



Back to the Bible

The Story: The parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41). When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast (verse 42). When they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and his parents knew not of it (verse 43). They, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey and then sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances (verse 44). When they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem (verse 45). There they found him (verse 46).

The Similarities: There are some similarities between these events and certain events in history. First, the Lord's house, which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15), was established in, and the Word of the Lord went forth from (Isaiah 2:2-3), Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-47). In time, some departed from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1-4), just as Joseph and Mary departed from Jerusalem and in so doing departed from Jesus. Since the Word of the Lord is light (Psalms 119:105), those who left that light departed into darkness (1 John 1:6-7). This departure resulted in the corrupt Catholic religion which ruled and reigned during a period of history lasting approximately one thousand years and known as the dark ages.

Second, when men began to realize and recognize this departure from the faith, they began to seek the Lord, but they found Him not for they were now far removed from Him (Galatians 1:6-9). They sought Him and His Word among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, but He was not there because they were no longer abiding in His doctrine (2 John 9-11). During the period of history known as the Reformation, men like John Calvin came up with a five point system of religion known as Calvinism which was just as corrupt as Catholicism (2 Thessalonians 2:1-10). Man made churches and man made doctrines began to abound, and the corruptions continued with men adding to and taking away from the Word of God (Revelation 22:18-19). Instead of reformation being a solution to the problem, it added to and increased the problem and religious divisions were multiplied (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

Third, a group of restorers began to advocate that men go back to the Bible just as Mary and Joseph had gone back to Jerusalem. They advocated speaking when and where the Bible speaks and being silent when and where the Bible is silent (1 Peter 4:11). They began to call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways for they knew that whatsoever they did in word or deed was to be done in the name (by the authority) of the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). They knew if they sowed the same seed, the Word of God (Luke 8:11), that the apostles and early Christians had sown

in honest and good hearts (Luke 8:15), it would produce the same thing that was produced in the first century, New Testament Christians (Acts 11:26).

The Solution: Mary and Joseph found Jesus by going back to Jerusalem. By going back to the Bible, we can find the Lord and the Lord's house. The Bible sets forth the five-step plan of salvation. First, faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). There must be faith in God the Father (Hebrews 11:6) and in the Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24). Second, God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Those who do not repent will perish (Luke 13:3,5). Third, confession of faith (Acts 8:37) is made unto salvation (Romans 10:9-10). If we want the Lord to confess us to the Father at the judgment, we must confess him before men here and now (Matthew 10:32-33). Fourth, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:15-16). Baptism is a burial (Romans 6:3-4) in water (Acts 8:36-38) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) wherein sins are washed away (Acts 22:16) by the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5). Baptism puts one into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27) where salvation is located (2 Timothy 2:10). Baptism also puts one into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) which is the church of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47; Romans 16:16; Ephesians 1:22-23). Fifth, the Christian (1 Peter 4:16) must now remain steadfast and unmovable and always be abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). The Christian must be faithful unto death, if necessary (Revelation 2:10). So long as children of God continue to walk in the light, the blood of Jesus will continue to keep them clean (1 John 1:7). And when Christians sin (1 John 1:8, 10), if they will confess their sins (1 John 1:9), repent (Acts 17:30), and pray for forgiveness, they will be healed (James 5:16). May God help us all to hear and heed the plea for the restoration of New Testament Christianity in this century by going back to the Bible.

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Nobility

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The High Cost of Salvation

The Ransom Price Paid for Redemption

Mark 10:45 says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Webster defines ransom as “a consideration paid or demanded for the release of someone or something from captivity.” In a spiritual sense, Jesus releases man from the captivity of sin. One might say they do not feel like they are in captivity or bondage. Another might say they did not know Jesus was a ransom given for their redemption. However, in consideration of certain biblical truths, one can most definitely say Jesus is a ransom offered so mankind can have spiritual freedom from the guilt of sin.

Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Sin is defined in scripture in many ways: (1) doing something in any motivation except for faith is sin (Romans 14:23); (2) not doing what a person knows he or she should be doing is sin (James 4:17); (3) breaking God’s law is sin (1 John 3:4); and (4) all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 4:16). The point of focus in Romans 3:23 is not necessarily what sin is but rather all men have sinned. There is not a person in this world that has not transgressed the law of God in one way or another. Now, in Romans 6:23, Paul says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This brings to light the idea that everyone is in bondage to sin. Sin leads to death — eternal death — or eternal separation from God. The debt of sin is death.

The good news is the debt of sin has been paid. Someone has died in place of every man. God sent His Son into the world so that everyone can be saved (John 3:16). The writer of the book of Hebrews said, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus went to the cross and died so no one else would have to pay the debt of sin. More than that, He gave up equality with God so every person who has ever lived on earth would have the opportunity of salvation or reconciliation with God (Philippians 2:5-11). **This is what Jesus did for you! What will you do for Jesus?**

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Jeremy Northrop, Ashland, MS

Should the Church Have a Pattern?

If we look around, it is clear most men believe the answer to the question of the title is “No.” But if one looks to God’s Word instead of man’s wishes, he will find that God has always been concerned with the pattern of those things He has commanded. For example, in the Hebrews letter, we read of the commands given to Moses as he received the Old Law on Mount Sinai. We are told he was to “make all things according to the pattern” (8:5; see also Exodus 25:40). A “pattern” is “an example... the pattern in conformity to which a thing must be made” (*Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon*). God was very concerned with His instructions or patterns being followed in the Old Testament. But did you realize in the New Testament age (the time wherein we all now live – Matthew 28:18-20), He is even more concerned? In Hebrews 2, we are told “we ought to give the *more earnest heed to the things which we have heard*, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Hebrews 2:1-3). Isn’t it strange then that we look about at the multitude of churches in our day and see so many differences? One would think God did not care enough about the blood bought church (Acts 20:28) to give a pattern! But a study of the New Testament teaches clearly that such is not the case. God has given a pattern. For example, let’s notice some aspects of the Lord’s pattern in His promise pertaining to the church in Matthew 16:18-19:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

From this passage alone, we can see several things about the “pattern” of the church:

- “church . . . the kingdom of heaven” – The Lord obviously equated the church and the kingdom. Any church which seeks to separate them is not following the Lord’s pattern.
- “I will build” – The church at that time was not in existence. A careful reading of the scriptures shows that until Acts 2 the church is spoken of as in prospect. From Acts 2 onward, the church is in existence. Any church that has a beginning time other than the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is not following the Lord’s pattern.
- “my church” – The church is the Lord’s, not man’s. In His Word, it is described by terms that show His ownership. Man’s churches have strange names – name of men who built them, names of teachings they follow or practices and other such manmade terms. These are not following the Lord’s pattern.
- “I will give thee the keys” – Keys are obviously used to enter. The Lord has provided a pattern for entrance into His church, a pattern followed in Acts 2 when the church began. Those who “gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41) “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). While many obviously believed in Christ (Acts 2:37), only those willing to accept and obey the pattern were added to the church (Acts 2:41-47). Today man has rejected His pattern in teaching infant baptism, faith only, and the like.

Clearly God is concerned and has given a pattern for His church. He did this because He is concerned with our salvation. The question comes down to us — Are we concerned with the pattern He has given? Obviously many are not, that is why you can “attend the church of your choice.” It really comes down to you. Are you ready to “make all things according to the pattern” and attend the church of His choice?

Jack H. Williams, Independence, MO

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

WHAT IS MARRIAGE ACCORDING TO GOD? Simply, marriage is defined by God as the union of two individuals, one male and one female, for sexual, social, and procreative purposes. This is exactly what the universal God created and instituted in the very beginning (cf. **Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-6:4**). However, the first violation of this is seen in the act of polygamy (the taking upon one's self more than one spouse at a time) and seen in the descendants of Cain (**Genesis 4:19, 23**). Lamech, the great, great, great, great, great grandson of Cain, took unto him two wives (**4:19**). By the time you arrive at the sixth chapter of Genesis, you will read about the great sin of the world that involved the relationships between male and female. No doubt, the violation of God's marriage law, one man for one woman till death do they depart (**Romans 7:1ff.**), affected the world then. Jesus, in commenting on marriage, clearly confirmed what marriage was from the beginning when he said: "*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*" (**Matthew 19:4-6**). If you noticed, two (twain) became one, not three or more, but two. Therefore, polygamy is and has always been sinful. According to God, one male and one female can become one. Furthermore, marriage is *not* for the homosexual. They may "shack up," or civilly be united, or considered as such by some; but in **all reality**, this is nothing more than a sinful relationship. Homosexuality is sinful, not safe or sound; and a homosexual marriage will not sanctify this sin!

WHAT SCRIPTURALLY DISSOLVES A MARRIAGE? Many will be eternally lost on the Day of Judgment because of marriage, unscriptural marriages, and divorce. There are only three reasons given in Scripture that approve or give allowance for dissolving a marriage. Only two of those reasons permit the innocent or living party the privilege of remarriage to another person. The third reason, which is physical, emotional, or spiritual abuse, does **not** allow for remarriage (**1 Corinthians 7:10-15; 14:37**). The first two reasons: adultery/fornication and death allow for the living party and the innocent victim — who has not committed adultery — the privilege of remarrying another innocent or scriptural party (cf. **Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18**). God hates divorce, and whoremongers and adulterers He will judge severely (**Malachi 2:16; Hebrews 13:4**). Also, death ends a marriage, and the living party has a right, then, to remarry another living party who is scripturally available. One final note on this: Mormons are "dead" wrong when they speak of eternal or celestial marriages. The Bible clearly teaches that death ends a marriage, and in eternity, we are *not* given in marriage but will be as the angels (**Matthew 22:30; Romans 7:1ff**).

Marriage is a beautiful thing when kept in the holiness and purity of godliness! It is truly a blessing to find one's soul mate. As the Proverbs writer said: "*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord*" (**Proverbs 18:22**). Marriage should promote faithfulness to God, not hinder it! It is most unfortunate that so many people do not recognize the purposes and point of marriage.

Bryan R. Braswell, Roanoke, TX

GAMBLING

One of the great blights against our society is the growing trend of the vice of gambling. Gambling is a disease that has plagued mankind for centuries. More and more, gambling has become a way of life, and people are being desensitized into thinking it is an harmless form of entertainment. On the contrary, it is far from harmless. Gambling has resulted in broken homes, thefts, murder, starving children, broken-hearts, drunkenness, and suicide.

Though some people confuse gambling or wagering with taking risks, it is far more than simply taking a chance. There are three essential elements in gambling. First, there is the element of a stake or risk such as a "kitty," "pot," or "pool." Second, there is the element of chance which is arbitrarily determined by the parties involved and is out of personal control. And, third, there is the element of a prize for the winner who is arbitrarily chosen by the element of chance. Though there are those who will argue that everything in life involves risks, gambling involves more than simple chance. Farming, crossing the street, driving a car, and investing necessitate risks, but these do not make gain by the loss of others.

Though gambling is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, it is condemned in principle. Consider these:

First, gambling violates the basic laws of good stewardship. There are three legitimate laws of economy. The law of labor in which labor is rewarded (1 Timothy 5:18; Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:10). Also, there is the law of exchange in which a product is exchanged with something of equal value (Galatians 6:7-8; James 4:13-15). Finally, there is the law of love in which benevolence is shown to those in need (1 Corinthians 16:2-3; Matthew 7:12; 22:39). Since no one gambles to loose, then all must gamble in order to win. No one freely gives up what they risk, but they intend to win more than they ventured. For this reason, gambling is sometimes defined as "stealing by consent." Can a person truly say he or she loves their neighbor while taking away what he or she has not freely given?

Second, gambling is based on and promotes covetousness (1 Timothy 6:10; Ephesians 5:5). Without a strong appeal to greed, gambling would hold little and possibly no attraction. Why do people gamble? To get money! The gambling industry knows this quite well. Why do they want you to think you might be the next winner? Because it creates inordinate desire for wealth. The reality is this: if you gamble, you will far more likely be the next loser.

Third, gambling is accompanied by evil bed partners. Jesus said, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). No matter where gambling goes, organized crime follows. The so-called glorious Las Vegas is full of organized crime. Gambling carries all the promise of revenue, but it actually costs our government. There is more than enough money used for gambling to build a hospital, a high school, a junior college, and a library in each of the three thousand counties in the United States. Did you know, you are three and a half times more likely to be killed by lightning and five times more likely to be eaten by a shark than to win a state lottery? For this reason, some people refer to state lotteries as a tax on people who are poor at math.

Gambling is not godliness. It is against God and harmful to society. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

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Sunday, January 30, 2005

A Study of Proverbs on Family and Friends

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Bible Class 9:30 A.M.; Worship 10:30 A.M. and 6:00 P.M.

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“A good friend of mine and I were talking the other day about the Bible, and she said that only 144,000 people will go to heaven, does the Bible really teach that?”

You have asked a very good question and are to be commended for seeking a Bible answer. The Bible says those in Berea *“were more noble...in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether*

those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

There is a doctrine put forth by the “Jehovah’s Witnesses” which teaches that only 144,000 people will go to heaven and be with God. This is no doubt the doctrine your friend was referring to. Various Jehovah’s Witness publications state, *“...the final number of the heavenly church will be 144,000, according to God’s decree” (Let God Be True, p. 113), and “... Christ Jesus and the 144,000 joint-heirs will rule as ‘the kingdom of heaven’...as such they will be functioning at ‘the new heavens’ with respect to obedient mankind” (The Kingdom is at Hand, p 350-351).*

The doctrine of only 144,000 people going to heaven is taken from two verses in the book of Revelation where the number 144,000 is mentioned. The first verse says, *“And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel” (Revelation 7:4), and the second verse says, “And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Revelation 14:1).*

The doctrine of 144,000 people going to heaven arises by forcing the number to be a literal number rather than figurative. These verses are found in the book of Revelation which is prophetic literature, and a characteristic of prophetic literature in both the Old and New Testaments is that numbers, as well as many other terms, are symbolic. They cannot be taken literally.

It is essential to note the book of Revelation is filled with and was written in symbolic language. For example, the phrase *“I am Alpha and Omega”* is used throughout the book with reference to Jesus (*Revelation 1:8,11 & 22:13*). The word “Lamb” is used throughout the book with obvious references to Jesus (*Revelation 5:6,8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8,11; 14:1,4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:9,14,22,23,27; 22:1,3*).

The doctrine of the 144,000 takes the number in both verses as literal but nothing else in the verses. The doctrine does not take it literally that the 144,000 come from *“all of the tribes of the children of Israel”* which would exclude anyone who lived this side of the cross. The doctrine does not take literally the 144,000 will be standing on a literal *“mount Zion”* with a literal *“Lamb.”* Please remember that phrases, words, and numbers throughout the book of Revelation are consistently used in a figurative manner, and to force a literal meaning upon them does something the author did not intend.

The doctrine of only 144,000 people going to heaven and being with God violates other clear and literal verses of the Bible. Jesus said, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...” (Mark 16:15-16).* Jesus did not limit the number of people who could be saved and go to heaven. The only limit is failure to obey the word of the Lord. The inspired word of God also says, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).* God has not limited the number of people who will be saved and go to heaven, for as the inspired author says, *“...to everyone that believeth...”* It is God’s will and desire that every human being who has ever lived, from Adam on, be saved and live eternally in heaven with God. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).* The gospel has been preached from the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem with the purpose of allowing every person the opportunity to go to heaven (*Acts 2:38*).

If the number 144,000 cannot be taken literally, then what might this number mean? Given the context of the book, the chapter, and the verses the number is found in, and the figurative number itself, the number most probably simply symbolizes the saved of all humanity. The saved on both sides of the cross have been saved by the blood of the figurative Lamb, Jesus Christ, and are there with Him and the Father, in heaven, identified as the saved (*1 Peter 1:18-19*). You can be among the saved, or the figurative 144,000, simply by believing and obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ (*Acts 2:37-38,41*).

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