

THE ISRAEL OF GOD TODAY

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In Genesis 32:28, Jacob's name was changed to Israel. The fleshly descendants of this great man became known as the nation of Israel. We read in the book of Joshua when these offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob entered the land of Canaan which was promised to Abraham by Jehovah (Genesis 12:1-3, 7). This people constituted God's chosen people through whom the promised Messiah would come. However, Israel fell out of God's favor, except a remnant, and never again stood before the Lord with acceptance as a nation.

The question might be raised, "Is Israel God's people today?" The answer is "yes," but with some clarification. The Israel which is acceptable to God today is a spiritual nation, not fleshly. "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.3:29). Those who are in Jesus Christ are the seed of Abraham. They become such by being immersed into Christ: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal.3:26-27). Even Nicodemus, a fleshly descendant of Abraham, was instructed to be born of water and the Spirit in order to be a citizen of the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). Both Jew and Gentile must obey Christ in order to be a part of spiritual Israel today.

Please observe these passages that teach that the Israel that is pleasing to God is spiritual and not fleshly in nature. "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter;

whose praise is not from men but from God (Rom.2:28, 29). "... For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, in Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Rom.9:1-8). "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God (Gal.6:15, 16). "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phi.3:3). "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet.2:9, 10).

Fleshly Israel, as a whole, rejected the deity of Jesus. In John 1:11, 12, we find this to be the case: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." In Romans 9-11 we read of the rejection of Israel because of unbelief and the acceptance of the Gentiles because of their belief in Jesus as the Son of God. In short, everyone who is in Jesus Christ constitutes spiritual Israel today. The Israel of God today is the church of Christ, the family of God, the kingdom of our Lord .

WOT

EDITORIAL

A MORE EXCELLENT WAY

The church at Corinth was rife with problems and squabbles of every conceivable type. There were open divisions in the church (1 Corinthians 1:10ff). One brother in the church at Corinth had taken his father's wife as his own, and the church refused to discipline him in order to save his soul (chapter 5). They were taking one another to court (chapter 6). They were guilty of abusing the Lord's Supper (chapter 11). They were being led astray regarding the truth of the resurrection of Christ (chapter 15). Perhaps the most glaring strife in the church at Corinth was their constant bickering concerning the nature of spiritual (miraculous) gifts (chapters 12-14). Some were elevating one gift above another, particularly the miraculous ability to speak in tongues. In the midst of his discussion of these matters, Paul points the Corinthian brethren to the solution to all problems they were currently experiencing—true love (chapter 13). If only they would learn to love after this manner, then would their problems cease, and peace and harmony would reign in the church at Corinth. Though Paul sought to correct their thinking regarding the nature of their miraculous abilities, he pointed them to what he called "a more excellent way" (12:31). This is the way of agape love which he goes on to describe in great detail in chapter 13.

It is of the utmost importance that we take note of the absolute necessity of agape love in all that we think, say and do in matters of a spiritual nature. Paul relates to the Corinthian brethren that even the noblest of tasks undertaken without this most supreme virtue were void of meaning and were to be counted as worthless, no matter how far reaching their effects nor how great the number of those who might benefit from such efforts. Paul states that "though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" (13:1). Some in the church at Corinth were patting themselves on the back for their ability to speak in tongues, looking down their noses at those who possessed what they considered inferior miraculous abilities. That these paraded their gift before the church as a badge of honor smacked of arrogance and selfish ambition for the accolades of men. Without love as their motivation for exer-

cising this God-given ability, their voices were as a cowbell in the midst of an orchestra. In comparing their sound to that of sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, Paul was likely showing that their speaking in tongues accomplished as much good as a pagan worship service (which was characterized by the banging of gongs or dull cymbals, and the sounding of brass horns). There also seems to be some sarcasm in the words of Paul in this verse, for not only did he have the miraculous ability to speak in tongues (14:18), but he may also have known the tongues of angels, having been caught up to the third heaven, hearing things unlawful to be uttered (2 Corinthians 12:3ff). In essence, Paul was stating that though they were bragging of their abilities, his were far greater. But this meant nothing if their talents were not used for the glory of God and for the good of the church!

Paul goes on to say that "though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing" (13:2). Though some had the coveted ability to speak in tongues, Paul states that it would not matter should they have all of the miraculous abilities imparted to those in the first-century church if they were unwilling to temper their use with the greater good of others in mind (charity, or agape love). Again, Paul uses a bit of sarcasm, as he had the ability to perform all miracles, far above the limited abilities of the Corinthian brethren. Any motivation other than true love for God and for the brethren causes even the most awe-inspiring exercise of religion to be totally devoid of meaning and worth. Paul states further that not only are these efforts futile when done apart from love, but the person undertaking these efforts is nothing. Such a description was a far cry from the over-inflated idea of self the Corinthian brethren had.

As Paul concludes these introductory thoughts of the character of true love, he writes, "and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (13:3). No more noble deed could be pondered than such altruism that would lead one to relinquish all of one's earthly possessions in order to meet

the needs of those less fortunate. No more majestic task could be done, except perhaps the ultimate sacrifice—giving one's life for a cause greater than himself. Many throughout history have been martyred for causes that to them seemed good and just. While some no doubt acted with the highest of motivations, many others suffered a martyr's death because of selfish ambition, seeking to leave their imprint on history. Many a Muslim has given his life for a so-called "holy war" to satisfy his carnal lusts with the promise of life in heaven with a harem of virgins. By man's thinking, such actions as these would garner the greatest and surest rewards heaven has to offer. Yet, Paul states that without love, these actions are not only vain, but the profit supposed to have been gained by such will amount to nothing. Such sacrificial giving, whether of one's possessions or even of one's own life, becomes nothing more than a hollow gesture when motivated by anything besides agape love.

While congregations of the Lord's church today may not suffer the severity or quantity of problems that Corinth endured, we would do well to heed the advice of Paul and follow the more excellent way of doing all things with charity. By following the more noble and exalted path of charity in all things, many of the problems that now exist in the church would be solved, and others that might become problems would be avoided. The church will be much stronger when each child of God learns to seek the good of the other person, and put our own interest last. Hear the word of the Lord, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). As our focus becomes "faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6), we will be more evangelistic toward the lost, more benevolent toward those in need and more encouraging to our brethren in the Lord. When we learn to act out of agape love, we are "conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29), for such love is the very essence of God Himself (1 John 4:8). Never will we be more like Jesus than when we follow this "more excellent way." The summary laws upon which all other laws of God are built stress this very idea—Love the Lord with all our heart, and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). The surest way for the world to recognize the followers of Jesus is when we demonstrate this love one for another: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another" (John 13:35). May God help us as His children to learn and implement this supreme love for Him and for one another. May it always be our aim in the church of our Lord to order our steps in this more excellent way!

WOT

LIFE AND NATURE

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

I'd like to paint what's on my mind,
Of nature's beauty in this rhyme.
Created for us by God's hand!
Four seasons every year: his plan.
No one can change the universe!
The deserts with snowflakes immerse,
Or change the seasons though they try,
If storm, or flood, or drought so dry.

Our Father will forever be
In full control of what we see.
Of life and nature he's the source.
His power is a mighty force.
With earth in balance night and day,
As long as time seasons will stay.
Yes! Summer, winter, spring and fall,
His words hold true for one and all.

It's springtime and the fields are green,
The flowers bloom by flowing stream.
A gentle breeze, nobody sees,
Among the trees of whispering leaves.
I listened to the mockingbird!
It's imitating voice I heard.
I wondered at such melody!
Some secrets are a mystery.

No words to describe in full detail!
The thoughts from tongues of wisdom fail!
To paint a picture at its best,
Of land or sea, or waves that crest.
Of moon and stars that shine at night!
Or dawning with sunrise so bright.
Too much for me to comprehend,
Pictures of nature have no end.

So much I see while looking through
These windowpanes, a pleasant view.
A taste of joy! With time to look!
Enough to see to fill a book.
With mind to think, and breath to breathe,
Sew faith for strength in nature's weave.
Bring out paintbrushes with a scroll!
Hang pictures, with love threads, of gold.

Lest we forget, with our supply!
Of paint material we can't buy,
It's good to take advantage of
Colorful seasons that evolve.
Around the globe if far or near,
Nature's beauty is everywhere.
With thoughts of choice to fill the mind,
Take pictures for a future time.

IS GAMBLING A GOOD BET?

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Many have a great love for gambling. While spiritual-minded people have been opposed to it, the appeal of a quick and easy gain and the excitement of chance-taking continue to entice many people. Gambling comes in many forms—bingo, casino games, betting on sports, horse-racing, and dog-racing. Several states have introduced lotteries as a way to raise money for state governments.

There is no *specific* directive in the Bible which says it is a sin to gamble. The issue is dealt with on the basis of principles which are plainly taught in the Scriptures. Those who are mature in Christ can by these principles “discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14).

Gambling violates the following five fundamental scriptural concepts:

1. GOD’S UNIVERSE IS ONE OF ORDER AND NOT CHANCE. The gambler’s world is ruled by artificially created chance, devoid of clearly predictable outcomes, unsusceptible to meaningful planning, and lacking in productive energy. In God’s providence, the world operates consistently by laws which He has established, and it moves toward the systematic fulfillment of His master plan (Genesis 1; Psalm 148:1-6). Chance as a way of life is inappropriate and unsuitable in such a universe.

2. NEIGHBORS ARE TO BE LOVED UNSELFISHLY. The second commandment according to Christ is, “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39). This verse is a more positive rendering of the Golden Rule: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12). We are our brother’s keeper (Genesis 4:9). We cannot knowingly inflict on our brother pain and degradation which accompanies gambling. If I win, he loses, and in the process we both lose. Gambling manipulates people for personal profit, and that is unworthy of the followers of Jesus Christ.

3. ADVANCEMENT IN LIFE IS BASED ON WORK. From the time Adam and Eve were placed in the beautiful Garden of Eden to this day, work has been ordained by God for advancement in life (Genesis 2:15). The Old Testament reflects this in these words: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread...” (Genesis 3:19). The New Testament reflects the same sentiment in these words:

“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (II Thessalonians 3:10). These two precepts maximize the role of work and minimize non-productive activity such as gambling as a valid way of advancement.

4. MONEY IS A TRUST TO BE HANDLED WISELY. This is taught in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The talents (money) are viewed here as a responsibility for which Christians are accountable. Paul wrote, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Not only does the 10 percent belong to God, but the 100 percent belongs to Him also. All of our resources have been entrusted to us to expend on God’s behalf. David said, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). We have no more ultimate right over the 90 percent than over the 10 percent. We are to invest it ALL to the glory of God. Such a concept leaves no place for careless stewardship nor for the deliberate courting of the loss of all. Gambling, is, therefore, antithetical to Christian stewardship because it is a WASTE of both time and treasure, two of a person’s most valuable assets.

5. COVETOUSNESS IS TO BE AVOIDED. Jesus warns, “Take heed and beware of covetousness” (Luke 12:15). Paul wrote, “Covetousness is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). One of the Ten Commandments reads, “Thou shalt not covet...” (Exodus 20:17). Paul made a sober observation: “For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). The avaricious quest for money by chance has no place in the life of a Christian who is trusting God to supply his need (1 Peter 5:7).

May all see gambling for what it is!

PRAYER

Our Heavenly Father, help us to be good stewards of all which You have given us. May we glorify You in all that we possess. Help us to avoid all temptations. In Christ’s name. Amen.

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

Keith Dixon, Macon, GA

Jesus has been called the "Great Physician." There is a song by that title that has very good sentiments. Seven hundred and fifty years before Jesus set foot on the earth, Isaiah prophesied, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5). Peter quotes this passage (1 Peter 2:24) and does not apply it to physical healing but to spiritual healing. This is as it ought to be.

Some in the religious world today make these passages above refer to a physical healing. Though Jesus did heal physical maladies while upon earth, this is neither the tone nor the meaning of the above passages. Jesus' emphasis while on earth was to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He was seeking the lost because they were estranged from Him; sin did that to mankind (Isaiah 59:1-2). When He found those that were lost, they needed healing because of the effects of sin. Only His blood can heal us so that sin is removed from our souls.

There are many different sins that stain the soul. Galatians 5:19-21 lists these sins: "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings murders, drunkenness, revelings and such like." Colossians 3:5 cites these: "fornication uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Ephesians 4:25-31 lists the sins of "lying, anger, stealing, corrupt communications, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice." There is a way to have these sins removed from our soul so that we can stand justified before God. These are ailments upon which the Great Physician must gaze to see how the remedy must be applied.

The blood of Christ will remove all of these sins, spots and ailments, but the blood of Christ must be applied correctly. To apply the blood of Christ upon the spiritual hands when it needs to be applied to the heart is to fail to use the "prescription" correctly. The directions have been given to us in detail. Many do not read the directions, thinking they know how to diagnose and apply the "balm." When given a prescription there seems to be more information received than is needed, but reading

this information is necessary. It will give the directions as to the proper method of application, the proper time to take the prescription and any potential side effects or reactions. We must read the prescription. We must read the prescription carefully. Failure to carefully read the prescription can be deadly to the body and to the soul. To apply the remedy to the "feet" when it needs to be applied to the "head" is not to get any benefit from the solution. To apply to the incorrect "spot" can have disastrous consequences both physically and spiritually.

Another problem some encounter is that they realize they are sick and want a doctor's diagnosis, but have no intention of applying the remedy to alleviate their problems. The physician gives the prescription to heal the patient. The patient might read the prescription carefully. The sick person may understand all of the information given, but perhaps he does not take the prescription to the proper person to get the medicine. The medicine must be gotten from the proper place and filled by the proper person. Failure to do so is to make a fatal error. The individual at the convenience store cannot fill the prescription. We must go to the right source with the intention of putting to use the remedy.

Many in the religious world understand the remedy for the sin-sick soul. Yet for some reason they will not take the "medication." The prescription is understood without any reservation. The remedy is before them plainly and simply, yet it will not be taken. The reasons may be numerous. The reasons may be complicated, but many refuse the prescription of the Great Physician. To take the time and effort to go to the physician and then refuse to take the medication is foolish!

"All have sinned" (Romans 3:23), so we are all sin-sick. We are all in need of going to the Great Physician to have the Balm of Gilead applied to our hearts and minds. This balm must be used on a constant basis. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). To fail to use this remedy is to have spots and blemishes reoccur. To fail to apply the blood of Jesus is to find oneself outside the grace of God. To do so means to miss heaven!

Let us read the instructions that are contained within the Bible. Let us make the proper application to our own soul so that we can be saved in the end.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

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Many times throughout the Bible the question is asked “What must I do?” or “What shall I do?” Throughout the New Testament this is a recurring theme. Obviously, it is very important to do what is necessary to be saved. What are the things one must do? We’ve all heard the plan of salvation: Hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. But what do they mean? Let’s look closer at God’s plan of salvation.

WHAT MUST I HEAR?

We take for granted sometimes that people automatically know what we are talking about when we say they must hear. But suppose someone does not know, what then? Romans 10:14 says “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” No one can believe in Christ if they have not heard of Him! Just a few verses later, Paul says “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom.10:17). One must hear the Word of God. Throughout the Bible, people are told to obey the word of God. The Israelites in were often told to hear the Word of God and return to him. (See the entire book of Judges, and about every one of the Major and Minor Prophets). If they heard the Word of God, they had the chance to make things right. Now, just hearing obviously is not enough, because not all who hear obey: “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” (Rom.10:16). On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostles preached the first gospel sermon, starting with the following words: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words” (Acts 2:22). Later on, Peter told them, “And it shall come to pass, *that* every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:16). There is a consequence for not hearing the Word of God! Have you ever had anyone say, “I don’t want to hear about Jesus” or “Don’t talk to me about religion.” They don’t realize that they shall be destroyed for not hearing!

WHAT MUST I BELIEVE?

In the example of the first converts on the Day of Pentecost, we can see they believed the Word of God. But what exactly must one believe before they can be saved. Obviously one must believe that God exists (Heb.11:6), but that is not enough: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). The people on the day of Pen-

tecost were religious people. They already had some background in the existence of God and his mighty power to save, but something was missing. What was it that they still needed to believe? Acts 8 tells of a man of Ethiopia who had come to Jerusalem to worship God. On his way back home, he was reading the scriptures (OT), thinking he was in a saved condition. Then Phillip showed up to preach to him: “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). What was it that the Jews in Acts 2 and the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 did not know yet? JESUS! Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. He was the Messiah for whom they had been waiting! When the eunuch asked to be baptized, Phillip told him that he must believe with all his heart. The eunuch answered and said, “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). Phillip thought that was enough to baptize him and make him a Christian. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom.10:9). What must we believe? We must be convinced that Jesus is the Son of God and that he was raised from the dead.

Some try to make too many rules and restrictions on who can be baptized. They may say something like “They don’t know enough yet.” or “I don’t think they’re ready.” If you’ll notice, EVERY specific example of conversion in the book of Acts was the result of a single sermon—ONE sermon. It was not the result of weeks or months of study on many different topics. These people were at a point where they could be baptized based upon the first time they heard the truth about Jesus being the Son of God. Paul refers to the new converts as “babes in Christ” (I Cor 3:1). Peter speaks of new converts as “newborn babes” (1 Pet.2:2), and as such they were to “desire the sincere milk of the word” so that they may grow. The milk of the word is the basic teachings of the gospel. Paul calls it the first principles of the oracles of God (Heb.5:12).. Babies do not know much of anything, but they do grow. Slowly, but surely they do grow. We don’t expect them to be able to walk and talk and eat solid food before we allow them to be born, so why do we expect the same of people who wish to be born spiritually in baptism? Jesus even illustrated this in his last words: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in

the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt.28:19-20). Notice that the teaching of all that they were to observe came after they had been baptized. You don't have to know the whole Bible before you can become a Christian!

OF WHAT MUST I REPENT?

John the Baptist preached in the wilderness "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt 3:2) Jesus Christ preached "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt 4:17) Jesus also said "Unless ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5) Jesus sent the apostles on the limited commission, and they "preached that men should repent." (Mark 6:12) Peter told the Jews on the Day of Pentecost "Repent" (Acts 2:38) The question arises: repent of what? "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). We must repent in order to have our sins blotted out. "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness" (Acts 8:22). Peter told Simon the sorcerer to repent of his wickedness. Paul preached "that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20). These were told to repent and turn TO God. This means they were not following God. These passages teach us that we must repent of our wickedness, and from being turned away from God. But what does it mean to repent? Repent means "to turn away" or "turn again." Vine's Dictionary says that the word repent always signifies a change for the better, and overwhelmingly is used in reference to changing from sin. Easton's Bible Dictionary says of repentance, "To change one's mind and purpose, as a result of knowledge." So, repenting is a change for the better (leaving sin) after gaining knowledge. What is that knowledge? "And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 4:15). Jesus tells them to repent and believe THE GOSPEL! They were to change their minds and purpose as a result of hearing and believing that Jesus is the Son of God!

WHAT MUST I CONFESS?

To confess is to tell someone something—to spread the word about something that deals directly with YOU. You cannot confess for someone else. To tell someone else's sins is to gossip and be a talebearer in most cases. You cannot confess for anyone else anymore than you can believe or repent for someone else. Confessing is something personal. Whether it be something that you

have done, or something that you believe, it is personal to you. Let us keep that in mind as we look at what we must confess. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt.10:32). Jesus is saying that if we confess HIM before others, He will confess us before God above. Remember, confession is something personal, so we must profess our belief in Him as the Savior and the Son of God. In turn, Christ will give his profession of His acceptance of us before God. Confession is made unto, or in the direction of, salvation (Rom.10:9-10).

BAPTISM?

Why should I be baptized? Because over and over in the Bible it is shown as the way to get into Christ and be saved (Mark 16:16.; I Pet.3:21, Rom.6:3, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16). How, and in what, should I be baptized? Any example in the Bible of baptism where any description is used talks about either going into or coming up out of water. So, you must be baptized IN water. The word "IN" means "surrounded by." So you need to be baptized, surrounded by water. That is why baptism is seen as a burial. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom.6:3-4). "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead" (Col.2:12).

What is the central theme of all of these steps of salvation? The GOSPEL, my friends, the GOSPEL! We must hear the wonderful news that Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth, died, was buried and arose on the third day so that we can have forgiveness of our sins! We must believe the Gospel with all of our heart! Upon hearing the Gospel, we must repent of sin, and change our mind and purpose to following Christ. We must confess our belief in Jesus. Then we must be baptized, following the form and command of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rom.6:3-4). After obeying the Gospel, we must then tell others about it! If we do not continually confess Christ before others, we will not be confessed by Him before God (Matt.10:32-33)! Spread the Word! Jesus Christ is the Son of God! He came to earth, died, was buried, and arose! Have you followed the Gospel?

WOT

ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: What does it mean - "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mathew 16:19)?

ANSWER: "Binding and loosing" were familiar phrases to the Jews. The Rabbis often spoke of "binding and loosing," meaning forbidding and permitting. Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:19 was addressed to Peter, however His words in 18:18 included all of the apostles. Therefore, whatever Jesus' apostles bound on earth would remain bound in heaven; and whatever they loosed on earth would remain loosed in heaven. In other words, Jesus' apostles would exercise authority according to His word (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 4:17; 11:23; 15:3; Gal. 1:11-12). However, this does not mean that God would obey what they did on earth, but that they should do on earth whatever God had already willed in heaven (Psalm 119:89). Whatever the apostles bound or loosed on earth was already bound or loosed in heaven and it would definitely remain bound and loosed as they proclaimed it. The verb forms "shall be bound" and "shall be loosed," in the Greek New Testament, are perfect tense, passive voice participles. The perfect tense means that the binding and loosing had already occurred and the effects of that action would remain. The passage may thus be translated as follows: "Whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven" (NASB). Remember, the church does not get man's will done in heaven; it obeys God's will on earth. Therefore, on the first Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection from the dead, Peter and the other apostles preached the Good News about Jesus (Acts 2:14-42). They proclaimed the inauguration of the Kingdom of God and the terms of entrance into it.

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