

# Scripture Studies

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“Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord...” I saiah 1:18

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## Editor's Note

To commemorate our tenth year of publishing, and to give the editor a sabbatical of sorts, we will finish the year by republishing articles from our first five issues. The current studies will recommence (D.V.) in 2004.

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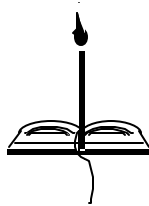
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May God bless you as you study His Word.



## Old Testament Study: Genesis 1:14-25

### The Fourth Day: The Light Bearers

<sup>14</sup>And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

Up until the fourth day, as pointed out in the last issue, God directly provided the light to His creation. On the fourth day, God created the light-bearers which shine forth the light that originally emanated from Him. In a similar way, God has created us to be light-bearers to shine forth His light to a dark universe, for Christ said, “**You are the light of the world**” (Matt. 5:14).

God created the light-bearers with specific purposes. First, they are “**to separate the day from the night.**” So also we, as His light-bearers, are to separate the day from the night. Paul urges us to “**put aside the deeds of darkness and to put on the armor of light**” and to “**behave decently, as in the daytime**” (Rom. 13:12-13). Thus, by our behavior and values, we are to define the deeds of the daytime, and to do our best to keep the deeds of darkness from seeing the light of day. On this earth, there will always exist darkness and the deeds of darkness. Unfortunately, the deeds of the night are mixing more and more with the deeds of the day as people are becoming less and less ashamed of their sin. Because of the relaxation of moral standards, sins that used to be carried out in secret, in darkness, are now accepted in broad daylight. We as light-bearers should fight to keep the deeds of the darkness separate from the deeds of the daylight.

Second, the light-bearers are “**to serve as signs to mark the seasons**

**and days and years**" (vs. 14). So also we, as light-bearers, are **"to serve"**, carrying out our specific God-given role. Just as the light-bearers in the heavens work together to **"mark the seasons and days and years"**, so also we should work together to accomplish God's purposes, each one using his God-given talents.

Third, the light-bearers are to **"give light to the earth"** (vs. 17). So also we, as light-bearers, are to give light to the earth. Our work as light-bearers should have the effect of making the world less dark. As Christ says, **"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"** (Matt. 5:16). Furthermore, as light-bearers, we should have an influence over others so that they too may become light-bearers. For, in the same way, the sun causes the moon, which is not inherently a source of light, to become a light-bearer.

Notice that God made a **"greater light"**, a **"lesser light"**, and He **"also made the stars"**. So we observe that just as God gave His heavenly light-bearers a variety of purposes, He also gives His modern-day light-bearers a variety of purposes. Paul says, **"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us"** (Rom. 12:6). Peter says, **"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms"** (I Pet. 4:10). God works in each person's life differently. Each person has a mix of different gifts suited to accomplish God's predetermined purpose for his life. One should not envy someone else's gifts and purpose, but should seek to cultivate his own gifts in order to fulfill God's purpose for his own life.

Notice that the different light-bearers have different prominence: one light is **"greater"**, one light is **"lesser"**, and then there are the stars. The light with **"lesser"** prominence does not have lesser value in God's eyes, though. The **"lesser"** light, by being **"lesser"**, is serving its purpose perfectly. If the moon shone as bright as the sun, it would not be serving its purpose. So also, God, according to His will, chooses to give some of His modern-day light-bearers more prominence than others. As Paul says, **"Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"** (Rom. 9:21). Again, the light-bearers with lesser prominence do not have lesser value in God's eyes, though man may see them as such. I dare say that the humble mother staying at home, giving of herself to raise a house full of Godly children, never holding a place of prominence among men, never receiving the cheers and accolades of the crowds, but saving her pennies to keep her household warm and well fed—I dare say that she will hold as great a place of prominence in the kingdom of heaven as the most visible of Sunday morning orators.

The phrase **"God set them in the expanse of the sky"** suggests that this was the time when the earth, planets and stars were placed in their proper positions and the universe was set into motion. The stars and other planetary bodies are clearly depicted with the purpose of serving, as

it were, the earth. Indeed, the earth was placed amidst the heavenly bodies in the universe with great care. For example, self-sustaining life on earth would be impossible if the earth was any closer to the sun (it would be too hot) or further from the sun (it would be too cold); or if gravity on earth were any stronger (the atmosphere would have too much methane) or weaker (all water would evaporate); or if the earth's rate of rotation were faster (the winds would be too great) or slower (the temperature differences would be too great); etc. Thus, the positions, movements and radiance of the heavenly bodies all serve to make life on earth possible.

The creation account seems to conflict with the possibility of extraterrestrial life within this universe (disregarding, of course, the spiritual realm). You see, the earth was created first, and the heavenly bodies, including other planets, were created on the fourth day. The heavenly bodies seem to have been created with the express purpose of serving the earth. In any case, much time, money and effort is spent by scientists searching for extraterrestrial life. Ironically, many of these scientists ignore the most important and most accessible extraterrestrial; an extraterrestrial who does not require a telescope or radar transmitter to make contact with. Rather, communication with this extraterrestrial can be opened simply with a humble heart, a bended knee, a private prayer closet. Yes, the most important and most accessible extraterrestrial with whom we can establish a relationship is God the Father, through Jesus Christ.

### **The Fifth Day: The Filling of the Creation**

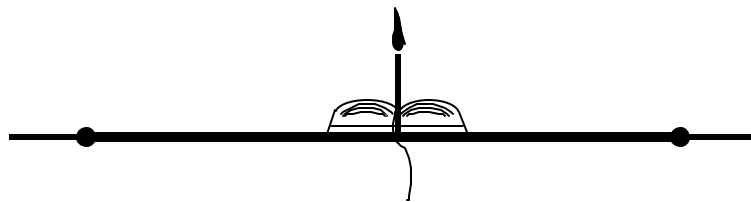
<sup>20</sup>And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." <sup>21</sup>So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." <sup>23</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

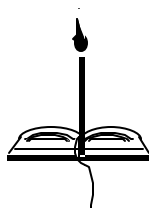
<sup>24</sup>And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

On the fifth day and the first part of the sixth day, God fills His creation with living creatures. God desires His creation to be full. God has limitless love for an unlimited number of creatures. He longs for multitudes to **“be fruitful”** in His work so that He may bless each one of them.

Additionally, God created a myriad of different **“kinds”** of creatures, from the **“great creatures of the sea”** to the smallest **“winged bird”**. Look around! God’s inventiveness and ingenuity are displayed in the variety of creatures rife throughout the creation: from earwig to eagle; from mite to mammoth; from oyster to orchid. God is full of wisdom; He has considered every contingency; He is a grand designer who has left no need unsatisfied in His self-sustaining creation. The flower depends on the bee, the whale makes use of the parasite, the hermit crab utilizes the castoffs of the snail. The existence of all is intertwined with the existence of all others. The large and the small, the great and the humble, the hideous and the beautiful all have their God-given niche in the completed puzzle of the creation. All have a purpose; all are equally important. Never consider yourself unimportant. If the grains of wheat can feed the world, what great purpose must God have for you. Seek it! In prayer, dedicate yourself to His desire for you in His grand design.

From Gen. 1:11 through the end of the chapter, the phrase **“according to their kinds”** (or a variant) is used ten times. In doing so, God is explicitly negating the theory of evolution. Evolution’s premise is that creatures produced offspring that eventually formed a different species; thus, evolution contradicts the statements that the creatures produced **“according to their kinds”**. It is interesting that God repeats this phrase, almost to the point of excess. This excess serves to emphasize the falseness of the theory of evolution. The theory of evolution is most certainly despised by God, because it encourages idolatry. The theory of evolution promotes the worship of the god of chance; it attributes the glorious design of the creation to random occurrences; it belittles the wisdom and creative genius of God by the premise that life was a product of happenstance.





## A Study of Exhortation Romans 12:2

### Being Renewed

<sup>2</sup>Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:2).

In Romans 12:1, Paul exhorted us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God. However, in order to do that, we must be **“transformed”** so that we behave as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, rather than as one who belongs to the world. Thus, Paul exhorts us strongly to conform no longer, but be transformed and renewed.

He starts with the words **“Do not”**. This is in contrast to the exhortation in verse 1, where he **“urged”** us to offer ourselves to God. In verse 1, he was telling us something that we, as Christians, should do; in verse 2, he is telling us something that we must not do. There are things that Christians are urged to do, and there are things that Christians are commanded to avoid. The words **“Do not”** constitute a command.

Thus we, as children of God, are not by any means to **“conform”** to this world. Peter tells us to **“live as strangers here, in reverent fear”** (I Pet. 1:17). He also calls God's elect **“aliens and strangers in the world”** (I Pet. 1:1; 2:11). Our new birth into the kingdom of God necessarily should cause us to feel as if we are strangers and out of place in this world. For instance, our values are different than those of the world. Those of the world desire material riches; we desire the riches of God. Also, our morals are different than those of the world. Their morals are based on what they consider right in their own eyes; our morals are based on the Word of God. Furthermore, our attitude toward death is different than those of the world. They see death as the end; for us, the death of our earthly bodies will bring us into the presence and glory of God.

Thus, our attitudes should set us apart from those of the world. Having been introduced into the glorious kingdom of God, a kingdom that will never perish nor diminish in its glory, what a shame it would be if we clung to this dying world.

Pauls says that we should not conform **“any longer”**, suggesting that we did conform to the world in the past. Men naturally conform to the world. Men strive for the approval and accolades of other men. But man is a fallen creature. To conform to the world is to conform to those under the rule of the **“prince of this world”** (John 12:31), that is Satan. Since we naturally do conform, we must make a conscious effort to avoid conformance. It is not easy to be set apart. It brings hostility and ridicule from those of the world. **“They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you”** (I Pet. 4:4). They desire that all conform, because the saints who do not conform **“are a sign to them that they will be destroyed”** (Phil. 1:28). We convict them by pure lives set apart for God, and they resent this.

It is **“the world”** that we are to avoid being conformed to. Note **“the world”** is different than the earth. The earth is the planet on which we live. **“The world”**, as used in the Bible, is the secular, carnal system of existence that controls fallen man. John describes it as **“the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does”** (I John 2:16). We are not to **“love the world”** because **“if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”** (I John 2:15). Also, **“anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”** (James 4:4). Though we are commanded not to love the world or to be friends of the world, nevertheless, **“God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son”** (John 3:16). Despite the fact that the world has turned its back on Him and followed evil, God, in his longsuffering, still has love for the world, enough love to give His Son in order to bring the world back to Him.

Paul says: **“but be transformed”**. Yes, it is hard to avoid conforming to the world, **“but”** we are given an alternative. The world would tell us that because of God’s prohibitions, we are somehow missing out on the joy of life. But Paul points out: **“When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?”** (Rom. 6:20-21). Godless joy is fleeting. It may be satisfying for the moment, but later it brings shame. In the book of Job, this is summed up: **“Surely you know how it has been from of old, ever since man was placed on the earth, that the mirth of the wicked is brief, the joy of the godless lasts but a moment”** (Job 20:4-5). In contrast, Jesus says: **“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete”** (John 15:10-11).

Paul says to **“be transformed by the renewing of your mind”**.



Notice that he does not say to transform ourselves, but to **“be transformed”**. The transformation does not originate in ourselves, but is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes to Titus: **“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit”** (Titus 3:5). Our role in the process is to seek and to yield to the renewal by the Spirit.

It is the **“mind”** that is to be renewed. Clearly, as can be seen from his writings, Paul does not view Christianity as a mindless, merely emotional religion, but a thinking religion. The mind is involved. Paul used his intellect to proclaim and defend his faith: **“He reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks”** (Acts 17:17). Likewise, Peter says to give **“the reason for the hope that you have”** (I Peter 3:15).

But, unfortunately, our minds have been corrupted by this fallen world and thus, need renewing. Note that it is the renewing of our minds that will lead to our transformation. **“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace”** (Rom. 8:6).

Going on, Paul says: **“Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is”**. Thus, the result of our transformation is the acceptance and approval of God’s will. One cannot know the complete will of God for his life without being transformed. Conversely, if you are transformed, you will know what God’s will is. If you live for God and not for the world, seek God and not the things of the world, then the will of God for your life will be revealed to you. **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight”** (Prov. 3:5-6).

Once you know God’s will, Paul is confident that you will **“approve”** of it, for he says that you will **“test and approve”** it. The extent to which you desire to please yourself rather than to do God’s will is the extent to which you still belong to the world. But if you would only **“be transformed”** so that you would be able to **“test”** the will of God, you will certainly **“approve”** of it. The Psalmist says: **“Taste and see that the LORD is good”** (Ps. 34:8).

Indeed, God’s will is **“good, pleasing and perfect”**. His will is **“good”** because it is always in our best interest. If we are in God’s will, then all things will work together for our good (cf. Rom. 8:28). God loves us; thus, His will is for our good.

His will is **“pleasing”** to us also. Some hold back giving themselves totally to God because they are afraid that He will have them do something that is not **“pleasing”** to them (such as be a missionary in a remote jungle). Christ, however, points out: **“Which of you, if his son asks for**

**bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!"** (Matt. 7:9-11). Certainly, God does not send His children into service for which they are unprepared. Indeed, if you are involved in service that you do not desire to do, odds are that it is not God's will for you.

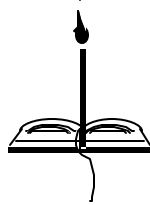
It is God's "**perfect**" will that we shall "**test and approve**". God has a permissive will and a "**perfect**" will. God is sovereign over all but, clearly, much happens in the world that is not in accordance with His perfect will. For instance, man sins. It is not within God's perfect will that man sin; but, if God prevented man from sinning, man would lose his free will to choose between good and evil. It is part of God's perfect will that man have free will. Thus, because God desires for man to have a free will, He allows man to sin. So, God permits man to sin; man's sin is within God's permissive will.

Man's sin, of course, is not within God's perfect will. It is God's "**perfect**" will that we shall "**test and approve**" when we are transformed. It is God's "**perfect**" will that we should strive for. God, in His patience, bears with us when we serve Him half-heartedly. He bears with us when we have one foot in the kingdom and one foot in the world. He bears with us when we fall short of His perfect will. Seek God's will! Seek God's perfect will in your life. Oh, how we take advantage of God's leniency! We fail to realize that when we step out of God's perfect will, it is we who miss out. God's will is, indeed, "**good, pleasing and perfect**". Taste and see!

How can we find God's perfect will for our life? "**Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened**" (Matt. 7:7-8).

So, Heavenly Father, show us your perfect will. Put it in our hearts and guide us by Your Spirit so that we may never stray from the path You have set before us. Give us the strength and desire to avoid conforming to this world. Transform us by Your Spirit; continually renew our minds. Purge our minds of the wisdom of the world; fill our minds with the knowledge of You. By the power in the name of Jesus we pray these things. Amen.

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## New Testament Study: James 1:9-18

### The Humble Rich and the Exalted Poor

<sup>9</sup>The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. <sup>10</sup>But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup>For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

In this seemingly strange passage, James describes the proper attitude that the “rich” and “not-so-rich” Christians should have. I put quotes around these designations because the “rich” in the eyes of the world are not necessarily the same as the rich as viewed by the child of God. That is what this passage is all about. The way Christians view things should be different than the way those of the world view things. For instance, Paul describes the believer as **“genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything”** (II Cor. 6:8-10).

Note that James says the believer is to **“take pride in”** either situation, whether humble or rich. We should be content with our circumstances, whatever they may be, realizing that it is God who has dealt us our lot: **“Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure”** (Psalm 16:5). We should be as Paul: **“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want”** (Phil. 4:12).

Unfortunately, many times, even as Christians, we complain when we cannot “get ahead” in the world. We desire the riches of the world, we dream of that big lottery win, we even murmur that we are being persecuted because we are short worldly riches. Why do we do this? Have we forgotten the riches of knowing Christ? As Paul, we should **“consider**

**everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 3:8). What could be better than being **“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God”** (I Pet. 2:9)? What kind of witness for Christ are we when we complain about not having the riches of the world?

We must have the proper attitude concerning our circumstances in the world. We may be naked now, but we will be clothed in **“fine linen”** (Rev. 19:8); we may be hungry now, but **“the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples”** (Isa. 25:6); we may be thirsty now, but as Christ says, **“whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst”** (John 4:14); we may be **“in humble circumstances”** now, but we will get **“a crown that will last forever”** (I Cor. 9:25) [Manton, 65].

Our desire for worldly riches is all the more surprising in light of the well known, well documented woes of the rich. One cannot read a newspaper without reading of their broken marriages, broken lives, bondage to drugs and alcohol, and bondage to sin. More importantly, Christ Himself said: **“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”** (Matt. 19:24). It is difficult for a rich man to humble himself, even before the God of the universe. He feels self-sufficient. **“The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall”** (Prov. 18:11). But, **“whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf”** (Prov. 11:28). Unfortunately, few of the rich give their lives to Christ. Security in this world often leads to loss in the next. Paul tells Timothy to **“command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment”** (I Tim. 6:17). Thus, the rich of the world must beware, for the riches of the world are a trap.

As James says, the **“one who is rich should take pride in his low position”**. In other words, the rich man’s true glory will be found in his humility. He is to see his riches in the world as a danger, even a disadvantage. The riches threaten to puff him up, to lull him into thinking that he doesn’t need God. But, as Christ says, **“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”** (Mark 8:36).

The rich man must realize that **“he will pass away like a wild flower”**. Indeed, he and his riches are fleeting. For instance, the rich man in Jesus’ parable in Luke 12 discovered this. He grew confident in his good crop and dreamt of building bigger and better barns in which he was to store all the grain and the goods he was to accumulate. He pondered: **“And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid**

**up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’”** Then Christ summed up: **“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God”** (Luke 12:16-21).

James likens the unfulfilled existence of the rich man to the beauty of a flower, beautiful for a season but fading. “The fairest things are most fading” [Manton, 70]. This is contrasted to our riches and our inheritance as Christians, for God has **“given us new birth...into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade”** (I Pet. 1:3-4).

James finally points out that the rich man will **“fade away even while he goes about his business”**. Indeed, the rich, in order to keep their riches, more often than not put more effort in going about their own business, than the business of God. Oh, that they would seek God as persistently!

## **Trials and Temptings**

<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

<sup>13</sup>When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup>but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

<sup>15</sup>Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James goes on to talk about the two types of testings that the child of God experiences. We are tested by trial and by tempting, by stress and by seduction, by adversity and by allurements. The first type is approved and even, at times, ordained by God for the purpose of our edification. The second type is opposed by God and is from Satan for the purpose of destruction.

In verse 12, James teaches that the man who withstands Godly trials is blessed. The trials ordained by God are edifying to us; they strengthen us, causing us to grow as children of God. Our natural reaction to trials, even to those from God, is to grumble. But James is telling us that we should consider that we are **“blessed”** through the Godly trials. In fact, we should consider it a privilege that the God of the universe loves us as

children and desires that we grow spiritually. The writer of Hebrews (quoting Proverbs) says: **“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son”** (Heb. 12:5-6 from Prov. 3:11-12). Later, he goes on and says: **“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it”** (Heb. 12:10-11). So, there are rewards for our endurance and growth through Godly trials. As James says, we will **“receive the crown of life”**; and again, the writer of Hebrews points out that the endurance **“produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.”**

Seeing that the result of these trials is great rewards, we should not grumble, but rejoice. Afflictions and trials should not make the true child of God miserable, because his reward and riches are not in this world (see the discussion above on verses 9-11). On the contrary, at times, the trials will bring about rejoicing and increased happiness when the child of God sees God’s work in bringing him through the trial. Had there been no Egypt, there would have been no parting of the Red Sea; had there been no Goliath, there would have been no slaying of the giant; had there been no chains, there would have been no breaking of the prison walls; had there been no cross, there would have been no resurrection.

Going on, notice that the **“crown”** that we will receive is a crown **“that God has promised”**. There are two implications of this. First, since **“God has promised”** it, we are assured of receiving it. God always keeps His promises. As Solomon pointed out in his dedication of the temple: **“Not one word has failed of all the promises He gave through His servant Moses”** (I Kings 8:56). And Paul says: **“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ”** (II Cor. 1:20). Second, since **“God has promised”** the crown of life, it does not come by our own merit. **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”** (Eph. 2:8-9).

Those who will receive **“the crown of life”** are described as **“those who love Him”**. We are identified as those who love Him (rather than those who serve Him or those who obey Him) because **“love is the fulfillment of the law”** (Rom. 13:10). When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”** (Matt. 22:37-40).

In verse 13, James begins to speak about the second type of testing,

which is the temptation to sin. He points out, in no uncertain terms, that God is not the originator of this type of testing; thus, we should not blame God for the temptations that we face. God is holy. For Him, temptation has no draw, evil has no attraction.

Man blames God in various ways for his own sin. Sometimes he says, "God made me like this". Some men will say that because they have a proclivity for a certain sin, somehow they are not to blame, and, in fact, should be pitied when they practice it. But this proclivity is not from God; it is from man's fallen nature. God made man to be holy and in His image, but He also gave man a free will. Man, in his free will, chose to succumb to Satan's temptations and ignore God's warnings. Thus, man and his fallen nature are to blame for his proclivity to sin.

Man also blames God for his own sin by saying "He put me in this environment". They blame their upbringing or socio-economic circumstances or peer group influences, etc. But this is a poor excuse. Every man faces temptations. Satan leaves no one unattended. Rich and poor, white and black, pagan and Christian all face temptations tailored by Satan for their situation. Note James says "**each one**" is tempted. No man is exempt from temptation, only one man was free from sin.

Man often puts the blame for his sin on others. Adam said to God, "**The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree**" (Gen. 3:12). And Pilate said to the Jews: "**I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility**" (Matt. 27:24). However, excuses do not hold with God. After making the excuse, your sin is still your sin and, to a righteous God, all sins deserve punishment. Rather than make excuses, it is much better to confess the sin to God and let the blood of Christ make a clean slate of things, for "**if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness**" (I John 1:9).

James goes on to state the true cause of sin: our "**own evil desire**". So, the blame for sin lies upon us. Not even Satan is to blame for our sin. Yes, Satan tempts us, but we are "**dragged away and enticed**" because we ourselves harbor evil desires. It is we and we alone who are accountable for our sin.

James uses the words "**his own**" when speaking of a man's evil desires because each man has weaknesses specific to himself. Some are especially vulnerable to lust, some to pride, some to anger, some to covet, some to idol worship, some to theft, some to adultery, some to murder. Let no man think that he has been dealt a worse lot than others because of his specific weaknesses. On the other hand, let no man condemn another man for his weaknesses, for it is only by God's grace that the same weakness does not torment him. Rather, we should say, as Paul did: "**By the grace of God I am what I am**" (I Cor. 15:10). No, we should not condemn the

weakness, but strive to help each other overcome our weaknesses through friendship, through discipleship, and, most importantly, through prayer.

Each one is **“dragged away”** and **“enticed”**. Temptation works in many ways: sometimes by force (**“dragged away”**), sometimes more subtly (**“enticed”**). So, we see in our lives, sometimes we plunge violently, recklessly into sin; sometimes we are led subtly by our desires, not consciously realizing it, until we look up and find ourselves entrenched. So, as Peter warns: **“Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away”** (II Pet. 3:17).

The life-cycle of sin consists of more than just the sinful act. James says: **“Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”** So, sin’s life-cycle consists of first desire then sin then death; first the conception then the act then the result. What begins as a desire, many times is brought forth into meditation. The meditation in the heart and the mind overflows into one’s conversation. And then, what one meditates on and speaks about results in action, action turns into sinful behavior, and sinful behavior must be punished by death.

Knowing this, we should make every effort to be victorious over the first step in the cycle, the desire, so that we are not led into the much more difficult battles after the **“desire has given birth”**. As Paul exhorts Timothy: **“Flee the evil desires of youth”** (II Tim. 2:22). Those who flee have a better chance to succeed in resisting temptation. Joseph fled and succeeded (Gen. 39); David stayed and failed (II Sam. 11).

God, by His grace, helps us to avoid sin. For instance, God has promised to keep us from any temptation that is more than we are able to resist: **“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it”** (I Cor. 10:13).

Also, many times, though we have the evil desire, God keeps us from the opportunity to sin. Praise God for the lack of opportunity! How many of us would have fallen miserably if given the opportunity? Real temptation comes when real opportunity comes. This is when we are truly tested. Again, some succeed and flee, like Joseph; some fail and stay, like David. Many pray for wealth or good looks or power; yet, they do not know that they are actually praying for more opportunity to be tempted! Praise God for your humble circumstances, for, in them, you are not given the opportunity to depend on your wealth instead of on God. Praise God for your ordinary looks, for, because of them, you are not given the opportunity to consummate the lusts of your flesh. Praise God for your position of service rather than leadership, for because of it, you are not given the oppor-

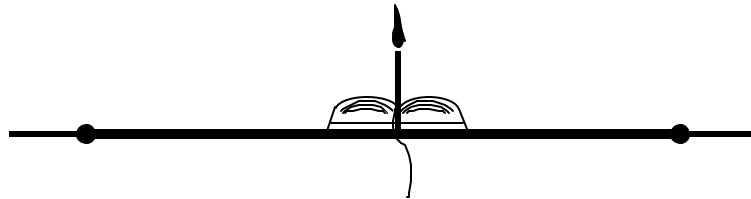


tunity to be puffed up with pride and lord it over people.

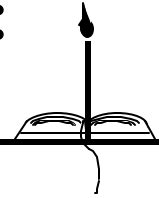
Furthermore, God will, at times, hinder us even when we are given the opportunity. He kept Abimelech from adultery: **“I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her”** (Gen. 20:6). He kept David from murder, as David told Abigail: **“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands”** (I Sam. 25:32-33). He will keep Israel from idolatry: **“Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them”** (Hos. 2:6-7).

Though God, by His grace, helps us to avoid sin, temptation continually presents itself. Be on guard! The most important prayer in this regard that we can pray is: **“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”** (Matt. 6:13).

Our Father, we thank You and praise You for the new birth that You have chosen to give us by Your grace. We offer the firstfruits of our lives to You to use as You would. We praise You that all that is good comes from You, that You never change so that we can depend on Your unfailing love. We praise You that You have assigned us our portion according to Your good purpose. Help us to rest in it, knowing the glorious inheritance that You have kept in heaven for us. We praise You, thank You and ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.



# A Study in Psalms: Psalm 2



## Psalm 2 – The World in Rebellion

<sup>1</sup>Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
<sup>2</sup>The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
against the LORD and against His Anointed One.  
<sup>3</sup>“Let us break their chains,” they say,  
“and throw off their fetters.”

<sup>4</sup>The One enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.  
<sup>5</sup>Then He rebukes them in His anger  
and terrifies them in His wrath, saying,  
<sup>6</sup>“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

<sup>7</sup>I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:  
He said to me, “You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father,  
<sup>8</sup>Ask of me,  
and I will make the nations your inheritance,  
the ends of the earth your possession,  
<sup>9</sup>You will rule them with an iron scepter;  
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

<sup>10</sup>Therefore, you kings, be wise;  
be warned, you rulers of the earth.  
<sup>11</sup>Serve the LORD with fear  
and rejoice with trembling.  
<sup>12</sup>Kiss the Son, lest He be angry  
and you be destroyed in your way,  
for His wrath can flare up in a moment.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

Psalm 2 is the first Messianic Psalm in the book of Psalms, meaning that it contains a prophecy about the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It prophesies

the coming kingdom, with Christ as King, and warns that those who do not bow to Him will be judged. No author for this Psalm is mentioned in the book of Psalms, but Peter ascribes this Psalm to David when he cites it in Acts 4.

This Psalm is organized into the following four sections: 1. The rebellion against the Messiah's kingdom by the rulers of the earth (v. 1-3); 2. God the Father's reply in word and deed (v. 4-6); 3. The coming King and Kingdom described by the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Himself (v. 7-9); 4. An exhortation to submission to the coming King by the Holy Spirit (v. 10-12).

The Psalmist begins with the question **"Why?"**, concerning the reason that the people and the nations rebel against the Lord. Note that no answer to this question is given. In fact, there is no logical reason or explanation as to why people knowingly rebel against the God of the universe, their Creator, and even their Savior. These questions can be asked of multitudes in history. Before, during and after the time of Christ, people have united against the Lord.

Many who would not unite on other grounds, unite against the Lord. For instance, during Christ's life, the Sadducees and the Pharisees were often united in their opposition to Christ. Though doctrinally they could not agree on very much, they often tried to turn the crowds against Christ with their questions on doctrine. Herod and Pilate are another unlikely pair of allies against Christ. Concerning the day of Christ's trial, Luke informs us: **"That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies"** (Luke 23:12). According to Peter, the prophecy in this Psalm is partially fulfilled by Herod and Pilate's opposition to Christ. In a prayer, after citing the first two verses of this Psalm, Peter points out: **"Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed"** (Acts 4:27).

Peter cited this Psalm in Acts 4 in order to comfort Christ's disciples. He was making the point that the opposition to Christ and His disciples was prophesied by God. Peter went on to say in his prayer that Herod and Pilate **"did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen"** (Acts 4:28). So also, we should realize that God is in control, even when we face opposition.

The ultimate fulfillment of the prophesied rebellion in this Psalm is the rebellion of the earth during the end times. The book of Revelation speaks about the spirits of demons that **"go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty...Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon"** (Rev. 16:14,16).

In verse 3, the rebels state the motive for their opposition. They view God's law as **"chains"** and **"fetters"** that they want to **"break off"** and **"throw away"**. In this, they show their ignorance. God's law is just, holy, righteous, fair and, for those who keep it, profitable, edifying and life-giving. **"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple"** (Ps. 19:7). **"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good"** (Rom. 7:12). **"We know that the law is good if a man uses it properly"** (I Tim. 1:8). Nevertheless, the rebels see it as **"chains"** and **"fetters"**.

Interestingly, there is a section of this Psalm devoted to each person of the Trinity. In verses 4 through 6, we have God the Father's response to the rebellion. The Father here is depicted as the One in control. First, He shows contempt for the rebellion, then He shows His wrath, then He states His sovereignty over the situation.

Conspiracies against the God of the universe are ridiculous and foolish. Thus, the Father shows His contempt for the rebellion by laughing and scoffing. In a similar passage in Psalm 37, the reason for God's mocking is given: **"But the Lord laughs at the wicked, for He knows their day is coming"** (Ps. 37:13). God knows His own power and ability to quash any rebellion. However, He refrains from judging the rebellious because He is patient and longsuffering, giving the rebels a chance to repent. Nevertheless, at the appointed time, God will judge those conspiring against Him when He **"rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath"**.

His judgment will be a confirmation of His anointing of Christ, for during the judgment He says: **"I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill"**. Note that the Father says **"I have installed"**. Jesus Christ came to earth with the full backing and authority of the Father. Note also, Christ is described by the Father as **"my King"**, for Christ was anointed by God and will be sent by God to rule the earth.

In verses 7 through 9, the Son, Jesus Christ, relates the commission that the Father gave Him to reign as King over the earth. It is interesting that Christ, as the **"Word"** (cf. John 1:1), reveals the secret counsel between Him and His Father.

The Father said to Him: **"You are my Son; today I have become your Father"**. The **"today"** that is referred to is, I believe, the day of Christ's baptism. On that day, Christ was revealed to the world as the Son of God: **"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased'"** (Matt. 3:17).

The Father says to His Son: **"Ask of me"**. God's promises are appropriated through prayer, even the promises made to the Son. So also, in order for us to appropriate God's promises to us, we are to ask of Him.

Significantly, Christ needed only to ask in order to establish His kingdom. The promise stood at least from the time of Christ's baptism (the "**today**"). Thus, if He asked, Christ did not have to endure the cross in order to reign, but, by His love, He chose to endure the cross for our salvation.

Christ will "**rule with an iron scepter**". His rule will be just. God's commandments will be the law of the land. Injustice will not be tolerated; immorality will not be permitted. The rebellious, He will dash "**to pieces like pottery**".

Interestingly, "**pottery**" is a symbol for God's creatures. Isaiah says: "**Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand**" (Isa. 64:8). And Paul asks: "**Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?**" (Rom. 9:21). Yes, and if the pottery rebels, the potter certainly has the right to dash it to pieces.

In the last section, verses 10 through 12, the Holy Spirit, through David, warns the rebels to repent, warning them of the judgment. This is in line with one of the purposes of the Holy Spirit. He is to "**convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment**" (John 16:8).

He exhorts the kings to "**be wise**". Again, rebellion against the God of the universe is foolish and will lead to death. Also, the kings and the rulers will have no excuse for what they are doing because they have been "**warned**".

Significantly, God gives the rebels a chance to repent. He offers mercy even to those in open rebellion against Him. Moreover, He also tells them how to obtain it. First, they are to "**serve the Lord with fear**". It is the clear indication of scripture that we are to "**fear**" the Lord. "**The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the one you are to dread**" (Isa. 8:13); "**Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man**" (Ecces. 12:13); "**Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear**" (I Pet. 1:17); etc. Our lives should reflect that we fear the Lord. If we truly fear the Lord, if we truly understand His power and sovereignty, if we truly understand His wrath, we will do what He says. Here, the Psalmist says to "**serve**" the Lord with fear. We should understand that it is our privilege to serve the Lord. Too many people think that they are doing God a favor by serving Him. Take note! "**Serve the Lord with fear**".

Second, in order to receive mercy, the rebels are to "**rejoice with trembling**". Even in our rejoicing, we are to, having the awareness of the

holiness of God, tremble with fear. To **“rejoice with trembling”** is to recognize God’s mercy on one side (thus, the rejoicing) and His wrath on the other (thus, the trembling). While in the midst of the blessings of God, we may forget that we are being blessed by a God that demands righteousness and reverence. Remember to **“rejoice with trembling”**.

Third, the rebels are to **“kiss the Son”**. The kiss is a symbol of affection, homage and subjection. Thus, we are to love Jesus, worship Jesus, and serve Jesus. It is no disgrace, even for a king, to **“kiss the Son”**; it is no disgrace, even for the rulers of the earth, to submit to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

If these solicitations to receive His mercy are ignored, the Lord will **“be angry”** and the rebels will **“be destroyed”**. Rejected grace brings God’s anger and the greater penalty. To reject God’s free gift of salvation is to insult God and to denigrate the sacrifice Christ made. Indeed, God’s anger is just.

Note that **“His wrath can flare up in a moment”**. Be ready! The end can come at any time. The day of God’s wrath is near. **“While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety’, destruction will come on them suddenly”** (I Thess. 5:3).

But don’t worry, as long as you **“take refuge in Him”**, you will be **“blessed”**, even through the day of God’s wrath. The Psalm ends with a blessing. God always emphasizes His grace and mercy over His wrath and judgment. God’s wrath is called **“His strange work”** (Isa. 28:21). When God describes Himself to Moses, again His mercy and grace are emphasized: **“The LORD , the LORD , the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished”** (Ex. 34:6,7).

Lord, thank you for the blessings of taking refuge in you: cleansing from sin, delivery from wrath, communion with God, everlasting life. We praise You that You have clearly stated how to escape Your wrath and receive Your blessings. By Your Spirit, teach us to fear You so that we may be driven to serve You. Forgive us in our rebellion, for we kiss the Son, we love Jesus and worship Him as our Lord and Savior. In His name we pray these things, Amen.



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### **The Testings of Life**

"God, through His providence, so arranges human affairs that everything in life is a test of character. If one is rich, his wealth will try his humility. If one is poor, he will soon show whether he is contented. If a bribe is held out, it will evince how far covetousness prevails. If one is put into office (like Judas), he himself may soon see whether his integrity is unspotted. If God leads the Israelites forty years through the wilderness, it is to humble them and to prove them (Deut. 8:2). If He feeds them with manna, it is for the same purpose (Deut. 8:16). If ambassadors are sent to Hezekiah, it is 'to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart' (II Chron. 32:31)."

-- William Plumer (1802-1880)

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