stumble others. We ourselves have been misled to eat foods sacrificed to idols. And we know others who have actually become immoral and nothing was done about it by our elder. There are other sectarian persons in our midst and we should have stood firm for the teachings of the Nazarene, but we compromised.

It frightens us to hear that if we do not repent, our Lord – the One we thought would love us no matter what – says, "*I am coming to you suddenly and then I will war with them by the long sword of my mouth!*" [Revelation 2:16] That certainly moves our angelic presbyter, and we ourselves as members of the

congregation – for we are also partly responsible – to use our ears to listen what our Lord says to the congregations.

We are assured by our Lord that if we do repent -- and shun those who corrupt our congregation – and finally conquer these problems – we will be eternally nourished by our Lord. He promises to remain our Friend as long as we obey his commandments. [John 14:15; 15:14] We will enjoy an everlasting relationship with him in the celestial realms of his Father.

TO THE ANGEL OF THYATIRA WRITE –

Now we are members of the congregation in Thyatira and our angelic presbyter has received a letter. It unsettles us a bit to hear how our Lord introduces himself: *“The One having his eyes like a fiery flame!”* [Revelation 2:18] However, we are pleased to know our elder has works that result from faithful service and endurance. We rejoice that the present activity of our elder is more than his first works.

But with all this good news it really does not surprise us that our pastor has tolerated his immoral wife. Everyone knows she acts the part of the prophetess and teaches others in the congregation. They have been misled by this so-called ‘sister’ to do immoral and idolatrous things. We should have said something – we should have objected – when she introduced lowered moral standards by compromising the teachings of the Nazarene.

It does not actually surprise us that our Lord calls this woman “Jezebel” for we have seen her “egging on” her husband like that ancient evil woman did King Ahab. [2 Kings 9:22] We older ladies in the congregation should have counseled her just as Paul instructed. [Titus 2] Perhaps this problem would not have become so severe.

We tremble with our Lord’s rebuke that if she does not repent he will bring terrible spiritual sicknesses on her and those who got involved with her. He even warns that he will destroy from the congregation any offspring she produced from her immorality. We now realize how true it is that our Lord always examines our deepest motives and inclinations. Nothing escapes those “fiery eyes” of his!

We were relieved that our Lord was not going to over-burden us with even more rebuke. Most of us did not learn of the “deep things of Satan” that Jezebel talked about. We know we must “hold fast” and remain alert until the Lord returns. We will do this by observing the example of our Lord’s own works and this not half-heartedly but completely. We rejoice at the thought that if we conquer we will reign as kings with our Lord. During the Thousand Years we will rule with “a rod of iron” so that evil never take over the whole globe again. How blessed we will be if we let our ears listen to what our Lord says to the congregations.

TO THE ANGEL OF SARDIS WRITE –

Now we find ourselves members of the congregation in Sardis. We are surprised what our Lord has to say about our angelic presbyter. It comes as a shock that our elder is “dead” even though he is well known to be spiritually alive. Perhaps he was just going through the motions in his sermons and duties in the congregation. Have we been affected by such an attitude?

Our Lord has counseled our elder – and this is something we do well to listen to – *“continue to remain awake and fix firmly whatever remains that were about to die.”* We wonder if we also have fallen into something of just a routine in attending meetings and going through the motions in sharing the Gospel with others. If our presiding overseer has not completed his works before God, what of the rest of us? Our Lord has counseled him *“to remember how he first received and heard”* the Gospel. Perhaps we have all slowed down a bit in our faith and affections? Is it not the time to re-evaluate our original dedication to God? We know our Lord is right, and we do, indeed, need to feel regret for the change in our attitude. We

take seriously our Lord's warning that if we do not remain spiritually alert he will come upon us suddenly like a thief. This does not sound good.

It is refreshing to know that our Lord is aware that there are "a few names" in the congregation who have not become defiled and are considered by him to be "worthy." How we truly long to walk with our Lord in his celestial realms as righteous and honorable Saints. The idea of just having our names erased from his Book of Life moves us to do as our Lord directs. O, the very thought of having our names confessed as friends of the Nazarene right in God's presence! Surely, we will also now use these ears of ours to pay better attention to what our Lord says to the congregations.

TO THE ANGEL OF PHILADELPHIA WRITE –

We in the Philadelphia congregation always knew our angelic presbyter was a loving brother who cared for all of us. How we rejoice that our elder has received no rebuke at all from our Lord! Instead, because of his good works over the years – his enduring charity, his affection for all, his zeal for Christ's name – he is going to be privileged with new Gospel opportunities and assignments in our Lord's service. How happy we all are that we followed his Christ-like example and to this day remain a loving and unified little church.

We surely want to follow our elder and continue to "observe the word of our Lord's endurance." He promises to keep us from some terrible future temptation that will test the entire Church of God in Christ. The very thought someone could take our crowns makes us shudder and we are all determined not to rest on our laurels and to pay even more attention to our Lord's teachings.

We rejoice at the very thought of becoming a pillar – a pillar! – in God's celestial Temple. To be recognized as a permanent citizen of the New Jerusalem! To enjoy an entirely new relationship with our Lord as dear and close friends – in heaven! Surely we are all determined to keep our ears open and obey everything the Pneuma speaks to all the congregations.

TO THE ANGEL OF LAODICEA WRITE –

Well, most of us in this congregation were quite taken back to hear the supposed insults to our angelic presbyter! The idea that he is lukewarm toward Christ! We all know he has plenty of works! What a disgusting suggestion that our elder is not hot or cold – what does that mean anyway – for we know our brother is well-off and this is proof of God's blessing on him. Yes, he tells us often how rich he is, but then he deserves his wealth because he is so dedicated to us. When we heard from this letter that the Lord was going to vomit our elder out of his mouth we were quite shocked. What a disgusting thought – vomit! This surely cannot be from our dear and precious Lord who never said such things when he walked the shores of Galilee. He would never speak that way to one of our elders!

To call our presiding elder – what? Destitute? Pitiful? Poor? Not hardly! Blind and naked? How revolting! If the Sender of this letter thinks that of him what must be his attitude toward us? And really, how can any of us "buy" gold or clothing from Christ? The very mention of our elder's nakedness is repulsive. The Lord could never have said such things! And, "eye salve" for his eyes – as though he were blind? That is ridiculous! After all, the Lord loves us and he would never speak in such a manner to us Christians. Reproof? Discipline? These are not the words the Lord uses. The Lord is completely forgiving. His love is unconditional. No matter what we do, or don't do, will affect his love.

And this so-called promise of sharing a meal with us if we – if we, if we, what, open a door to him? What a silly idea. The Lord is in heaven. He cannot eat a meal with us. How could he ever make a dinner for us? We know that no matter what our works are – whether we work harder than others and so have more to show for it materially – the Lord will make us kings to dominate over others just as he rules in heaven with his Father.

“Let the person with ears listen to what the Pneuma is saying to the congregations!” [Revelation 3:22 NSR]

Well, now we are all back in our home congregations here at the beginning of the 3rd Millennium. What kind of congregation do we want to become? Shall we take a closer look at our church or congregation and see whether it might parallel those to whom Christ wrote? When we take a serious spiritual look at ourselves and our local group, do we see ourselves as part of the problem or part of the solution? Are we willing to repent of any failures on our part? What are some questions to think about?

- ?? **Is my love the same as it was in the beginning?**
- ?? **Am I prepared to endure whatever the Devil throws at me?**
- ?? **Do I allow false teachings to influence me?**
- ?? **Do I look the other way when there is immorality in the congregation?**
- ?? **Are my works fully performed before God?**
- ?? **Do I keep the Lord’s word and continue to endure?**
- ?? **Do I keep material concerns in their proper place?**

==== END ====

BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED

There are over 10,000 footnotes in the *Nazarene Commentary 2000*© reference on the Christian Bible. These below are samples of some of these.

HOW DOES MATURITY AID IN UNITY?

Ephesians 4:14 “... so that we may not remain babes, being tossed about by waves and borne around by every wind of teaching ...” [Nazarene Saints Rendering *Literal*]

In giving instructions on how unity could be achieved in the Body of Christ, Paul encouraged that Christian disciples should “*Not remain babes.*” [Compare 1 Corinthians 13:11.] Christian growth continues throughout one’s life, and each year witnesses an ever closer growth in Christ manifest by faith and love. The result is that the mature, grown-up Christian is not “*tossed about by waves.*” The mature Christian is not like a rudderless ship at the mercy of tossing seas. That is, having come to a solid foundation of the “first principles of the doctrine of Christ ... and pressed on to maturity” [Hebrews 6:1] they are no longer “*borne around by every wind of teaching.*” [Or, KJV: every wind of doctrine; TCNT: blown round by every breath of human teaching; WEY: every changing wind of doctrine; KNX: the wind of each new doctrine; NEB: every fresh gust of teaching; BECK: every windy thing that is taught.] An infant can be taught almost anything, but a mature adult may follow reasonable logic founded on the Scriptures. It is a knowledge of the Scriptures that provides a firm anchor so that a “different Jesus,” or, “a different Gospel,” do not unsettle the unity of the Church. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF REVELATION 1:7?

Revelation 1:7 “Behold! ***‘He arrives with clouds’*** [Daniel 7:13] and ***‘every eye will look to him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth beat themselves in grief’***. [Zechariah 12:10 LXX] Yes! Amen!” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

The phrase is straight from Daniel 7:13. Here there is a hymnal praise which may be viewed as the theme verse for the *Apocalypse*. This verse is a compound of two Hebrew Bible verses: Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10 (possibly from *Theodotion's* LXX version; compare John 19:37). Verse 7 closes with an "Amen!" which draws particular attention to it, much as the Nazarene said, '*Amen, amen,*' when introducing an important truth. So some would view Revelation 1:7 as a praise-hymn, not of the future, but the past, as it highlights the death and enthronement of Messiah. It may also serve as a prophetic reference to the *parousia* or Second Coming of Christ who returns as redeemer to deliver his own. This would be in harmony, not with the original fulfillment of Daniel 7:13, but the angel's promise at Acts 1:9-11. [From notes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHO SHOULD CHRISTIANS NOT GREET?

2 John 10 "If anyone approaches you and does not bring this Doctrine, do not receive such into [your] house. Do not say a greeting to such. **2 John 11** For the person who says a greeting to such is sharing with the wicked works of [such persons]." [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

The apostle John pens a warning when he describes a certain type of person: "*If anyone approaches you and does not bring this Doctrine.*" [Or, if you are visited by anyone, and does not bring this teaching.] Some would limit this "doctrine" to just the belief that Jesus did not come in the flesh. It is "Christ's doctrine" John has mentioned in verse 9. It seems fair to conclude John refers to those deceivers and antichrists who were once part of the Nazarene community but have now gone apostate. John says: "*Do not receive such into [your] house.*" [Or, stop welcoming him.] There is a story of John who was on his way to the public baths with some disciples. Upon entering it was learned an apostate was present. John told the others: "Let us get out of here, lest the building collapse." This is a more severe reaction than those who have sinned as ordinary humans. [Compare notes on 2 Thessalonians 3:11-15.] Note how such apostates work their way into households and lead away captives. [2 Timothy 3:5-13] Thus, John says not to even greet this type of person: "*Do not say a greeting to such.*" [Or, welcome him.] It is best to have no communication at all with such antichrists. Let them pass without notice. Romans 16:17 counsels to "avoid" or "shun" such sectarians. [From note in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT IS "LOVE"?

1 Corinthians 13:1 "If I should ever speak in the languages of humans and angels, but do not possess real [divine] love, I have become merely the sound of copper or a clanging cymbal." [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

At 1 Corinthians 13:1 Paul begins his discussion of "love." [Or, KJV: charity.] The word "charity" is closer to the real meaning of AGAPE than most people realize. Both AGAPE and charity are marked by three things: interest, concern, positive help. Though the Greek AGAPE can have negative aspects because one may love for the wrong thing or for wrong reasons. There can actually be a hypocritical love or AGAPE. Paul will begin with 1 Corinthians 13:4 to use the article with AGAPE [HE AGAPE] meaning "the Love." That is a love of a specific sort, thus we use here "real [divine] love" for this is a godly quality. The word "love" [AGAPE] occurs 24 times in all of the Synoptic Gospels and 44

times in John. After the Gospel of John the word “love” occurs most often in his letters to the Corinthians. [24 times] Love occurs in his other letters: Romans, 17; Galatians, 5; Ephesians, 17; Philippians, 4; Colossians, 6; 1 Thessalonians, 8; 2 Thessalonians, 5; 1 Timothy, 8; 2 Timothy, 11; Titus, 6; Philemon, 3; Hebrews, 6. James uses it only twice, Peter 10 times, and Jude 4 times. In John’s three epistles he uses love 46 times. Though some think John uses love more often it is about equally divided between him and Paul. This real [divine] love has been defined by William Barclay as “that which seeks the highest good of another.” Two texts, lacking the word love, best describe it:

1 Corinthians 10:24 – “*Let no one seek just self-concerns, but rather the concerns of others.*” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Philippians 2:4 – “ ... not just looking after your own selfish things, but also those things of others.” [Nazarene Saints Rendering] [From notes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW WILL NON-JEWISH HUMANITY BE JUDGED?

Romans 2:14 “For when non-Jews, though not having the Law, naturally keep the Law, they are a law unto themselves. **Romans 2:15** They demonstrate the Law’s work ‘*written within their hearts*’ [Jeremiah 31:33] -- the combined testimony working between their conscience and their logical thoughts either prosecuting or defending them. **Romans 2:16** According to my good news through Christ Jesus [this is how] it will be in the day The God judges the secret things of all humankind.” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul writes that the non-Jewish world is without the Law of Moses. [Compare notes on Ephesians 2:12. (Psalm 147:20)] However, their divinely implanted conscience produces something of a “natural law.” Paul puts it: “[The non-Jews] *Naturally keep the Law, they are a law unto themselves.*” The non-Jewish nations, including tribes and all peoples, have had their laws, including taboos, whether oral tradition or written, which contain the essential principles of the moral Law of Moses -- theft, murder, adultery. Paul states that these non-Jews “*demonstrate the Law’s work ‘written within their hearts’.*” In their primitive way the non-Jews are a demonstration of what the Prophet Jeremiah meant when he foretold a new covenant with Israel and a law written on hearts and here Paul alludes to Jeremiah 31:33.

How this “universal human conscience” operates is explained by Paul: “*The combined testimony working between their conscience and their logical thoughts.*” Paul explains the mechanism foreseen in Jeremiah 31:33: the conscience and the thought process combine to make inner judgments of the heart. The Greek word for “conscience” is SYNEIDESEOS, or literally ‘with + idea’ (or, knowledge). The English word “conscience” also means ‘with + knowledge’. “Conscience” is a word Paul uses several times and most often in 1 Corinthians chapters 8 and 10. Thus, the conscience of the non-Jew acts something like either the prosecution or defense lawyer. Paul writes, “*either prosecuting or defending them.*” Like a prosecuting and defending attorneys, the conscience and the logical process makes its judgments.

Judgment and punishment are part of Paul’s Gospel. We have been introduced to certain key words associated with his Gospel: judgment, law, punishment. Paul mentions this judgment in the context of both Jews and non-Jews when he continues: “*In the day The God judges the secret things of all humankind.*” We may infer from the above that in the judgment (Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:12-14) the non-Jews will be judged according to the implanted conscience and the Jews by their own Law. (Luke 8:17; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Peter 4:5) All mankind will rise in the judgment to receive their payment for what they have done in their lives. (See notes on Matthew 12:36, 37 and Hebrews 9:27) This becomes a major theme in Paul’s Gospel and is discussed in further chapters. Judgment Day is among the Bible’s prime subjects. Research on the words judge and judgment in a concordance or in *Nazarene Commentary* is an important study. Paul lists judgment among the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ at Hebrews

6:2. Though some would place salvation as the theme of the Bible, judgment must come first before salvation can occur. [From notes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT KIND OF THINKING MAY DEFILE A CHRISTIAN?

Matthew 15:18 *“But the words pouring out of the mouth originate from the heart. Those are the things which defile a person. Matthew 15:19 For it is from the heart these originate: evil dialogue, murders, adulteries, fornications, thieveries, perjuries and slander, abusive speech.”* **Matthew 15:20** *“These are the things defiling a person.”* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

When Jesus was condemning the Jews for the traditional rituals he explained that the real things that defile a person *“originate from the heart.”* [NEB: has its origins in the heart; PME: comes from his heart and mind.] The disciple of the Nazarene James says something similar when he writes that sin begins in the mind: *“Rather, everyone is tempted by their own desire, being drawn away and allured. Then, the desire having conceived gives birth to sin, and this sin, when it reaches full growth, brings forth death.”* [James 1:14, 15 NSR] Thus, Christ lists some of the things originating in the heart that may defile a person. [Mark 7:20, 21 adds several characteristics: *“injurious reasonings issue forth: fornications, thieveries, murders, adulteries, covetings, acts of wickedness, deceit, loose conduct, an envious eye, blasphemy, haughtiness, unreasonableness.”* (NWT)]

In Matthew Jesus lists six of these things that originate in the heart. He calls these generally, *“Evil dialogue.”* [The Greek is *dialogismoi poneroi*. Or, KJV: evil thoughts; KNX: wicked designs.] These “designs” include: 1 *Adulteries* [Or, BAS: broken faith between the married.]; 2 *Fornications* [The Greek is *porneiai* and is drawn from “prostitution.” Or, MOF: sexual vice; GDSP: immorality; BAS: unclean desires of the flesh.]; 3 *Thieveries* [MOF: stealing]; 4, 5 *Perjuries and slander* [Or, KJV: false witness; NWT: false testimonies.]; and, 6 *Abusive speech* [The Greek is *blasphemiai*. Or, KJV: blasphemies; ASV: railings; RHM: profane speaking; WEY: slander.] For more details on the full list in Matthew and Mark see the book *Nazarene Principles* in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT KIND OF ‘WISDOM’ SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

James 1:5 “However, if any of you lacks wisdom, let them ask God who gives to everyone generously and without any reproach, and it will be given to them.” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

James writes about the need to possess wisdom if one is to endure a variety of trials or tests. He says, *“If any of you lacks wisdom.”* [Or, RHM: coming short of wisdom; GDSP: deficient in.] Wisdom is the right use of knowledge; knowing what right action to take. No human is possessed of perfect wisdom. We all lack knowledge of how to act on it in different occasion and circumstances. [Proverbs 2:3; compare notes on Romans 8:26] The request here is for the wisdom needed to endure various trials -- the understanding to make right decisions that influence endurance. The spirit of this is right out of the Nazarene’s Mountain Teachings and elsewhere when Jesus stressed persistence and faith in prayer. Consider Matthew 7:7, *“Keep on asking.”* Mark 11:24, *“Everything you ask for in pray, have faith.”* Luke 18:1, *“[Jesus taught them] the necessity to always continue to pray and never give up.”* The Proverbs encourage this search for wisdom. [Proverbs 2:4, *“Keep seeking wisdom.”*]

James assures: *“Let them ask God who gives to everyone generously.”* The thought is straight out of the Nazarene himself. [See notes on Mark 11:24 and 1 John 3:22.] James says this giving will be, *“without any reproach.”* [See notes on Matthew 7:11.] God never accuses for a lack of wisdom if one is repentant and willing to change in order to conform to His will. Thus, *“it will be given to them.”* [From note in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW MANY GODS ARE IN JOHN 1:18?

John 1:18 “No one has ever seen God -- the only-begotten god, favored by the Father, explains Him.” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

John writes about two different gods in John 1:18. The first is the Invisible God whom no one has ever seen. That is a statement which agrees with Exodus 33:20: “*For no one may see my face and remain alive.*” [Compare also John 6:46; 1 John 4:12.] The other God is designated by John as “the only-begotten god.” [Or, KJV: the only begotten Son; MON: God, only begotten; MOF: the divine One, the only Son.] Most modern versions agree THEOS should occur here. There are two Gods in the verse: the one no one as ever seen (the Father), and the “only-begotten god.” This is similar to verse 1 which also has two gods: “The God” of phrase b and “a god” of phrase c. Two Gods is shown in Psalm 45:6, 7 and Hebrews 1:8, 9. [Deuteronomy 10:17] The Greek MONOGENES (mono/only) + genes) infers the Son is “monogenetic,” [see an English dictionary] that is, unique and one of a kind, the only one genetically related to the Father. The whole idea echoes Proverbs 8:22-30. This latter “God” serves as the Word or Spokesman for the Invisible God and thus “explains” Him, as John puts it. The Greek is EXEGESATO from which comes “exegete” or “exegesis,” a teacher, or one who explains a subject, particularly theological. This is the function of the Word. [From notes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

DID PAUL OBSERVE THE LAW OF MOSES?

Acts 21:23 “Therefore, we want you to do as we direct. We have here four men who are under a vow.
Acts 21:24 Take these along with you, then, and cleanse yourself and them, paying all their expenses, and afterward they may shave their heads. Then all will realize that those things they have heard concerning you are of no concern. But rather you yourself walk orderly and observe the Law [of Moses].” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Many thousands of the first Christians were Jews who had formerly observed the Law of Moses. Elements within the Church leadership presented a strong influence to continue to observe the Law of Moses. The word had spread that claimed Paul had rejected Moses and the Law and was telling new converts that it was not necessary to circumcise their male children. James, the presiding officer of Christian elders and a member of what was called the Circumcision Class, order Paul in these word: “*We want you to do as we direct.*” [Or, TCN: do what we are going to suggest.] Whether this is only a suggestion or a direct order is unclear, probably the latter. Paul will obey this order, or suggestion, as he does not sin in what he is about to do. By considering the details it is clear much as involved in the observance of the laws involved.

James explains: “*We have here four men who are under a vow.*” That is four Jewish men who have either made a particular vow or were what the Law called the Nazirite, like Samson. Such could not cut their hair, drink wine, or touch a dead relative, even a mother until they had fulfilled their vow. [For details see Numbers 6.] At the end of the fulfillment of this vow there was a period of one week of purification. Three animals must then be sacrificed: two rams and a lamb, as well as other offerings. Then he must shave his head. The sacrifice itself must be handled in a precise way according to the Law requiring a Hebrew priest and an altar of sacrifice. After the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD it would be impossible to fulfill or observe this law.

James commands Paul: *“Take these along with you, then, and cleanse yourself and them.”* James is directing for Paul to observe the requirements of Numbers 6 to placate certain Jewish Christians. [Acts 15:1, 2] Also Paul was to, *“Pay all their expenses.”* This would have required the purchase of 12 farm animals, a considerable expense. James draws the conclusion: *“Those things they have heard concerning you are of no concern.”* [Or, TCN: no truth in the things they have been told about you; LAM: what has been said against you is false; BAS: there is no basis for the reports.] Judging from Galatians 2:4, 12 it seems clear who has started this “rumor” which is based in some fact. Later Paul will write in almost all of his letters against this Judaizing influence within the Church. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD the Jews themselves will desist from the observance of the majority of the Law of Moses having no priesthood or altar on which to make sacrifices. One view here is that Paul knows the Law is not sin so he in no way sins by going through with this directive. In the process he does what he has written: “to Jews I became a Jew that I might win Jews.” [1 Corinthians 9:20]

Paul is patient with the misunderstandings of the Jewish Christians and the relationship of the Christian Jew or non-Jew to the Law will be cleared up within a decade. Paul has already written that in the Church, *“there is neither Jew or Greek.”* [Galatians 3:28, 29; compare Romans 2:28, 29; 9:6] James assumes: *“You yourself walk orderly and observe the Law [of Moses].”* Because James, a sympathizer for the Law of Moses, claims this does not make it so. For Paul will write later as mentioned above that as a Jew he is *“dead to the Law.”* [Romans 7:4] Had he said these things on this occasion it would have caused a rift or schism beyond imagining. [From notes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT TWO ATTRIBUTES OUGHT TO CHARACTERIZE A DISCIPLE OF THE NAZARENE?

1 Corinthians 13:4 *“Real [divine] love is tolerant and kind.”* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul describes love as “tolerant.” Or, suffers long, long-suffering, patient. [1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Peter 3:15] The most difficult test is to tolerate the intolerable. To be patient with the impatient. The Greek MACRO [= long] THYMEI [= desire; feeling] is variously rendered: MOF: patient; RHM: gracious; PHM: slow to loose patience; UBS Int: suffers long. The word occurs about two dozen times. God possesses the attribute. (Romans 2:4; 9:22 1 Timothy 1:16) It is a fruit of the spirit. (Galatians 5:22) It is proof of an outstanding minister or servant. (2 Corinthians 6:6; 2 Timothy 3:10. It contributes to unity. (Ephesians 4:2) It is reflected in joy. (Colossians 1:11) A Christian should show it toward everyone. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

Paul also describe this love as “kind.” Or, gracious; PME: looks for a way to be constructive. When it doubt, love does the kind thing. Kindness is a fruitage of the Pneuma. [Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12] Kindness is well reflected in the parable of the Good Samaritan. [Luke 10:30ff] “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number. But they offer

sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s way.” (Victor Frankl (1905-1997), Psychiatrist and writer)

The Greek KHRESTEETAI and most use the English "kind." The Middle English root KYNDE means sympathetic, friendly, gentle, tender-hearted, generous. The Greek is a rare word in the Christian Bible, occurring only here in 1 Corinthians 13:4b. Related forms occur about 70 times. Christ’s yoke is kind. (Matthew 11:30) God is kind even toward the unthankful and wicked and thus kindness and mercy are the path to godly perfection. (Luke 6:35; Matthew 5:45) Kindness is often associated with hospitality and giving. (Acts 26:2, 30; 2 Corinthians 8:6, 7, 9) God is characterized by kindness. (Romans 2:4; Titus 3:4; 1 Peter 2:3) Paul elsewhere counsels kindness. (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12) Kindness is a fruit of the spirit. (Galatians 5:22) Of course, kindness is related to "grace" which is really undeserved kindness. So, kindness, or being kind, would be characterized by hospitality, charity, giving, mercy, and good manners, or gentility (a word rooted in the old English related to KYNDE). Someone has said, "When in doubt about what to do to another -- do the kind thing." Our Christianity should be characterized by our kindness, particularly toward even our enemies, those unthankful, or even wicked. Only then can spiritual perfection be attained. (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:30-36) [From notes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

IN WHAT HOPE DO CHRISTIANS REJOICE?

Romans 12:12a *Always rejoice in the hope.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Romans 12:12a reads in the King James Version: *“rejoicing in hope.”* The Greek has the article and thus it is “the hope.” Paul had earlier described the condition of the human creation as, *“The (human) creation groans together and travails in pain together.”* (Romans 8:22 NSR) He continues to show that despite this groaning pain there is a sustaining hope: *“We groan eagerly awaiting the adoption (as children), the release by ransom of our Body. For to this hope we were saved. But, hope seen is no longer hope, for why hope for what you can see. But if we hope for the unseen we keep waiting by enduring.”* (Romans 8:23-25 NSR)

This hope is “one” and unique to the Body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:4) It is The Hope. It is the hope of “partaking in the heavenly calling.” (Hebrews 3:1) This “hope” has two premier elements. The first is described by 1 John 3:2, *“Now we are children of God but when (the Son) is made visible we shall see him as he really is.”* [NSR] What a joyous part of our hope, seeing our Lord! But, if possible, there is another feature of the hope even more transcendental and it is recorded at Revelation 22:3, 4: *“His slaves will serve Him reverently and they will see His face.”* [NSR] The power of this “one hope” -- one day meeting both the Celestial Christ and his Father, God Almighty -- is beyond description. Such a hope, renewed daily in prayer and Scriptural meditations, will be characterized in our joy. When we find ourselves overcome by “the groaning pain of this human creation” we will prayerfully reflect on that “one hope” of viewing the Father and the Son within the golden walls of the Celestial New Jerusalem. (Revelation chapters 19, 22)

The Bible is a Book of joy and hope. The word groups “joy” and “happy” occur 650 times in one translation. These words appear most often in the Psalms (118 times) and so meditating on these will build the joy of this God-given hope. In the Christian Bible Luke has been called “the theologian of joy” with over 50 occurrences in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. The Bible is also a book of “hope” with this word occurring 240 times. By regularly reading God’s Word and prayerfully meditating on it, hope can be sustained and will manifest itself in a happy and joyful disposition. As in all matters of life, when things are particularly difficult, this joy may reside within instead of revealing itself by the countenance. But, it will be helpful and healthy to keep this hope alive like a burning coal which keeps the inner self warm while the outside may shiver in the cold. Ask: When I consider everything else what is my grandest hope? Did something material come to mind? If I was to make a list of those things which bring me the greatest joy what would be at the top? [From the footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW ARE ALL GENUINE DISCIPLES JOINED TOGETHER?

Ephesians 2:21 ... in whom all the building, jointed together, is growing into a sacred, lordly Divine Habitat, Ephesians 2:22 in whom you also are being built up together into a spiritual dwelling place of The God. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

The stones in this spiritual Temple have been “jointed together.” The image is of finely chiseled stones carefully made to fit into the next. The Saints are compared to “living stones” by Peter. (Read 1 Peter 2:4-10; compare 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19. Note 1 Kings 5:17; 7:9.) The stones in the quarry were so well chiseled that no improvements needed to be made when ‘jointed together’ in Solomon’s temple. 1 Kings 6:7 says, “As for the house, while it was being built, it was of quarry stone already completed that it was built; and as for hammers and axes or any tools of iron, they were not heard in the house while it was being built.” The test in the quarry is so perfect each Christian fits flawlessly into the celestial Temple. [Compare Colossians 2:19.] This hammering and chiseling involves a process of growth personally and as a Body. [Compare notes at Ephesians 4:13 and Ephesians 4:16.] [From the footnotes in Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

HOW DO SOME RELIGIOUS TEACHERS CONTROL THEIR FLOCK?

2 Corinthians 11:19 For you, as sensible persons, gladly tolerate those who are senseless. 2 Corinthians 11:20 You [Corinthians] tolerate anyone who tries to enslave you, anyone who devours you, anyone who takes from you, anyone who exalts himself, anyone who strikes you in the face. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul will list five characteristics of the minister of Satan posing as a church representative, giving all the appearance of an angel of light or a minister of righteousness. [2 Corinthians 11:14, 15] First, some, even today, enslave their membership by organizational control. The Christian Judaizers would impose more and more rules and regulations from the Law of Moses to “enslave” the Corinthians. [Note the same language at Galatians 2:4; 4:9; 5:1.] Second, these attempt to “devour” the flock. [Or, plunders, prey upon, spends your money.] One characteristic consistent with most of these ministers of Satan is – money. [1 Timothy 6:5] Third, these satanic ministers are takers and not givers. [Or, TCN: gets you into his power; KNX: vaunt their power over you; PME: if a man takes away your liberty, spends your money, takes advantage of you.] Any minister who attempts to control the lives of the flock, and who expects to live in luxury at the expense of the sheep, is a minister of Satan. Notice his wrist-watch, his car, his home, his clothing, his life-style – and you may find that lovely “angel of light.” Third, the satanic minister exalts himself. [Or, TCN: puts on airs of superiority; PME: puts on airs.] A minister of Satan can be no different than the one who sent him – filled with arrogance and pride. [Compare 1 Timothy 3:6.] Fifth, the satanic ministers “do not treat the flock with tenderness.” [Acts 20:29, 30] There is more than one way to do this: verbal accusations made in public from the pulpit. Satan’s ministers abuse the flock. [From footnotes in Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

HOW DID THE APOSTLES EXPECT JESUS TO RETURN?

Acts 1:11 [The angels] said to the apostles: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand watching toward the sky? This same Jesus, who is departing from you into the

sky, will return in the same manner as you watched him ascend into the sky.”

[Nazarene Saints Rendering MM©]

The apostles seem to wonder what is happening. If the apostles had understood Daniel 7:13 at this moment they would have understood: *“In my night visions I beheld someone similar to a human being arriving on the clouds of heaven.”* [NSR] This is the Risen Lord now in a spirit-like body. [1 Corinthians 15:40-50; 1 Peter 3:18] The former, fleshly body sacrificed on the Tree, has been accepted by God and used as a sin-offering. [Compare the notes on Hebrews 13:11, 12.] “This Jesus” is the one who will return at his Parousia. [John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17] The Hebrew and Greek for “heaven” may be used of the atmosphere or Sky. [Note Genesis 1:8, 20; Revelation 14:6] How did “this Jesus” depart? It was visibly, until a cloud caught him from beneath out of the sight of the apostles. If this was like a film rewind backward, “this Jesus” would be seen visibly coming on the clouds, and so Jesus foretold. [Matthew 24:30, 31] In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Christ is in the “air.” In Revelation 11:12, 13 the raptured Saints are seen by their enemies as they ascend in clouds. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

CAN ANY CHRISTIANS KNOW THE TIME OF CHRIST’S RETURN?

Acts 1:7 However, Jesus answered them: ***“It is not for you [apostles] to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed within His own authority.”*** [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

The apostles had one question to ask before Jesus left: “Was he going to restore the Davidic kingdom to Israel now?” About a week before Jesus had already answered a similar question. He had told them: ***“Regarding that day or that hour, no one knows – not the angels, nor the Son, but only the Father. So, be on the lookout and remain awake, for you do not know when the appointed time is.”*** [Mark 13:32, 33 NSR] Here in Acts 1:7 Jesus says something similar but uses the phrase “times and seasons.” [Or, KIT: times and appointed times; WMS: times and dates; MOF: periods of time; NAS: times and epochs.] The Nazarene’s language rules out even knowing the “season.” And, certainly it rules out computing some “appointed times” and arriving at some chronological date for his Return. Jesus had clearly told his apostles that no one could know the time of his Return. [Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32] The Nazarene warned that any who preached, *“the time is at hand,”* were not to be followed. [Luke 21:8] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

TO WHOM WOULD THE APOSTLES PREACH?

Acts 1:8 ***“You [apostles] will be my witnesses throughout Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*** [Nazarene Saints Rendering MM©]

There are three divisions here: Judea, Samaria, and the non-Jewish world. The Nazarene told Peter he would give to him the “keys of the kingdom” and in the case of

the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles, it is Peter who initiates the Gospel with these three groups. [Acts 8:14; 10:24] Daniel 9:25-27 suggests that the “Jews first” [Romans 1:16] would have a seven year period of special grace during which the Gospel was presented solely to them. [Matthew 10:6; 15:24] This period covered 29-36 AD, following which the non-Jews were then given the invitation. [Compare notes on Matthew 22:1-14.] It is thought by some that many of the apostles departed Jerusalem before the year 66 and went to distant lands, including England and India. Peter himself writes from Babylon. [1 Peter 5:13] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW MANY TONGUES DID THE APOSTLES SPEAK?

“So how are we all hearing in our own native languages? Parthians, Medes and Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, those from Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egyptians, and those from Cyrene in Libya, visitors from Rome [both Hebrews and Jewish converts], Cretans and Arabs – all of us in our own languages hear them in other languages the mighty acts of the God.” [Acts 2:8-11 Nazarene Saints Rendering MM©]

The pious Jews from “every nation under heaven” heard these twelve men speaking in their own languages about the magnificent things of God. By examining each of the language groups it can be seen the great distances these men traveled. Thus, later after their baptism and they returned home, we can see thousands of paths leading to every part of the Roman world. Parthians came from south east of the Caspian Sea including as far as India. Christianity would develop in the world of the Persia religion. Medes and Elamites from the Iran Plateau were also from a Persian background. Elam was southeast of Mesopotamia, also called Khuzestan in southwest Iran. Mesopotamia is something of another name for Babylon, including present day Iraq. Thus, these peoples, though likely also speaking Hebrew and Greek, generally spoke a related Persia language. [Aramaic] Judea would indicate that one of the apostles was speaking Hebrew. Cappadocians were from what is today Turkey and Armenia. Pontus was the area around the Black Sea. Asia in the Christian Bible does not mean China, but Asia Minor which included such places as Galatia. Phrygia was also part of Asia Minor. Pamphylia was also part of Asia Minor. All these above places were north of Israel reaching as far as Turkey and India. Most spoke either Persian, Greek, or Latin. Now the list goes south to North Africa where there were large populations of Jews in Egypt and Libya. Then northwest to Rome, the island of Crete; and back to the southwest in Arabia. Thus, like seed-bearing birds, these first Christians carried the Gospel to the farthest reaches of the Roman Empire. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT WARNING DID PAUL GIVE ABOUT PHILOSOPHIES?

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. [Revised Standard Version]

Paul warns against being misled by Greek philosophy. The word PHILO-SOPHIAS [love+wisdom] is also rendered: MOF: theosophy; PME: intellectualism; NEB: delusive speculations. Having alluded to Aristotle above, Paul means Greek philosophy in particular. [1 Corinthians 2:13]. Paul also calls this philosophy: empty deceit, hollow sham, idle fancies, make-believe, empty fantasies, high-sounding nonsense, delusive speculations, empty seduction. [Ephesians 4:14, 15; 5:6] Most inspired epistles warn of the coming of false teachers just as the Nazarene foretold. [Matthew 24:4, 24; compare 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff; 2 Peter 2:1ff; 1 John 4:1ff; and, the letter of Jude] The modern Church in the 3rd Millennium is filled with such persons who continue to “twist the Scriptures.” [2 Peter 3:16] There are thousands on the World Wide Web.

Paul also mentions “human tradition” or “the tradition of men.” Such echoes Matthew 15:9 and the corrupted Jewish doctrines. Such “traditions of men” or man-made doctrine can result in vain worship. [Isaiah 29:13] From the Egyptians, the Greeks developed such doctrines as hell-fire, soul immortality, and the Trinity – none of which are taught in the Bible.

Paul lastly identifies “the elemental spirits of the universe” and such language may confuse a modern reader. The phrase is also rendered: KJV: rudiments of the world; RHM: first principles of the world; GDS: material ways of looking at things; NOR: he may set forth some human tradition, or some theory about the nature of the universe. The phrase “elemental spirits” is from the Greek **STOICHEIA** [Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4747] and literally “elementary things.” This is also an allusion to the Stoic philosophers. [Compare Acts 17:18] The Stoics believed matter and force were the elementary principles of a wholly material world, without a personal God. They believed the soul was the result of an impersonal deity. They were naturalists who sought happiness as the highest virtue. Ultimately their souls would be reabsorbed by the universal Soul or be destroyed with the Universe. They rejected the idea of a resurrection. One does not have to think long before identifying similar thinking in the modern world – a mixture of Darwin and Sartre and evolutionary existentialism. One also sees modern attempts to mix Hinduism [and Buddhism] in a Taoist philosophy of the Universe.

Paul writes that these were “not according to Christ.” A disciple of Christ is a learner of Jesus Christ, their master and teacher. There is a serious danger that modern disciples may spend more time on the doctrines of men rather than the teachings of Jesus. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

ABOUT WHAT STRENGTH DID PAUL SPEAK?

Philippians 4:13 For I continue to have strength for everything by the One empowering me. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

This verse reads in the King James Version: "I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me." This text has been much misapplied to other matters, but one can see Paul has in mind the strength he needs to both have a lack and an abundance. The previous verses read: "*I know how to be in humble circumstances, as well as how to have more than enough. In every situation and in all circumstances I have been initiated into the secrets of how to be satisfied with [more than enough] food and how to be hungry, how to abound and how to lack.*" [NSR] It is doubtful many Christians have ever asked God's strength when they had a surplus. Others may blame God if they have to go without for awhile; or, wonder where they have lost God's pleasure. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

IN WHAT MANNER DID PHILEMON OWE PAUL?

PHILEMON 18 If he has wronged you, or owes you, put this to my account. PHILEMON 19 I, Paul, writing in my own hand, will repay you, though I will not mention you yourself owe me. PHILEMON 20 Yes, brother, let me have this fleshly profit from you, to refresh my inner being united in Christ. [Nazarene Saints Rendering MM©]

It is likely Philemon, in "sharing his faith" mentioned above, showed charity to Paul. Paul is to use appealing language to suggest Philemon is much more indebted to him. Paul, a poor prisoner, assures Philemon he will cover any debts accrued because of Onesimus. [On personal loans compare the Nazarene at Luke 6:30-35.] Likely Paul was instrumental in introducing Christ to Philemon. By such Paul such Philemon really owes him. Paul appeals to a well-off Christian master to release his slave to serve in the place of Philemon, so that the zealous Christian missionary may find some refreshment while imprisoned. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

DID EARLY CHRISTIANS PREACH DOOR TO DOOR?

Acts 5:42 And so every day in the Temple area, as well as in private homes, they did not stop teaching and preaching Christ Jesus. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

The Christian historian Luke records the zeal of the early Christians to spread the Good News of Messiah's coming and resurrection. Some versions like NWT and KNX state they preached "from house to house." Other versions say KJV: in every house; ASV: at home; TCN: in private houses. The Greek KAT' OIKON is claimed by some to mean the apostles preached from door to door. The only occurrence of the actual phrase "from house to house" is at Luke 10:7 where Jesus tell his apostles not to do it: "**Do not go from house to house.**" The Greek here is EX [from] OIKIAS [house] EIS [unto] OIKIAN [house]. That KAT' OIKON means "in private homes" is shown by Acts 2:46 where the same Greek phrase occurs regarding the taking of meals. It is unlikely the early

Christians went from door to door getting their meals. The apostles set the example of tirelessly preaching and teaching about the Messiah in both public and private places. Thus, the more than 8,000 men [and unnumbered women] had the apostolic role model. With such a concentrated teaching program these thousands of people journeyed back to their homelands throughout the Roman world fully trained as disciple-makers. [Matthew 28:19; 2 Timothy 2:2] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT FAITH DID THE EARLY CHRISTIANS SHOW?

Acts 4:34 For there was no one needy among them, because anyone who owned lands or houses sold them, and they continued bringing the value of the things they sold, Acts 4:35 placing them before the feet of the apostles. The apostles then distributed to each person as they had need. [Nazarene Saints Rendering 2000©]

When the early Church got started Luke records that *“there was no one needy among them.”* The later disunity of the Church, in fulfillment of the Nazarene and Paul, saw this pristine society change. Not only did the Church drift away from the fundamental doctrines, it also became more and more materialistic – and capitalistic. Over two decades later Paul still argues for the original attitude of *“sharing according to needs.”* [See notes on Romans 12:8, 13 and Philippians 4:15.] The more apostate the Church became the less it was a true commune of Nazarene believers. The modern Church – often very wealthy no matter which religious organization one examines – have a hierarchy living much better than the average Christian. Virtually none of the modern religious movements can state: *“there was no one needy among them.”*

This took enormous faith, to trust in God’s provision, to even chose poverty, so that others may benefit. The modern craving for economic security may betray a weak faith. The Nazarene had specifically commanded his “little flock” to ***“sell your belongings and give charity [to the poor].”*** [Luke 12:32, 33] Any who claim to be part of such a “little flock” are pseudo-anointed if they do not abide by this command. They are no longer “friends” of the Nazarene if they do not follow his commands. [John 14:15] It is the self-professed “rich” that the Apocalyptic Lord promises to ***“vomit out of my mouth.”*** [Revelation 3:16] Paul instructs Timothy to “order” the rich to become *“liberal and willing to share.”* [1 Timothy 6:17-19] It should be kept in mind that in Jesus’ teachings the “rich” are those with a surplus, and the poor are those who must depend on others for necessities of life. [Luke 21:1-4] Many of these would have been disciples permanently living in Jerusalem or nearby. It should be kept in mind that Jerusalem had only about three decades before it was completely destroyed with one million deaths. Anyone who had property then lost it in the conflagration of 70 AD. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WERE THE FIRST CHRISTIANS COMMUNISTS?

Acts 2:44 And all those believing were gathered at the same place and they had everything in common. Acts 2:45 They would sell their possessions and went to distributing the money to everyone as each had a need. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

The historian Luke records the communal nature of the first Christians. He says, *“they had everything in common.”* Some render this: GDS: shared everything; BER: had everything jointly; RIE: they lived as a community and shared everything. The Greek is again **COINA** as above. The word is the source in English for “community,” “communal,”

and “communism.” At least here, at this moment, the Church is communistic, as are all small tribal peoples. Jesus had instructed his apostles to sell all and give to charity to the poor. [Luke 12:32, 33] Paul encourages an “equalization.” [2 Corinthians 8:14] Though the Church was not purely communistic, the rich were given “orders” to remember to share and be liberal. [1 Timothy 6:17-19] Some Christian groups to this day chose to operate as a communal society. It is worthy of note that it has been Jews in modern history who were the origin of communism in Europe.

Luke writes: *“They would sell their possessions and went to distributing the money.”* Exactly as Jesus instructed his apostles. [Luke 12:32, 33] This may be one of the reasons that the Saints in Jerusalem were poor. [Compare notes on Hebrews 10:34; 13:2, 16. (Romans 15:25-31; 1 Corinthians 16:3)] The world owes it to the Jewish community in Jerusalem and their charity for the bloom of Christianity. The Christians shared with *“everyone as each had a need.”* [Compare notes on Romans 12:8, 13.] It is a sad statement on the corruption of western capitalism that the vast bulk of modern Christianity no longer reflects this self-sacrificial giving. This may come back to haunt millions of Christians. [Matthew 25:31-46] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

DOES DEATH CANCEL SIN?

Romans 6:7 For sin is no longer credited against those who have died. [Nazarene Saints Rendering 2000©]

Some quote this verse from the King James Version to prove all that die are cleared of their debt of sin: *“He that is dead is freed from sin.”* Or, as the New World Translation has it: *“For he who has died has been acquitted from [his] sin.”* Some believe this should read in such a manner that a person who has died has paid the debt of sin and thus has been justified or acquitted from sin. This suggests that the most vile and ungodly persons, like Adolph Hitler, would have his debt of sin canceled by his suicide. However, both in Romans chapters 2 and 14 Paul argues that each dead person must rise to their judgment based on their past conduct. Death is the result of sin. [Romans 3:23; 5:12] Death does not cancel the responsibility for sin. [Matthew 12:35-37] [Research the word judgment for more details.] Paul writes elsewhere that all die and then are judged. (Hebrews 9:26; 2 Corinthians 5:10) The point in Romans 6:7 seems to be: the dead no longer sin, and it is an analogy of the righteous life the Saint should live. This is harmony with the context of Paul’s argument. Thus, Philips Modern English version reads: *“For a dead man can safely be said to be immune to the power of sin.”* [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT “DAYS” DID PETER MEAN?

2 Peter 3:3 For you know this first that during the end of the days there will come scoffers making mockery in accordance with their own desires. [Nazarene Saints Rendering 2000©]

The Greek for *“during the end of the days”* is ESCHATON TON HEMERON. [Compare 2 Timothy 3:1, ESCHATAIS HEMERAIS; Hebrews 1:2, ESCHATOU TON HEMERON; Acts 2:17, ESCHATAIS HEMERAIS.] The KJV renders this phrase: *“in the last days.”* Many will make this something of a prophecy about a future moment. Research the phrase last days which occurs about 6 times in the Christian Bible. Note whether they refer to those contemporary times or some future period. Note also

Jesus never uses the phrase “last days” nor does it ever occur in the Book of Revelation. Jude 18 actually alludes to Peter’s words here and applies them to their time period in the first century. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

DID PAUL BELIEVE THE PAROUSIA WAS IMMINENT?

2 Thessalonians 2:1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, 2 Thessalonians 2:2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. [Revised Standard Version]

Paul begins chapter two with the words in Greek: TES [the] PAROUSIAS [presence] TOU [of the] KYRIOU [Lord] HEMON [our] and means literally, “*the presence of our Lord.*” It is likely this subject resulted from two things: a) the previous letter; and, b) something said during the previous visit. It seems this is a reference to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, “*to meet the Lord in the air ... and thus we shall always be with the Lord.*” In his previous letter Paul has mentioned both the Parousia and the Gathering. (Compare Matthew 24:31; Matthew 25:31; see notes on Matthew 24:31 and Matthew 25:31) Consider the Nazarene’s grand promise at John 14:1, 2. It seems reasonable that this Parousia is the same as the Appearing or Revelation of 2 Thessalonians 1:7. [Compare Luke 17:30 (revelation) and Luke 17:34, 35 (taken along).] Some misunderstanding, or someone’s misinterpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, has led to a misplaced excitement in the church. Likely, judging from what follows, Paul’s phrase “we the living” was either misunderstood or twisted, implying the imminent Return of Christ and the resurrection. Though Paul may mean the epistle 1 Thessalonians and a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of it, it seems possible they have also received a letter from someone else. This letter may have claimed to have heard from Paul, or represents what Paul says, giving the impression “the Day of the Lord has come” and the Parousia and resurrection were near -- in their life-time. Paul could not have violated the Lord’s warning at Luke 21:8. The suggestion is that they misunderstood Paul or were deceived by gossip or another inspiration that the PAROUSIA had come or was near. If Paul understood the Parousia was imminent he might well have so indicated. Jesus had also cleared up any thought the Day was imminent at Luke 19:11, 12. [Compare also the “after a long time” at Matthew 25:19.] To this day at the beginning of the 3^d Millennium Christians must be on guard against false prophets. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

DOES “FIRSTBORN” MEAN “FIRST-CREATED”?

Though some read Colossians 1:15 and understand that the Son is the “firstborn” [PROTOTOKOS] of all God’s creatures, others – through a Trinitarian filter – understand this to mean the Son is actually the first-birther, or the Creator himself. Here we wish to provide a few concluding thoughts: some early church scholars of the 1st and 2nd Centuries understood “firstborn” to mean “first-created.” It seems that the first appearance of the Greek PROTO-KTISTOS [first+created; created+before] in Hellenist literature from the time of Homer is in the writings of the 1st Century Christian, Clement. In his work *Stromata* Clement calls Christ “firstcreated” [TON PROTOKTISTON]. He also composes the line [alluding to Proverbs 8:22]: TES SOPHIAS TES PROTOKTISTOU TO THEO. [= “*Wisdom that was the first created of God.*”]

One scholar comments on this: “Clement repeatedly identifies the Word [editor John 1:1] with the Wisdom of God [editor Proverbs 8:22], and yet he refers to Wisdom as the first-created; while in one passage he attached the epithet ‘first-created,’ and in another ‘first-begotten,’ to the Word. ... At a later date a sharp distinction was drawn between ‘first-created’ and ‘first-born’ or ‘first-begotten,’ but no such distinction was drawn in the time of Clement, who with the Septuagint rendering of a passage in Proverbs [8:22] before him could have had no misgiving as to the use of these terms. ... Clement makes a sharp distinction between the Son and the Word who was begotten or created before the rest of creation and the alone Unbegotten God and Father.” [*Clement of Alexandria*, John Patrick (1914)]

More than a century later this view had no changed. Compare the words of Justin Martyr in *Dialogue With Trypho*: "But this Offspring which was truly brought forth from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with him; even as the Scripture [at Proverbs 8:22-31] by Solomon has made clear that he whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten AS A Beginning BEFORE all His creatures and as Offspring of God. ... We [Christians] know [Christ] to be the first-begotten of God, and to be before all creatures. ... He is the Son of God and since we call him the Son, we have understood that he proceeded before all creatures from the Father by His power and will." Thus, Willis B. Shotwell in *The Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr* concludes: "The language here is such that it cannot be argued that Justin considered the Logos to be eternal. The most that can be said about the Logos is that he was created before anything else." [London 1965] Some think Paul's language in Colossians 1:15 may have been borrowed from a Jewish contemporary, the Hebrew philosopher Philo Judaea. Philo writes in *On the Confusion of the Tongues*: "God's firstborn, the Logos, who holds the eldership among the angels, an archangel as it were." [From *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW DOES LOVE "COVER" EVERYTHING?

1 Corinthians 13:7 [Real (divine) love] covers over everything. [Nazarene Saints Rendering 2000©]

The phrase is variously rendered: WMS: it bears up under everything; NEB: there is nothing lover cannot face; PME: love knows no limits to its endurance; WEY: love can overlooks faults; MOF: always slow to expose. The Greek STEGEI (STEGE) is rooted in the idea of a roof (Matthew 8:8; Mark 2:24; Luke 7:6). STEGO may convey two meanings: a) to cover by silence, or keep a confidence; and, b) to bear up against, or hold out against. Given the immediate context STEGEI here may mean "love covers by silence" those matters which could be damaging or misunderstood about someone loved. Families do this all the time. So do true and genuine friends who are very reluctant to reveal negative information about a close companion. The Proverbs teach the same thing: "*Hatred is what stirs up contentions, but love covers over even all transgressions.*" (Proverbs 10:12) This thought from Proverbs is likely what Paul has in mind when he says, "*Love covers everything.*"

One of the most unloving things a friend can ever do is reveal a bit of confidential information to those who have no need or right to know it. Such may not be slander in the strictest sense, for the subject is truthful, but unknown. It is rather terribly harmful gossip. Many a close friendship has been destroyed by such failures to cover or keep a confidence. Additionally, love will cover others' weaknesses or failures by a willingness to explain unchristian conduct. For example, if someone reveals an error or trespass on the part of another, love may cause one to make an excuse for the person rather than multiplying and passing along such gossip. A loving person might defend the person by saying, "Well, perhaps he (or, she) was just having a bad day like we all do from time to time." [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW DOES LOVE TRUST EVERYTHING?

1 Corinthians 13:7 [Real (divine) love] trusts in everything. [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

This phrase also may have more than one meaning. The phrase is variously rendered: WMS: it exercises faith in everything; BER: unquenchable faith; MOF: always eager to believe the best; NEB: there is no limit to its faith; PME: no limit to its trust. If the Greek PISTEUEI is viewed more as "trust" then this kind of love always trusts a friend's truthfulness or honesty. This love is not paranoid, distrusting, or suspicious. There is a certain guilelessness in such a loving person. This person has no agenda, is no manipulator. These loving persons take people as they are without judging them wrongly without strong evidence to the contrary. Translator James Moffatt may have come the closest: "*(love) is always eager to believe the best.*" What a Christ-like attitude to trust and believe that there is some goodness in everyone. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHO IS THE ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGN?

Acts 4:24 *When the whole community heard, they raised their voices to the God with one mind, and said: "Sovereign Lord, the One who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea and everything in them.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

With one unified mind and heart Peter and some early Christians prayed to the God, addressing Him as "**Sovereign Lord.**" The Greek is DESPOTA and according to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* [#1203] means, an absolute ruler, that is the One over whom no one else rules, the only One with absolute power and authority. The first occurrence of DESPOTA in the 3rd Century BC Jewish Greek Bible is Genesis 15:2 and is used of Yehowah. Never is this absolute title used of Jesus Christ, for his power and authority are not absolute but limited and qualified. The word occurs two others times at Luke 2:29 and Revelation 6:10. This latter verse is the voice of the martyred Saints who call out to "the DESPOTES." As a lord, Jesus has his own Lord, his Father Yehowah, for He alone is "God of gods and Lord of lords." [Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 110:1 KJV] It is clear from this early Christian prayer that they considered the Creator to be the Absolute Ruler, while Jesus was the servant-boy anointed by Yehowah. [Psalm 2:1] The DESPOTA is the Creator. Though Christ was used as a creative agent, he is no never called the Creator. [Colossians 1:15-18; Revelation 3:14] It should also be noted that DESPOTA created "everything" in the heaven and that would include His own Son. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT DEMONS DID THE GREEKS FEAR?

Acts 17:22b *"Men of Athens, I behold in every way you are more demon-dreading than others."* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul calls the Greek philosophers as "demon-dreading." The Greek is DEISIDAIMONESTEROS [Strong's Exhaustive Concordance # 1174, rooted in fearing+demons]. The great cyclic religions such as the Egyptians, Hindus and Buddhists all have the fear of demons as a major part of their religious ritual. In the western world Hinduism and Buddhism are presented in a different guise though anyone who has traveled in such worlds has seen this continuous attempt to placate demons. It is well known Plato studied the Egyptian religion and plagiarized much of its central theology. [Compare Eusebius' *Preparation of the Gospel*, 3rd Century AD] Paul writes to the Corinthians that the non-Jews or Greeks commune with demons. [1 Corinthians 10:20] As with the Egyptians and Hindus many of these demons or gods were triune or triads. For even Aristotle writes in *On the Heavens*: "It is just as the Pythagoreans say, the whole world and all things in it are summed up in the number three; for end, middle, and beginning give the number of the whole, and their number is the triad [or, trinity]. Hence it is that we have taken this number from nature, as it were one of her laws, and make use of it even for the worship of the gods." [English translation by W. K. C. Guthrie M. A., Cambridge] The French Biblical commentary also says: "The Platonic trinity, itself merely a rearrangement of older trinities dating back to earlier peoples, appears to be the rational philosophic trinity of attributes that gave birth to the three hypostases or divine persons taught by the Christian churches. . . . This Greek philosopher's [Plato, fourth century B.C.E.] conception of the divine trinity . . . can be found in all the ancient [pagan] religions." [*Nouveau Dictionnaire Universel* (Paris, 1865-1870), edited by M. Lachâtre, Vol. 2, p. 1467.] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHO ARE THE 144,000?

Revelation 7:4 *And I heard the number of those sealed: "144,000."* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Note John now "hears" what he is soon to "see." This point is noted by *New International Dictionary of*

New Testament Theology (Colin Brown editor), Vol 2, page 695: “. . . 12 x 12,000 = 144,000 who are sealed ... from the tribes of Israel; cf. also 14:3. Thus the number 144,000 does not denote a numerical limitation of those who are sealed; it symbolizes the final perfection of the people of God (cf. also 7.9). In this respect when John sees them, as opposed to hearing the number of the sealed, they are ‘a great multitude which no man can number . . . (cf. Rev. 7:9 with 7.4).’”

If the prophetic context is sequential from the First Seal and the ride of the white horse and occurs after the Sixth Seal begins, this sealing occurs contemporary with the celestial darkness. The sealing of the 144,000 would take place at a moment when the Four Winds could occur but are restrained. The logical placement for this is exactly where the *Apocalypse* has it, near the end of the Sixth Seal. The 144,000 are strongly linked with the Large Crowd which is soon to be seen by John. In other words, John hears the number 144,000 and then he sees the same group who are to be rescued from the Great Oppression. In Revelation 9:4 there are only two groups during the Locust Plague: the unsealed harmed and the sealed unharmed. The 144,000 are on earth during this plague. The 144,000 are the same as the “we the living” of 1 Thessalonians 4:16. The number 144,000 occurs only 3 times. (Revelation 14:1, 3) 144 is a variant on the number 12. But, the number 144 can be mystically seen in the cherubs on the tabernacle tapestry. (Numbers 26:21) By comparing Revelation 14:5 with Zephaniah 3:13 it is seen the 144,000 are the “remnant of Israel” and not the full number of this New Israel of God. (Galatians 6:16) [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW IS JESUS A “HELPER”?

1 John 2:1 *My little children, I am writing you this so that you may not commit a sin. And every time anyone commits a sin, we have a Helper facing the Father, a righteous person, Jesus Christ.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

John calls Jesus a “heper.” The Greek is *parakleton*. Or, KJV: advocate; TCNT: we have one who can plead for us; GDSP: intercede; BER: a counsel for defense. Despite his death, Messiah will “*make intercession for sinners.*” (Isaiah 53:12 JPS) Romans 8:34 describes: “*(Jesus) is on the right hand of The God, who also pleads for us.*” Also, Hebrews 7:25 says: “*(Jesus) is always alive to intercede for them.*” Jesus promised to send the Paraclete to his apostles (John 14:26) as guide into all the truth but here it is the Son of God as mediatorial helper who intercedes or interposes in behalf of the Saints. (Numbers 21:7 and Isaiah 53:12) Using this understanding the “sin” of verse 1 could not be apostasy, or, those sins which “incur death” for which Saints are not encouraged to pray, but those habitual sins which would finally lead to failure in the Christian course. His one sacrificial death has already canceled their debt of sin in the past and through their faith they attained perfection by justification. (Romans 5:1, 9 and Hebrews 9:9, 12, 14) It is a pleasant and reassuring thought our Lord Jesus faces our Father to act as our Helper when we stumble into “a false step.” [Galatians 6:1] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT IS “DIVINE NATURE”?

2 Peter 1:4 *He has freely granted to us the precious and greatest promises so that by these things you might become sharers of divine nature, having escaped a world of corrupt desire.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Peter writes about God's “precious and great promises.” Such include becoming “sharers in divine nature.” The Greek is *theias coinonoi physeos*. *Theias* is “a general name of deities or divinities as used by the Greeks.” (Strong's #2304) It means god-like. *Coinonoi* means to share in “common” or commune, communion. *Physeos* is rooted in “swell” and thus “beget” and may mean: “the nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature ... the sum of innate properties and powers.” (Strong's #5449) It is the word from which “physics” comes. Most translations use “divine nature.” It suggests the hope of the Saints: to gain a

god-like, or divine existence. 1 Corinthians 15:53, *“this which is mortal must be clothed with immortality.”* [NSR] 1 Peter 1:4, *“The God has regenerated us into a living hope ... into an incorruptible inheritance -- immaculate and never fading brilliance -- reserved for you in the heavens.”* [NSR] This promise is conditioned on what Peter says next: that each Saint must have escaped or fled from *“the moral decay (rottenness and corruption) that is in the world because of covetousness (lust and greed).”* [AMP] Thus, only after leaving behind such a corrupt world, may we become shares in a god-like existence. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHERE WILL CHRISTIANS DWELL ETERNALLY?

2 Corinthians 5:1 *For we realize that if ever our earthly habitat of this tent should be taken down, we are going to possess a building originating from God – not a handmade house – ageless in the Heavens.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul compares the bodies in which we live as a tent that will one day be taken down, or as the KJV has it “dissolved.” Other renderings are: destroyed, dismantled, demolished. The human body is to be destroyed. The Greek refers to the pulling up stakes of a tent so that it collapse and be rolled up. Peter uses a similar metaphor. [2 Peter 1:13, 14] The faithful Saint does not take this collapsed tent to heaven, but rather receives an entirely new residence. As Paul says: “a building in heaven to live in” [GDS], or, “a permanent house in heaven.” [PME] This is a “house” not made by human hands. Paul explains this phrase in Hebrews 9:11 to mean “not of this creation.” [Note also Daniel 2:45.] The new spiritual body of the resurrected Saints is “not of this creation.” [Compare 1 Corinthians 15:48, 50; Philippians 3:21.] Will such a new eternal dwelling be on earth? Paul describes it as “ageless in the heavens.” Or, “eternal in the heavens.” [KJV] The Saints do not live forever on earth, but in a celestial home. However, this does not exclude the temporary “encampment” of the New Jerusalem during the Thousand Years. [Revelation 5:10; 21:2] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW SHOULD THE SAINTS CLEANSE AND PERFECT THEMSELVES?

2 Corinthians 7:1 *As a result, having these promises, beloved, we should cleanse ourselves from every fleshly and spiritual pollution, perfecting holiness in godly fear.* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul writes that in order to partake of “these promises” the Nazarene disciple must first “cleanse” themselves by a process of perfecting holiness in the fear of God. This “cleansing,” or self-purification, would include those Babylonish doctrines and standards alluded to previously by Paul. Also, those things that pollute the flesh. [Consider these at Galatians 5:19-21.] Jesus himself provides his own list of such defilements. [Matthew 15:19, 20] That is anything that pollutes the spirit. Paul describes this process as *“perfecting holiness in godly fear.”* One version puts it: *“... deepest reverence for God, aim at perfect holiness.”* [TCN] The fear of God is inseparable from such perfect holiness. Paul has in mind holiness from three perspectives: spiritual, moral, and physical. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHO ARE THE “OTHER SHEEP”?

John 10:16 *“I have ‘other sheep’ [Isaiah 49:12; 56:8] that do not belong to this sheep-fold. Those [sheep] I must lead also, and they will listen to my voice, and*

they will become one flock, 'one Shepherd.' [Ezekiel 34:23] [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Jesus told his disciples that he had "other sheep." It is likely the Nazarene echoes either Isaiah 49:12 or Isaiah 56:8, the latter reading: "Yehowah the Absolute Lord – the One gathering together Israel's scattered ones – says: "I will gather together to [Israel] others besides those already gathered together." [NSR] Jesus came to call **"the lost sheep of the House of Israel"** [Matthew 10:6; 15:24], and with but rare exceptions he does not witness to non-Jews. Later some Greeks wanted an audience with Jesus but he does not arrange for such. [Compare John 12:20] It is likely these Greeks were included in Jesus' words at John 12:32, that after his ascension to heaven he would draw people of all kinds, not just "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It is these who are the "other sheep" who are not naturally part of the Jewish sheepfold. Compare these two groups – Jew and non-Jews -- becoming one in Ephesians 2:11-22. Some arbitrarily, and without any support, apply these "other sheep" to another class of Christians who do not attain heaven, the American Indians, and even homosexuals. However, these "other sheep" – non-Jewish Saints – will become "one flock" led by "one Shepherd." This latter designation is an exact allusion to Ezekiel 34:23, 24 where the Messiah-type David is the parallel. [1 Peter 5:4] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT CHANGE MUST A CHRISTIAN MAKE?

Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this period of time, but rather, be transformed, by the renewing of your mind, proving to yourselves the good, acceptable and perfect will of The God." [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul writes, *"Do not be conformed to this period of time."* [Or, KJV: to this world; RHM: configuring yourselves unto this age; NOR: fashion of the times; GDSP: not adopt the customs; LAM: do not imitate; WMS: stop living in accordance with the customs.] The world is an enemy of God (James 4:4) and under the power and influence of Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4) and will one day pass away (1 John 2:17). The Nazarene prayed that his disciples would not be part of this world. (John 17:15, 16) Thus, the Christian must *"be transformed."* [Or, ALF: transfigured; WMS: mold your minds; PME: remold.] The Greek word is METAMORPHOUSTHE (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3339) and is the same word that describes the transfiguration of Christ. (See notes on Matthew 17:2) This suggests the degree of change required. The person who becomes a Nazarene disciple is as different to the former life as the butterfly to the caterpillar. Paul's counsel is not to be molded by the world (or, age) around you but let your mind undergo a transformation. Only after this can the Nazarene disciple discern the perfect will of God. People who remain "worldly" or whose lives are based on a schematic patterned according to the characteristics of the Roman Age will not likely create a harmonious community. Is it clear that a real change must come about when one becomes a Christian or Friends of the Nazarene? How do these changes or transformations affect the structured part of the Christian community? There are certain key fundamentals necessary for a group of people to work in harmony for their mutual purpose and encouragement. First, Paul discusses certain attributes or characteristics which would apply to all within the Nazarene community.

This transformation requires what Paul calls the *"Renewing of your mind."* [Or, GDSP: new attitude of mind; WMS: new ideals. This is a complete new way of thinking. Paul has mentioned the changed mind earlier.] And only then can the changed disciple begin *"Proving to yourselves good, acceptable and perfect will of The God."* The Greek word for "proving" is DOCIMAZEIN (Strong's Exhaustive

Concordance #1381) and one can see the root for “document.” Each disciple must prove to themselves that worship of God is the logical thing to do. For some this is an easy process, for others it amounts to climbing the highest mountain. (1 Timothy 4:15) God’s will and purpose is good (perfectly virtuous and kind, destined to perfect fulfillment); and, acceptable (His will pleases perfectly His worshipers who have used their logical mind to prove it to themselves); and, His will is perfect (not lacking anything, and complete in every aspect to fulfill His wishes). God’s will never harms us and is always good for us. His will for the Nazarene’s disciples is there complete sanctification. (1 Thessalonians 4:3) [From the footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHY AVOID JUDGING ANOTHER?

Romans 14:4 *“Who are you to be judging another’s household servant, for to his own lord he stands or falls. However, that person will stand [firm] because the Lord is strong enough to make such a person stand [firm].”* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul asks the challenging question of each judgmental Christian: *“Who are you to be judging another’s household servant?”* [Or, TCNT: who are that you should pass judgment on the servant of other; MOF: who are you to criticize the servant of Another.] The Nazarene warned of the same thing when he taught: **“Stop criticizing others so that you may not be criticized yourselves.”** [Matthew 7:1 WMS] Paul gives the reason: *“For to his own lord he stands or falls.”* [Or, GDSP: to say whether he succeeds or fails.] Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:4, 5: *“For I am not conscious of anything against myself, but in this I am not pronounced innocent. But, ‘The One judging me is ? ? ?.’ So, do not judge anything before the season, until the Lord arrives. He will bring to the Light the hidden things of darkness and manifest the motives of [all] hearts. And, then, each person’s praise will be from The God.”* [Nazarene Saints Rendering ©MM] And, despite any critical opinions of others, Paul explains why the object of our judgment can stand: *“The Lord is strong enough to make such a person stand [firm]”* [Or, KJV: God is able to make him stand; ASV: for the Lord hath power to make him stand; KNX: God is well able.] So, any judgment we make against others only reveals our own jealousy and ends up hurting us. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW IS A BROTHER WHO IS A HABITUAL SINNER TO BE TREATED?

1 Corinthians 5:11 *“However, now, I write you not to associate with anyone called a ‘brother’ [who is] sexually immoral, a greedy person, an idolater, a reviler, a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even eating with such a person.”* [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul commands: *“Not to associate with anyone called a ‘brother’.”* Paul will now list a few other reasons to shun someone, as well as explaining what “not to associate with” includes. He means a ‘brother’ [or, sister] who is habitually, *“Sexually immoral, a greedy person, an idolater, a reviler, a drunkard, or an extortioner.”* Paul has now expanded his list for shunning to six reasons. [For details on these words reference the same in *Nazarene Commentary*©.] Though some sects who practice shunning regularly disfellowship or excommunicate sexually immoral persons, they seldom, if ever, address the “greedy person,” or even, the “extortioner.”

Paul says, *“Not even eating with such a person.”* [Or, TCN: sit at a table with.] If we compare 2 Thessalonians 3:10 the same is suggested. It would seem obvious that the above does not mean to cast out a family member, though some sects include such in their shunning practices. It would seem that the principle stated at 1 Timothy 5:8 would bear on that matter. Paul writes that such a person should *“not be treated as an enemy,*

but as a brother.”[See Nazarene Commentary© on 2 Thessalonians 3:15.] It is possible the early Christian Church copied something of the Jewish practice in shunning. The Jews did expel undesirables from their spiritual community. [John 9:22; 16:2] They had three steps: a) NID -DUY’ was for a short period of a month to let the person know what he might be in for – such a person could attend the Temple but his family had to remain six feet away from him. B) CHE’REM included a more serious ban during which the person could not share in teaching with others, nor any business in buying or selling save essentials for subsistence. C) SHAM-MAT-TA’ which was a complete casting out of the Jewish community. [From the footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT WERE OLDER CHRISTIAN WOMEN TO TEACH YOUNGER CHRISTIAN WOMEN?

Titus 2:4 “... *so that they may encourage the young women to be fond of males, fond of their children ...*” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul writes to Titus that the older Christian women should, “*encourage the young women.*” Though Christian women would not be appointed to any office of teacher or prophet in the early Church, this did not limit the good they could do in teaching the younger women. Paul goes on to list what these older ladies ought to teach the young females. He first mentions: “*To be fond of males.*” [Or, KJV: love their husbands; CON: loving wives. (See Weymouth)] The Greek is PHIL-ANDROUS [Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5362] from which the English corruption “philanderer” comes with a contradictory meaning. It literally means “fond of males” and is usually rendered “love their husbands.” It does show that the older women should teach the younger to be fond of males and not hateful of them as if in a battle of the sexes. Also, they should teach the young wives to be “*fond of their children,*” something most natural to billions of mothers throughout history. There may have been a particular problem on Crete for it is the nature of women to love their children unless there is another force at work. There can be no greater work in the Church than rearing the next generation. [From the footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

HOW IS THE NEXT GENERATION OF CHRISTIAN TEACHERS PREPARED?

2 Timothy 2:2 “... *entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Paul gave instructions to Timothy, though a young man himself, to prepare other loyal Christian men to become teachers. He wrote: “*Entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*” [Or, KJV: the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also; GDSP: trustworthy men; BER: reliable men; PME: who will be able to pass it on.] Paul suggests a teaching program involving qualified Christian men with the object of their teaching other men. This indicates Timothy was well qualified in Paul's opinion despite his youth. It also tells us something of the early Church's program to prepare the next generation of teachers. [See notes on Ephesians 4:11-14.] A vital church must have elders who prepare others to become teachers. These “faithful men” would likely become qualified elders if they met the more than a dozen requirements. [Compare notes on 1 Timothy 3:1-12] [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

WHAT DOES THE PARABLE OF THE SLEEPING FARMER MEAN?

Mark 4:26 Then Jesus said: “*God's Realm is as if a person scattered seed on the ground, Mark 4:27 then goes to sleep at night and rises the next day. The seed sprouts and grows and the person has no idea how.*” [Nazarene Saints Rendering]

Jesus uses the designation "God's Realm," or, the Kingdom of God, to refer to the Church, or the Realm of Profession, the domain or territory over which Christ reigns by God's power. [Compare notes on Matthew 13:40-42 and Ephesians 1:19-23.] This parable is unique to Mark and there are several views. The growth of the Church has occurred miraculously as without any outside help, like a seed that grows of itself to produce fruitage. Here the Sower has planted the seed, and then it would seem to the world, showed no interest in how it develops. Like a planted seed, the growth of the Church has amazed historians, and certainly no one could have predicted that within three centuries such a small movement would become the state religion. As a comparative analogy see Paul's example in 1 Corinthians 13:9-12. [From footnotes in *Nazarene Commentary 2000*©]

===== END =====

WHY WE CANNOT PREACH THESE ARE "THE LAST DAYS"?

THE CURRENT FRENZY ENTERING THE 3RD MILLENNIUM.

Current preachers and prophets scream passionate warnings about these really being the Last Days as we enter the 3rd Millennium. This was exactly as it was when the year 1,000 drew closer in the Middle Ages. The frenzy led to the Crusades, for so many Christians sold their material things and fled to Jerusalem to await the end of the world. Their presence finally irritated the Moslem rulers in Palestine and the "Holy Crusades" began. Something similar happened just prior to the end of the Nineteenth Century when various religious leaders and Bible students pointed to the beginning of the "last days" in 1820. Or, 1844. Or, 1874. Or, 1914. As strange as the question may seem to most Christians, what did the Nazarene and his inspired disciples really teach regarding "last days"?

DID JESUS THE NAZARENE PREACH ABOUT "LAST DAYS"?

Some are in for a surprise. Take a concordance and look for the phrase "last days" in the Gospels. Jesus never used it despite Bible topic headings in many translations of chapters like Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. What about the *Apocalypse* or Revelation which was given to Jesus? (Revelation 1:1) Surely, this most apocalyptic book uses the phrase "last days"? Or, "time of the end"? Is it fair and honest to include the phrase "last days" atop Bible pages as if these words occurred in the main text below? For example one translation begins Matthew chapter 24, "Christ's presence, last days." On Mark chapter 13: "Signs of the last days given" and "Signs of last days continued." The same happens with Luke chapter 21. No one can claim Jesus ever used the words "last days." But, what about his disciples who wrote later?

WHAT "LAST DAYS" DID HIS DISCIPLES HAVE IN MIND?

Peter, Paul and James all use the phrase "last days." But, what "last days" were they talking about?

Peter's "last days" regarding Jerusalem. Peter uses the phrase "last days" in his Pentecostal speech to his Jewish audience. Read Acts 2:16, 17: '*No this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32 LXX), "In the last days [ESCHATAIS HEMERAIS] it will be God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh."*' (RSV) Is it fair to state that Peter applies these "last days" to those disciples who were experiencing the spirit's manifestations and his contemporary audience? [It is noteworthy that the words "last days" do not occur in Joel 2:28-32. Peter gives his quote an inspired paraphrase.]

Peter is to use the phrase "last days" another time in his second epistle: *'First of all you must understand this, that in the last days [ESCHATOU TON HEMERON] scoffers will come.'* (2 Peter 3:3 RSV) Some are tempted to apply this to some "generation" long after Peter's time, right up to our own period as we enter the 3^d Millennium. How can we know to what "last days" Peter was warning about? The disciple Jude answers this for us because he actually quotes Peter and applies it to his own times.

Note Jude's words: *'But you, beloved, must remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; for they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers."*' (Jude 17, 18 RSV) Does it seem fair to say Jude has Peter's words in mind? Jude, like Peter, applies the phrase "last days" to the approaching end of Jerusalem's Temple Age, just as the Nazarene foretold in Matthew 24:4-20 and Luke 21:7-24.

Paul's "last days". Among the most famous occurrences of the phrase "last days" is the one used at 2 Timothy 3:1, *'You (Timothy) must understand this, that in the last days [ESCHATAIS HEMERAI] distressing times will come.'* (RSV) Some translations omit the singular "you" in this verse somewhat obscuring the fact that Paul has Timothy in mind. A reading of the whole context from 2 Timothy 2:14 to 3:9 would seem to confirm Paul's warning about the "last days" were those upon Timothy and his "generation" who would witness the end of Jerusalem's Temple Age. How can we be sure of this?

Paul (if he be the writer of Hebrews) uses a phrase highly similar to "last days" in Hebrews 1:2: *'But in these last days [ESCHATOU TON HEMERON] God has spoken to us by a Son.'* (RSV) Is it misinterpreting matters to say Paul calls his contemporary times "last days"?

The "last days" of the disciple James. James uses the phrase "last days" also: *'You have laid up treasure for the last days [ESCHATAIS HEMERAI].'* (James 5:3 RSV) Is it fair to say James has those rich Christians of his own day in mind as the "end" of Jerusalem draws closer?

All of these rare occurrences of the phrase "last days" all deal with the end of Jerusalem's Temple Age just as Jesus Christ foretold. (Mark 13:5-23) [For more details on this subject see *Nazarene Principles* and *Nazarene Apocalypse*]

WAS THERE AN "END" TO THOSE "LAST DAYS"?

A few students and commentators believe "the last days" began in the first century and continue down to our own time. Was there an "end" to those "last days" upon that Jewish generation with its Temple in Jerusalem? This subject introduces another word: "consummation" or "conclusion."

In Matthew 24:3 when the disciples asked about the Nazarene's prediction of the Temple's desolation they use the Greek word (possibly from Matthew's own translation of the Hebrew) *SYNTELEIAS*. This word in Greek is translated by Jerome in his Fourth Century *Vulgate* as *CONSUMMATIS* for the word means "with + end" or "ending together"; that is, a conclusion or consummation. This word is possibly borrowed from Daniel 9:26, 27 *'And after the sixty-two weeks, the Christ shall be destroyed, and there is no judgment in him; and He shall destroy the city and the sanctuary ... and to the end of the war which is rapidly completed, he shall appoint the city to desolations. ... and on the temple shall be the abomination of desolations; and at the end [SYNTELEIAS] of the time an end [SYNTELEIA] shall be put to the desolation.'* (LXX) This was the prophecy from which Jesus drew his own words at Matthew 24:15. The *SYNTELEIA* the disciples had in mind was "the end" of Jerusalem's Temple. Would this not indicate "the last days" on that Jewish generation with its sacred Temple had an end, conclusion, or consummation? Those particular "last days" did not continue on for many centuries more. (Matthew 28:20)

Paul uses *SYNTELEIA* himself when discussing the "last days" upon the Jewish Temple Age. Note Hebrews 9:26, *'But as it is (Christ) has appeared once for all at the end [SYNTELEIA] of the age.'* This later phrase "the end of the age" is exactly the same of the disciples' question at Matthew 24:3. Does this not prove Paul believed, in fulfillment of Daniel 9:26, 27, and in agreement with the Nazarene's apostles, that there was then, in his own time, "the last days" to culminate in a "conclusion" upon the Jewish Temple Age? Would this limit any Christian teachers today from predicting the last days and "the time is at hand"?

"THE TIME IS AT HAND?"

Most have overlooked the Nazarene's warning immediately after the disciples asked their question about the SYNTELEIA, particularly the way it is worded in Luke 21:8: *'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name, and say . . . "The time is at hand!" Do not join them!'* (RSV, BY, NJB) How much clearer would our Lord have to make it? If any who claim his authority, asserting they are "the Anointed" (Mark 13:22) and prophesy, "The Time Is At Hand!" they are not to be followed or believed. Such a "presumptuous" prophet need not be feared. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22)

WHEN WILL WE KNOW WE ARE IN THE "LAST DAYS"?

Does this mean there will never be any "last days"? Not if we judge the *Apocalypse* correctly. An "end" will come following the Return of Christ. (For details read *Nazarene Apocalypsein Nazarene Commentary 2000*©) The Books of Daniel and Revelation foretell a period of three and a half years of Great Oppression on the Saints just prior to the *parousia* of Christ. Jesus gives the single "sign" which will mark the imminence (within hours) of his *parousia* and this will be seen by the Saints and all the earth at the same time. The Nazarene predicts: *'Following (the Great Oppression) . . . the Sign of the Son of Man will become visible in the sky and all the tribes of earth will mourn as they see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of the atmosphere.'* (Matthew 24:29, 30 NSR) The *parousia* follows the Great Oppression.

When that future "generation" witnesses celestial phenomenon, the Sign of the Son of man, and the visible Return of Messiah, then we will know our "redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28 RSV) Only then will the Friends of the Nazarene be able to say these are "the last days" and "the time is at hand."

WHO IS AUTHORIZED TO SAY: "THE END HAS COME"?

Only after the Saints are raised and raptured to the Celestial Throne Room (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Revelation 11:12; 15:2) will the Seventh Angel declare: "THE END HAS COME!" (Revelation 16:17 PME)

==== END ====

IS GOD'S LOVE "UNCONDITIONAL"?

From time to time on evangelical television programs and among other Christians one hears of God's "unconditional love." The idea is presented that no matter who we are, or what we do, God still loves us. Some give the impression that once you have accepted Christ as your "personal Savior" then heaven is guaranteed and nothing you do will ever cause you to lose the love of God. It has made some ask whether God's love is "unconditional."

Before we can answer this question from the Bible we must understand the meaning of the words "love" and "unconditional." In most instances the English word "love" is from the Greek AGAPE. It means an action in behalf of another based on motive and principle that seeks the highest good of another. It is a principled love that may be without sentimentality and affection. The word "unconditional" is defined as that which is "without conditions or reservations; absolute."

GOD'S LOVE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

What does the Bible actually say about God's love? One of the earliest occurrences of God's love in the Greek Bible is Deuteronomy 4:37, *"[The God] loved your forefathers and chose their seed after them."* [LXX] The next occurrence is at Deuteronomy 7:12, 13 where God's love is conditioned on obedience to

His commandments: *“Then it shall come to pass IF you will listen to these regulations -- keeping them and doing them -- THEN will Yehowah your God ... will love you.”* [Compare Rotherham]

1 Kings 10:9 promises, *“Yehowah loves Israel throughout the Ages.”* God's love here is without limit based on the conditions mentioned above – the observance of His Law. God does love those who are obedient to His commandments as Psalm 11:7 promises, *“Yehowah is righteous, [and] He loves righteousness. The upright will behold His face.”* God also loves “justice.” [Psalm 33:5] In that regard He will never forsake those who keep covenant-loyalty with Him. [Psalm 37:28] God loved the tribe of Judah, while he rejected others in Israel. [Psalm 78:68] God may love one feature more than another: *“Yehowah loved Zion's gates more than all Jacob's dwellings.”* [Psalm 87:2]

God's love involves discipline: *“For whoever Yehowah loves He corrects. He causes pain to the son in whom He delights.”* [Proverbs 3:12; compare Rotherham] God does not unconditionally love everyone: *“The way of the lawless is an abomination to Yehowah, but He loves those who pursue righteousness.”* [Proverbs 15:9]

God saves Israel because he loved him. [Isaiah 43:4; 48:14; 63:9] God may love a People without particularly loving every individual. [Jeremiah 31:3, 4; Hosea 3:1] As a people God may provide a loving cure: *“I will heal their apostasy. I will love them freely.”* [Hosea 14:4 Compare Rotherham] This is, however, conditional or with reservations: *“All of you see what is right and not wrong so that you may live and then Yehowah God of hosts may be with you. Hate wrong and love right ... possibly Yehowah God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant.”* [Amos 5:14, 15] God may love one people and yet hate another: *“I have loved you,’ says Yehowah. ... Yet I loved Jacob and hated Esau.”* [Malachi 1:2]

GOD'S LOVE IN THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE

God's love is not mentioned in Matthew, Mark or Luke. In John 3:16, 36 it becomes clear that the love of God is conditional: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son in order that **whoever believes in him** might not perish but have ageless life. ... The person who **continues to believe** on the Son has ageless life. However, **the person who does not yield and obey** the Son shall never see life, but God's anger waits for such.”* [Compare Rotherham] God's love for the world is a world of believers. Only those who obey the Son will benefit from God's love.

That the Father's love is condition on obedience is demonstrated by the One God loved the most, Jesus Christ. The Nazarene teaches: *“**Just as my Father loved me, I also loved you. Now you [apostles] remain in my love. You remain in my love IF you continue to observe my commandments, even as I have observed my Father's commandments and continue to remain in Him. ... As long as you continue doing my commandments, you are my friends.**”* [John 15:9, 10, 14 NSR]

What did Paul write about God's love? He writes in Romans 5:5 a lovely thought that has been the joyous anthem of the Church for nearly two thousand years: *“The love of God has flooded our hearts. ... While we were still sinners God demonstrated His own love for us [in that] Christ died in our behalf.”* [Romans 5:5, 8 NSR] As far as God's part is concerned nothing could ever separate us from His love: *“However, in all of these things we are victorious by means of the One showing loving concern for us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things future, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation will ever be able to separate us from God's loving concern in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* [Romans 8:37-39 Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

In Paul God's love is always conditioned on other factors: *“Finally, brothers, continue to rejoice, to be readjusted, to be comforted, to think the same thing, to be at unity – and then the God of love and peace will be with you [Corinthians].”* [2 Corinthians 13:11 Nazarene Commentary 2000©] Here God's love for the Corinthians is conditioned on their adhering to these matters discussed in Paul's letter.

Despite a wicked past God has demonstrated His love in his Grace through Christ: *“In the past you were once spiritually dead because of your transgressions and wrongdoing. You followed that lawless attitude*

which characterizes this period of time in a worldly arrangement ruled over and controlled by a certain wicked atmosphere or environment. ... However, that God -- who is opulent when it comes to forgiveness and benevolence because of the enormous dimensions of His loving concern for us -- loved [us] despite our dead state as transgressors." [Ephesians 2:1-4 Paraphrase Nazarene Commentary 2000©] That is, despite our previous condition as sinners, before God even recognized us, he demonstrated his love by His Grace through Christ.

There is no question of God's love for humanity. For He, indeed, has an affection or fondness for mankind in general. Paul writes to Titus in this vein: *"However, when God our Savior's kindness and fondness for humanity was made manifest -- [We were pronounced innocent by that One's unmerited favor] -- not by any righteous works of our own, but rather, according to His mercy He saved us by a regenerative washing and renewal of holy Pneuma."* [Titus 3:4, 5, 7 Nazarene Commentary 2000©] The phrase "fondness for humanity" comes from the Greek PHILANTHROPIA, the source of the English word "philanthropy." In it this "fondness for humanity" that aroused in God the loving provision of the ransom of Jesus Christ.

Most are aware that the beloved apostle John writes extensively about love. What does he have to say about God's love? Is it conditional or unconditional? Compare some verses from First John:

Now every time we keep obeying his commandments we will come to realize we have an intimate relationship with him. The individual who claims, "I have an intimate relationship with him," and yet fails to observe his commandments, this person is a liar and there is not a shred of truth in such one. However, the love of God is made complete in anyone who observes His Word. Because of such obedience we realize we remain in union with Him. Therefore, the person who says, "I remain in harmony with him," has the responsibility to live just as Jesus lived. [1 John 2:3-5] Stop showing worldly concern for worldly things. Everyone who shows more concern for the world no longer has any love for the Father inside. [1 John 2:15] Here is how we really understand what love is: our Lord sacrificed his very existence for us. For this reason we are obligated to sacrifice ourselves for our fellowship. For example: if any of us has this world's resources for maintaining life and is aware that another Christian is in need and yet slams shut the doors of his tender affections -- how is it possible that God still loves that person? My little children, make it your habit to always show loving concern, not in speech or words only, but in positive and real action. [1 John 3:14, 15] God is loving concern in action. The individual who abides in such loving concern abides in God. God abides in that kind of individual. [1 John 4:16 Nazarene Commentary 2000© Paraphrase version]

John makes it clear that God's love will only be realized by those who love others. Those who are hateful and unloving cannot expect to receive God's love unless they repent and make a serious change. The Christian who refuses to come to the aid of a needy brother or sister no longer remains within the love of God. Those who would want God's love must be loving themselves and must walk after the example of the Lord Jesus -- willing to sacrifice self in behalf of brothers and sisters.

This brief study of God's love in the Bible assures us that His loving concern is displayed in His interest in humankind, His concern for their sinful condition, and His positive action for humanity's highest good. Whether individuals among humankind will be the object of God's enduring love will be those who continue to believe in Him and show the same kind of love for both friends and enemies. [1 John 3:23; Luke 6:31-36]

In this way we can all remain in God's love, even as the disciple Jude writes: *"Keep yourselves in God's love [that is, "Stay always within the boundaries where the love of God can reach you." (Living Bible)] anticipating the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ into everlasting life."*[Jude 21 Nazarene Commentary 2000©]

==== END ====

Friends of the Nazarene

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