

People Same Now as Then

Part 1.

This article is about some of the people (especially their character traits) who are to be found within the pages of the bible that all of us, even thousands of years later, can still identify with as regards our own relationship with the Lord God.

*Even now, as technologically advanced as modern civilisation has become, people can still identify completely with most of (if not all of) the character traits and the emotions of the personalities who are to be found written about within the pages of this thousands of years old book. **This being the case, we shall find that the contents of this book concerning the characteristics of the people mentioned within it, has just as much relevance to us all now as it would have done had we been living and reading about these events when they were first recorded all those years ago!***

In this article I have deliberately omitted commenting at length on the greatest `character` of all, Jesus Christ, because Jesus was, at the time, God in the flesh, Emmanuel, God with us, and as such we should all be aspiring to be as He was, and indeed still is. (but obviously no longer flesh and blood) This article concerns ordinary people like ourselves but who,

because of what they did or achieved, managed to become extra-ordinary in the eyes of our God, and this is something that we can still all attain to.

And so, let's begin our trawl through the bible, through the pages of the holy scriptures and look at some of the lives of its very varied characters, the personality traits and emotions of whom are still *very* evident in *all* of us no matter how 'superior' some of us *assume* ourselves to be!

Where better to start than right at the very beginning of humankind's history in the garden of Eden, with the newly created Adam, the early history of whom is perhaps a cautionary tale for all bachelors. Adam appeared to be doing just fine on his own, he had everything that he needed, he was well fed, warm, carefree, he had no idea or conception of sin and therefore he had no gnawing guilt within himself, thus enabling him to enjoy having perfect peace of mind and a happy, almost child-like contentment. Add to all this the fact that he had the most powerful, loving and knowledgeable being that ever was or ever will be as his Father, teacher and protector and, well, you get the picture. So now let's take a look at this state of bliss from the pages of the biblical scriptures starting with **Genesis 1: 26**. 'And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have authority over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth'. and **verses 29-31**. 'And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creeps upon the earth, wherein is the breath of life, I have given every green herb for food,: and it was so. And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day'. Now let's read from the next chapter of the book of Genesis, **Genesis 2: 8-10**. 'And the Lord God planted a garden, eastward in Eden, and there he placed the man (Adam) whom He had created. And from out of the ground the Lord made to grow every tree that is pleasant to look upon and also good for food; the tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, as was the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided and became four rivers'. and **verses 15-17**. 'And so the Lord God took Adam and placed him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to care for it. And the Lord God commanded Adam saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it, for in the day that you eat of that tree, you shall surely die'. From the reading of those lines of scripture we can appreciate that Adam was to spend his time looking after and reaping the fruits of a 'tropical paradise'. Just think of what that garden of Eden must have looked like. Bring to mind the most beautiful garden(s) that you have ever seen, and then imagine what God would have created! Of course Adam didn't know just how beautiful it was, how could he? he had nothing else to compare it with, **yet!** The Lord even paraded in front of Adam, all of the animals that He had created, and invited him to give them names, we can read of this in **Genesis 2: 20**. 'And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but as for Adam, there was not found any that were compatible to him'. Now as for the last portion of that scripture, things, as we now know, were to change. The Lord God never intended that Adam would be some kind of self-reproducing 'Hermaphrodite', and so now He put into effect the next part of His great plan, let's read **Genesis 2:18**. 'And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man

should be alone, I will make someone compatible to him, to help him`. and **verses 21-22**. `And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept, and the Lord took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh where it had been. And from the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, He made a woman, (Eve) and introduced her to the man`. And so happy days, Adam now had a female counterpart/companion, and they began to live their lives together just as innocent children would. They had no idea of the potential that existed between them if they were to come together as man and wife, they had no idea that they were naked, after all, what *were* clothes? They had no idea of these things, that is of course until Satan entered into their lives. Satan, who must have appeared to the woman, Eve, as a dazzling, effervescent, fun-loving creature, who knew of exciting things that the Lord God had yet to tell them. But the Lord knew what Satan was really like, which is why he is described within the scriptures as a `serpent`. And so Satan *easily* managed to tempt Eve to disobey the Lord God`s command *not* to eat of the one forbidden fruit within the garden of Eden, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan even went so far as to call the Lord God a liar (although not in such a direct way) when he *opposed* the fact that if they ate of the fruit then they would both surely die, as we can read of in this next portion of scripture, **Genesis 3: 4-5**. `And the serpent (Satan) said to the woman, You shall not surely die. For God does know that in the day that you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil`. Let`s read on, **Genesis 3: 6-7**. `And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make a person wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also to her husband (Adam) with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and so they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings`.

Now, in some mere seconds of time, something quite extraordinary has happened. Adam and Eve are no longer the innocent `children` that they once were just moments before. They are now beginning to experience feelings and emotions and desires that they could never have imagined existed before they disobeyed the Lord God, and ate of that forbidden fruit.

And so, finding themselves consumed with guilt and shame, what do they do? Well, like any naughty child would, they try and hide themselves from their parents (the Lord God) in order to cover their shame and keep secret that which they had done, but with no success, they are soon, and easily, found out, just like the child who`s mouth is covered in chocolate but denies having eaten any! Let`s read from **Genesis 3: 8-13**. `And they heard the voice of the Lord God as He walked in the garden in the cool of the day. And so Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord, amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called out to Adam, and said to him, Where are you? And Adam said, I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and so I hid myself. And the Lord said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree whereof I commanded you that you should not eat? And Adam said, The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said to Eve, What is this that you have done? And Eve said, The serpent tricked me, and I did eat`. What a lot of finger pointing went on between the two of them! but for the moment, let`s concentrate on Adam. I wonder, how many husbands in these modern times in which we live, even six thousand years or so after the events in the garden of Eden, still feel deep down inside that their life was so much

simpler and carefree and even `happier` than before they met and married the woman who is now their wife? Is anybody reading this article one of them? And if so, do you *always* think to blame your wife when marital problems arise and then having had time to reflect, do you reconsider and then think that maybe it isn't *all* your wife's fault, and so then you begin to apportion blame by imagining that `fate` or even the Lord God had something to do with it? Well perhaps, just like Adam, you *were* `happier` than before you were married, but think on, if Adam had stayed on his own, he would still be on his own, happy as can be, living a life of child-like innocence in the paradise of the garden of Eden, and you and I wouldn't know anything at all about it because we and the rest of the people of this world would not even exist! What has to be, has to be, and we all have to deal with the consequences when it happens.

I think that Adam's relationship/behavioural conduct with the Lord God is beyond anything that I could in totality, accurately describe. But one thing that I can perceive from it is this, and it is a personality trait that Adam had and that still exists in every human being that has walked and is walking this earth, (with the exception of Jesus Christ!) and it is the trait of `finger pointing`, laying the blame, in part or in total, at somebody else's feet. This is often accompanied by a feeling of outrage and unfairness due to having been stupid enough to be found out and of having to take all the blame for that which was after all, a joint venture. So now, not only do we have somebody who has been found guilty of committing a crime or misdemeanour, but also of betraying their fellow `criminals`!

The atheist or pagan if found guilty of a crime will try and lay the blame for it somewhere other than with themselves by quoting circumstances, upbringing, deprivation etc., as the root cause. On the other hand many God-fearing and `god`-fearing people will at some time in their lives, have confessed in their minds or in their prayers something along the lines of; `Yes I have sinned Lord, but You know that it wasn't truly me that did it. I'm not like that, I was led astray by (whomsoever) and I wasn't in my right mind at the time, so you see it really wasn't me who did it at all`.

Yes, feeling guilty of something is a hard thing for a human being to have to live with on their own, far better for them to have the comfort that somebody else *should* take all the blame or at the very least part of it, than for themselves alone to have to suffer the consequences. In this respect Adam had Eve to blame, and Eve had Satan to blame.

Moving on from the garden of Eden, let's have a look at some other people in the pages of the bible that we can still relate to, we'll start with with Moses.

The Lord God was to choose Moses to be the leader of his, but more importantly, the Lord's, people. Moses was a Hebrew by birth but was found abandoned as a baby and raised, as a *very* high-ranking Egyptian, by Pharaoh's daughter. Let's read from **Exodus 2: 10**. `And the child (Moses) grew, and she (the wet nurse, his real mother) brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son`. In the years leading up to and into young adulthood Moses was endowed with all the privileges and power that came with being Egyptian royalty. But in spite of all of his given status and authority, Moses was by nature a very humble man. He was not given to pushing himself or his ideas upon others, he was not assertive and he was not insistent or persistent in wanting his own way as opposed to the ways of others. But in spite of his amicable, natural character traits, characteristics that he did not `naturally` possess were soon to be demanded of Moses by the Lord God. At this point it must be remembered, Moses' change of character was not because he wanted to do his own will, but instead he knew

that he had to do the will of the Lord God as per instructed to do it.

Now, if we think about it, all of this enforced `rebellion` by Moses against all that he had been brought up to obey and respect must have been so difficult for him to commit himself to, after all, Pharaoh was in effect his `grandfather` and the rest of the royal household were seen as his family. The Egyptian princes, including his one time best friend the next in line to the Egyptian throne, were his `brothers`.

So, how was the Lord to prise Moses away from all that he was not destined to be? Well, it all began with Moses witnessing the extremely violent and sadistic mis-treatment of a Hebrew slave and with his stepping in to intervene, but his intervention was so tempered with rage that he killed the offending Egyptian task-master. Moses then tried to conceal that which he had done, but unbeknown to him the incident had been witnessed and the witness told Moses in no uncertain terms about that which he had seen, then Moses knew that the `secret` was out and that it would only be a matter of time before Pharaoh and his court, even the whole of Egypt, got to know about that which he had done. And so, Moses, knowing of the seriousness of the situation that he was in, fled into the land of Midian where he befriended a priest, married the priest`s daughter and happily settled down to raise a family.

And there the story might well have ended, but it was not to be so, the Lord had important work for Moses to do, and a *lot* more personal stress and trouble lay ahead for him. In time, the old Pharaoh died and a new one, the one that Moses had grown up with and looked upon as a brother, took his place on the throne of Egypt. Under the rulership of this new Pharaoh, all of the Hebrew slaves were made to work even harder than they had before, and the cries of their suffering did not go unnoticed by the Lord God who then decreed that it was time for their slavery, under Egyptian rule, to end. And so, cutting the story short, the Lord commanded Moses to leave his settled family life and return to Egypt and confront the Pharaoh and demand that he release all of the Hebrews from bondage and allow them to leave Egypt. Let`s read these words of the Lord which He spoke to Moses in **Exodus 3: 9-10.** `Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come to Me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring forth My people, the children of Israel, from out of Egypt`. But Moses was not at all excited or eager to partake of the work that the Lord had set out for him to do. Quite apart from the fact that this work went `against the grain` of his character, he doubted very much, try as he might, that he was even capable of performing it in order to achieve any worthwhile outcome, and he told the Lord of his doubts as we can read of in **Exodus 3: 11.** `And Moses said to God, Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?` and **verse 13.** `And Moses said to God, Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you; and then they shall say to me, What is His name? then what shall I say to them?` Poor Moses, he really did not want to do what the Lord required of him, he tried to put before the Lord every reason that he could think of in order to convince Him that he, Moses, was *not* the man for the job! But the Lord would have none of it. **Exodus 3: 14.** `And God said to Moses, (tell them) I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, I AM, has sent me to you`. But still, Moses was not convinced as we can read of in these next lines of scripture, **Exodus 4: 1.** `And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor will they listen to my voice, for they will say, the Lord has not appeared

to you`. The Lord then works a miracle for Moses to show him that he too will be able to perform such things in order to win over the trust of the children of Israel. But still, Moses came up with reasons as to why he was not convinced that he was going to be able to perform that which the Lord required of him because he imagined that he could see too many obstacles beginning to appear in his way. **Exodus 4: 10-13.** `And Moses said to the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since You have spoken to your servant, but rather I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the Lord said to him, Who has made the mouth of man? or Who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing or the blind? have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth, and shall teach you what to say. And Moses said, O my Lord, send I pray You, some other person`. Well, on hearing this the Lord loses His patience with Moses as the next line of scripture tells us, **verse 14.** `And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses. . .`. Eventually, as we know, Moses, the self-doubting and reluctant `hero`, went and did as the Lord demanded of him. This then culminated in **40 years** of himself and all of the continually complaining and ungrateful children of Israel, seemingly pointlessly having to wander and meander through a never-ending, boring landscape of desert and rocks. This finally came to an end when all of the ungrateful complainers and mutterers had lived out their lives and died, not being deemed worthy by the Lord to enter into the `promised land`, a land so lush and fertile, a land which was `flowing with milk and honey`. And so, did Moses get his reward for all that he had endured because he had done the Lord`s will? did he get his chance to resume his family life in this promised land? not a bit of it! Why not? well because he had failed the Lord, in full view of the children of Israel, on one very specific point. I`ll let the scriptures tell the story, **Deuteronomy 32: 48-52.** `And the Lord spoke to Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get you up into this mountain Abarim, to mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is opposite Jericho, and behold the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel for a possession: and die in the mount where you go up, and be gathered to your people; as Aaron your brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered to his people. Because you trespassed against Me amongst the children of Israel, at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, because you sanctified Me not in the midst of the children of Israel. Yet you shall see the land before you, but you shall not go there to the land which I give to the children of Israel`. Not fair? Well consider this. It would appear that Moses not only sinned before the Lord but that he did it in full view or at least in full knowledge of the thousands of the children of Israel. This being the case, the lord had to eventually `punish` Moses for his sin, otherwise the children of Israel would have considered the Lord to be partial, and we should all know and realise that this is not the case, the Lord is not partial towards anybody as regards the consequence of sin, and He never will be!

Let`s read **Romans 2: 11-12.** `For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many that have sinned without knowledge of the law, shall also perish without knowledge of the law, and as many that have sinned and have known the law, shall be judged by the law`. And from the book of **Colossians 3:25.** `But he that does wrong shall receive for the wrong which he has done: there is no respect of persons`. But for all of this, was Moses bitter towards the Lord? Did he at any time fume and rage and accuse God of using him for more than 40 years, and in the process, of taking away the best years of his life? Did he try and make a case for himself by stating that he did the very best that he could under increasingly difficult circumstances and yet in all that time

he only ever really failed in one point, and end by saying `and this is how You have rewarded me`? No, no he did not, and why not? Well it is because in all of those years and in spite of all of the strife, worry, hardship, loss and tears there was also mixed in with it all, joy, laughter, celebration, friendship and above all love and faith, faith in the God whom he had got to know so well. With knowing God, Moses also believed and so knew that his real reward was never going to be in this life, but that it still awaits him in the next. So, what can we who are alive now and are living comparatively comfortable lives possibly have in common with Moses and with the life that he had to live? Well, although by comparison our lives may not be as `hard` as Moses` life was, we still experience the same feelings as he would have experienced, feelings of despair, loneliness, grief etc., albeit for different reasons but the feelings are just as real. And so for the true Christian, the lessons learned in this life, but more particularly the hard lessons, (and there will be plenty of them) can be just as advantageous to us as they were for Moses, especially as the true Christian was not born to have an easy life! Just as Moses was shown the *temporary`* promised land`, the true Christian has been shown the way to the *eternal* promised land, and the way to it has been given to us via the death and resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ, just as He tells us in the book of **John 14: 6.** `Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father except by way of Me`.

I should now like to go back to the book of Genesis, because there is a man mentioned therein who I feel should not be omitted from this article. He is a man who, as a young lad, was deeply despised by his elder brothers, but who in spite of all of this murderous ill-will towards himself, did not, even in the long term, after all he had suffered at their hands, bear any ill-will towards them, and he forgave them all of the terrible things that they had inflicted upon him. To get a measure of his character we should understand that he must have daily endured cruel teasing, mean words and deeds metered out at every opportunity by his jealous, older, and physically bigger and stronger, brothers. Now whether you may think that his compliant endurance of this maltreatment was because of indifference or some kind of child-like innocence on his behalf, it does not matter, because in the long-term it enabled him to develop a supremely loving and forgiving nature. Now I`m not suggesting for one moment that this kind of up-bringing would work to the good for everybody, but it worked to the good for him. This person was so innocent of the way that he was perceived, not only by his brothers, but sometimes by his father as well, that he even told them of a very particular dream which he had. Basically, the thrust of this dream involved both his brothers and his father, one day in the future, having to bow down in supplication to him. Needless to say, this did not go down too well with *any* of them, particularly his brothers. This person`s name was Joseph, and we can read of his story starting at where a certain gift made for him by his father, had the unfortunate effect of rubbing further salt into already existing, sore wounds of jealousy that his elder brothers had towards him. **Genesis 37: 3-4.** `Now Israel (his father) loved Joseph more than all of his other children, because he was the son of his old age: and so he made him a coat of many colours. (an expensive option in those days) And so when Joseph`s brothers perceived that their father loved him more than all of his bretheren, they despised him, and could not speak peaceably with him.

By now the wounds of jealousy deep in his brother`s hearts had not only been re-opened but were now also beginning to weep and fester, and as if to further aggravate

them this is what happened next.

Genesis 37: 5-11. `And Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his bretheren, and they hated him yet the more. And he said to them, Hear I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed. For behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright, and behold, your sheaves stood round about, and bowed down to my sheaf. And his bretheren then said to him, shall you indeed reign over us? or shall you indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more because of his dreams and because of his words. And Joseph dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his bretheren, Behold, I have dreamed yet another dream, and behold, the sun and the moon, and the eleven stars, bowed down to me. And he told it to his father and to his bretheren: and his father rebuked him, and said to him, What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your bretheren indeed come to bow ourselves down to you to the earth? And his bretheren envied him, but his father kept in mind that which he had told them`. By now Joseph`s brothers were heartily sick and tired of him and wanted him out of the way, out of their lives forever, even if this meant murdering him, and soon this opportunity was to arise!

Even for all of this outwards aggression towards himself, Joseph was blissfully unaware of the real danger and murderous threat that his elder brothers posed to him. This is evidenced by the fact that one day he left the safety of his father and his home to travel alone to try and find them as they tended their flocks some miles away. We pick up the story just as Joseph has found his brothers and they see him coming towards them.

Genesis 37: 18-22. `And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near to them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer comes. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, (well) and we will say, Some evil beast has devoured him: and we shall see then what becomes of his dreams. And Reuben heard it, and he delivered Joseph out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Rueben said to them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him: now he said this so that he might free Joseph from their hands, and later, deliver him back to his father`.

Who needs enemies when you can have brothers like this? Well, at least one of them, Rueben, had some compassion on him. So Joseph ends up being thrown down a dry well, he is still alive but his brothers couldn`t care less what state he is in, they intend to walk away and leave him to his fate, in all probability to die of thirst. But destiny then intervenes. As his brothers sit close by, eating and drinking before they walk away forever, another scheme enters their evil minds. Why let Joseph, a fit and healthy young lad, die, and therefore waste that which could be sold for money? Let`s continue with the story. **Genesis 37: 28.** `Then there passed by, Midianite merchantmen, and Joseph`s brothers drew and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishme-elites for twenty pieces of silver: and they took Joseph into Egypt`.

In Egypt, Joseph began his life there in lowly servitude. After some years which included a period of imprisonment having been wrongly accused by his employer`s wife of attempted rape, he grew in favour in the eyes of the Pharaoh. Eventually because of a series of God-influenced events, very particularly the ones in which he interpreted Pharaoh`s dreams for him, Joseph was elevated to the position of being answerable only to Pharaoh! Then Pharaoh, being Pharaoh, gave Joseph complete and unfettered power over all Egypt, so much so that Joseph could rule and do as he saw fit, only Pharaoh

himself was to be beyond his authority as we can read of in

Genesis 41: 39-42. `And Pharaoh said to Joseph, For as much as God has showed you all this, (the interpretation of Pharaoh`s last dream in which a devastating , seven year famine is predicted for the land) there is none so discreet and wise as you are. You shall be in charge of my house, and according to your command shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne shall I be greater than you. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set you to rule over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off the ring from his hand and placed it on Joseph`s hand, and arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck`. Then we can further read of how the great famine which Joseph had foretold of by interpreting one of Pharaoh`s dreams, did eventually come upon not only Egypt but also upon neighbouring lands for many miles beyond Egypt`s borders. This catastrophic famine caused much distress and hardship throughout the whole region, but having been warned of it seven years in advance, the land of Egypt following Joseph`s instructions, had managed, because of seven previous bountiful harvests, to fill their barns and grain silos to the brim, so much so in fact that they were able to spare some (at a price!) to those who would travel to Egypt to buy it. And so eventually, who should turn up, cup in hand as it were, but none other than Joseph`s hateful brothers. Now we can only speculate what Joseph felt when he caught sight of his brothers, perhaps at first he was more than a little aggrieved but this must also have been tempered with love and also a clear head because he took time to plan just how he would receive and then behave towards them. Joseph would also have realised just how much grief and mourning they would have put his father and mother through because of their treachery and lies, and I think that because of this, Joseph, decided to teach them a lesson and have some `sport` with them. One other important thing to mention, remember how all had scoffed at Joseph when he told them that the dream that he had dreamt had them all bowing down to him? well let`s read from **Genesis 42: 6.** `And Joseph was the governor over all the land, and it was he that sold (in this case the grain) to all the people of the land. And Joseph`s brothers came, and bowed themselves down before him with their faces to the earth`. Ultimately the love that Joseph had for his father and his younger brother (who Joseph had only recently learned of and met) and the rest of his family, including his elder brothers, dispelled any further thoughts of `punishment` or `revenge`. He forgave them, even to the extent of heaping food and gifts upon them and giving them land to work and live upon. Pharaoh had this to say to Joseph concerning his father (Jacob) and all of his family and his bretheren, **Genesis 47: 6.** `The land of Egypt is before you; in the best of the land make your father and your bretheren to dwell; in the land of Goshen, let them dwell. And if you know of any capable men amongst them, then make them rulers over my cattle`.

I feel sure that we can all relate to the feelings of `revenge` or the need for justice that Joseph must have experienced towards his older brothers, but how many of us would have been **so** forgiving? Ok, I realise that some of us might end up dying in the gutter as opposed to being elevated to a position of power from which we can `right-royally` dispense our forgiveness, but there is one `Person` who has shown to us that whatever happens, we should be willing and able to forgive those who wrong us, let`s read **Luke 23: 33-34.** `And when they came to the place that is called Calvary, there they crucified Him along with the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And they parted his clothes and cast lots for them`.

Before we leave the story of Joseph, I wonder how many of you have ever noticed the similarity of some of his life with that of some of Jesus Christ's life? For example, instead of the jealousy towards Jesus of the scribes and the Pharisees, with Joseph we have the jealousy of his brothers. Jesus had a special one-piece coat that was woven for Him, Joseph had his coat of many colours. Jesus was betrayed for the price of thirty pieces of silver, Joseph was sold into slavery for twenty pieces of silver. Jesus was far removed from the actual presence of His heavenly Father and was born into a world of sin, Joseph was far removed from his father and taken to Egypt which, throughout the scriptures, has always been representative, figuratively, of sin. Jesus Christ came and offered the whole world a way out from being convicted of their sins and so be saved, even those who came to Him that were not of the house of Israel. Likewise Joseph 'saved' the people who lived in sin (Egypt) when the famine came, and also 'saved' them who came to him from lands far and wide, to buy grain. Jesus forgave all who had Him crucified, likewise Joseph forgave all who had cruelly treated him, especially his brothers. And finally, they were both re-united with their respective fathers whom they loved dearly.

I think that the relationship that Joseph had between himself and the Lord God was almost, all things considered, perfect. It had, after all, survived great personal upheaval, loss, grief, hurt, imprisonment, cruelty, false accusation, betrayal and hardship at the hands of his fellow man, especially his own brothers. Never once do we read of Joseph berating the Lord for having been singled out for the kind of early life that he had to endure. He just got on with it possessed of a quiet, inner faith that allowed him to believe that one day, the Lord would make all things right for him. And as we know, He did, big time!

For the next person to be 'spotlighted' from the biblical scriptures I should like to look at Job. The man Job, and the book, deserves a lot more attention than I shall give him or it in this article, but I hope that I shall manage to impart to you a feeling of the intenseness of the character that this man possessed. It is a character that we can still witness in certain people, people who have mostly been brought to our attention through the world's news media as they cover the never ending tragedies that happen almost daily in our sin-sick world.

The story of 'poor old Job' is an intriguing one, if only because it gives the reader a hitherto undreamt of glimpse into the workings of the Lord God's 'court' in heaven, even into His very throne room! But before we go there, let's start right at the beginning and find out just what kind of a person this man Job, was. **Job 1:1.** 'There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and shunned evil'. Now I do not think that there will be many in God's true church who can relate to Job regarding his wealth or the position of authority and 'honour' which he had in human society, he was indeed very blessed by the Lord, but we should be able to relate to the suffering that he endured at the hands of Satan. It would seem that all things, especially righteousness, come at a price. It was all of Job's financial security, faithfulness to God and overall satisfaction with his life that moved Satan to act against him and for the Lord God to allow Job to be 'put to the test'. Let's read on, **Job 1: 6 and 8.** 'Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came amongst them. And the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him upon the earth, a blameless and an upright man, and one that reveres God and shuns evil?' And

now for Satan`s thoughts on the matter, **verses, 9-10.** `Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Does Job revere God for no reason? Have not you created a (protective) barrier around him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land`. We all have family or have had family and/or friends who we love or have loved dearly, and most of us have material possessions which make life that much comfier and easier for us. More importantly, we have or have had times of good health, both physical and mental, without which of course, the importance of material possessions soon fades to nothing, and even the love of family and friends can begin to wear thin and take second place to our own sufferings. These then, are the main reasons as to why we can relate to the sufferings of Job. Yes Job had it all, he was living the `good life`, he was content with what he had and with who, as a person, he was, but suddenly, out of nowhere and for no apparent reason and in very rapid succession, he began to lose it all, and there came a time when even his life, although still very much within him, became loathsome to him, and he wanted it to end. Satan had suggested to the Lord that Job was only righteous and revering of Him because of all the blessings and protection that the Lord had given to Him, and that if it was all removed then Job would `curse God to his face`. The Lord told Satan that He would remove His protection from Job and that Satan could do whatsoever he wanted to him except to kill him. And so Job`s challenges began, he went rapidly from one moment loving himself and his life, to the next of hating himself and seeing his life as a horror that he wanted to be rid of. From the book of Job, chapter one and verses 13-19 we can read of the first of the catastrophic and tragic events that befell Job, one after another, all seemingly within the space of less than one hour! These included the loss of most of, if not all of, his livestock, his servants, and in **verses 18-19 of Job 1:** we can read, `While his servant was yet speaking, (of the tragedies that had already befallen Job) there came another servant who said, Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their elder brother`s house, and behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness which struck the four corners of the house, and it collapsed upon the young men and killed them, and I alone escaped to come and tell you`. Well, this sort of thing, after the initial shock and grief subside, would often make a person question the validity of their belief in a loving and a merciful God, but not Job. The next three verses give the reader an insight into the faith and the understanding towards our God that Job had. He did not rant and rage and bemoan his lot, instead he did this, **Job 1: 20-22.** `Then Job arose and tore his robe, he shaved his head, and then he fell down upon the ground and worshipped and said, Naked I came out of my mother`s womb, and naked shall I return there, the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this, Job did not sin, nor did he foolishly blame God`.

Poor old Job, but Satan was not finished with him yet! Let`s allow the scriptures to continue the story, **Job 2: 1-8.** `Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said to Satan, From where come you? And Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a blameless and an upright man, one that reveres God and shuns evil? and still he holds fast his integrity, although you moved Me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the Lord and said, Skin for skin

yes, all that a man has will he give for his life. But put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse You to Your face. And the Lord said to Satan, Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. And he took a piece of broken pot with which to scrape himself with, and he sat down amongst the ashes`. Even for all of this new suffering that had now befallen him, Job was not to find any comfort, not even from the one human person that he thought that he could rely on, his wife. But worse than just being offhand towards him and his painful and disfiguring condition, she actively railed against him as we can now read in **Job 2: 9**. `Then said his wife to him, Do you still retain your integrity? renounce God, and die.` But for all of this, Job was not moved to say anything against the Lord, **Job 2: 10**. `But he said to her, You speak as one of the foolish women speak. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this, Job did not sin with his lips`. Ok, as many reading this will already know, Job, after much suffering, did complain and moan about his situation to the Lord, but it was all done with respect and due deference, and there`s nothing wrong with anybody who is deeply troubled doing that, as we can understand when we read the words of Jesus Christ in the book of **Matthew 11: 28**. `Come to Me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest`. Today we are blessed with knowing these words, but Job did not initially have knowledge of the comfort that they can provide, but none the less he kept his faith and loyalty towards the Lord God.

Now, as if Job`s misery was not complete enough, along come his friends to add to it by conveying to him their inaccurate knowledge about the `workings` and the `ways` of the Lord. Hence the expression `A Job`s comforter`. These friends of Job`s, right from the start, begin to set up their arguments from their perceived position on the moral high ground. They proceed to inform him that his sufferings must have come about because of personal sin, and that being the case, he has brought all of this tragedy down upon himself, and so it is the Lord`s way of punishing him. Job, despite not having had any proper sleep or rest for days then argues against their assumptions about himself and of his relationship with the Lord, point by point. He continually and patiently tries to enlighten them as to the way that *he* recognizes the ways of the Lord to be, but they will have none of it.

Eventually, in no uncertain terms, the Lord makes His presence known to them all, Satan, I presume, having been given his `marching orders`. God speaks directly to Job, and begins to reveal to him, in part, some of His glorious being. And it is at this point, I think, that we who are reading are given a down-to-earth reminder about just how little knowledge we possess about the true extent of the glory of the Lord. Let`s get a flavour of it as we read the scripture where the Lord begins to question Job and so demonstrate to him his (Job`s) position in the great scheme of things as compared to that of the Lord Himself.

Job 38: 1-4. `Then the Lord answered Job from out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now your loins like a man, for I will demand of you, and you will answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare it if you have understanding. Whoa, what a first question, it puts the reader, just as it must have put poor old Job, right in their place! Where indeed where any of us when the Lord started His great works? The enormity of that question, when I first read it, left me open mouthed! Many more such weighty

questions followed for Job to answer, and the way that the Lord framed them is pure poetry to read. And so, after the Lord had spoken such marvellous and poetic things to him, poor old Job had only these words left in him with which to answer back, **Job 40: 3-5.** `Then job answered the Lord and said, Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer You? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer, yes twice, but I will proceed no further`. And these words coming from a man who was judged to be blameless in the sight of the Lord! Makes you think, just how much less would any of us be able to withstand such one-to-one questioning? And so the Lord continues His questions for Job, many of which may, to the reader, appear rhetorical, after all, how could Job possibly know all of the answers? Nevertheless, along with the questions come more revelations of spiritual things hitherto undreamed of, and as a consequence more and more `things` to make Job feel totally inadequate and insignificant compared to and in the presence of his Creator. Let`s read Job`s parting remarks to the Lord, **Job 42: 1-6.** `Then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that You can do every thing, and that no thought can be withheld from You. Who is he that hides counsel without knowledge? therefore I have uttered that which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech You, and I will speak, I will ask of You, and declare You to me. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Wherefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes`. Picking up on one of the last remarks that Job made in that last piece of scripture, `but now my eye sees You`, I do not think that we should take that too literally, rather, I think, Job is saying that now he has a better *understanding* of Who the Lord really is, and to support this idea let`s read from **Exodus 33: 20.** `And He (the Lord God) said, You can not see My face, for there shall no man see Me and live`.

In many ways we who are living in today`s modern world of high tech and high speed global travel, are still, even for all of our `sophistication`, like Job. Those of us who are special in God`s eyes, still have to suffer along with the not so special, even more so sometimes. But I think that we are more able to be appreciative of the many `good times` that the Lord allows us to have, `good times` which will not be seen as such by those who do not have the holy spirit of the Lord dwelling within themselves. Of course we can all look back on our past lives with more than a tinge of regret, but we should not dwell there, we are no longer of the past, because that is the place where our `old man of sin` once lived and died, and was subsequently buried after our baptism. No right thinking person goes into a graveyard and starts to dig up a rotten corpse, likewise, we should not keep visiting our past lives to dig up our spiritually rotten `old man`. Like Job, we all have to experience pain, sorrow and loss, but just think how intolerably smug, selfish and downright self-righteous we would all be if we had not experienced the bad things along with the good. The true Christian *can* take comfort in his or her friends and family, but unlike Job did at first, they should not try to find a *definitive* solution to their problems by listening to their counsel. Fortunately for us, unlike Job, we now have our Mediator between ourselves and God the Father, we have Jesus Christ, and it is to Him that we should all seek advice and then have the faith to wait for an answer which may or may not include having to bear more discomfort before any final relief is given. It all depends on what is ultimately best for the individual concerned, and only the Lord knows what that is.

Job was given a reward for his faithfulness towards the Lord, as we can read of in **Job 42: 12-13.** `So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had

fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters`.

And so, as happened to Job, a reward will be given to us, but not necessarily in *this* lifetime. We now possess the comfort of the knowledge which enables us to look forwards to receiving our reward in the *next* life.

For the next character from the biblical scriptures I should like to look at the prophet Jonah. I wonder how many of us realise just how like Jonah we are, or at least have at some time been like during our lifetime. Any true Christian knows what the Lord God requires of them and in what way we should behave in order to please Him, but oftentimes, just as Jonah did, we `duck and dive because we want to avoid having to do exactly the right things in order to comply with His requests. We then find ourselves suffering the consequences of our, albeit more often than not reluctant, disobedience. For example, how many of us at some point have thought to ourselves something along the lines of: `Yes I know that`s what I *should* be doing in order to fulfill the Lord`s desire for Me, but I also know that it`s going to be running against the grain of popular opinion and therefore what the Lord requires of me is not going to be at all well received in the sight of men. And in any case, it`s going to cause me so much trouble and upheaval, and for what? it`s not going to change people`s attitude towards the Lord, so *at the very least*, (to make it so much easier for myself) I`m going to have to make compromises`.

Let`s read from the scriptures and find out what Jonah was reluctant to do for the Lord, **Jonah 1: 1-3.** `Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me. But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. And he went down to Joppa, and found a ship bound for Tarshish, so he paid the fare thereof and went down into it in order to flee to Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord`. How little Jonah must have known about the power of the Lord by imagining that he could actually run and hide from Him, perhaps for ever, by physically getting into a boat and sailing away from the place where the Lord had communicated with him! We know that it doesn`t work like that, the `arm` of the Lord is long, too long for anybody or anything to be beyond its` reach. The Lord God tells us of this fact in

Amos 9: 2-3. `Even though they dig into hell, from there shall My hand take them, though they climb up to heaven, from there will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in the top of mount Carmel, I will search and take them out from there; and though they be hid from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them`. And so the Lord finds Jonah hiding on the ship and commands a great storm to erupt, so great that the ship is in imminent danger of sinking and of causing the death, by drowning, of all on board. The ship`s crew, being the superstitious sailors that they are, rapidly come to the conclusion that somebody on board must be to blame for the catastrophe that is about to befall them, so they cast `lots` to determine who it is, and of course the Lord makes certain that the `lot` falls upon Jonah. Jonah then offers to be thrown overboard from the ship, and immediately that he is, the storm ceases to rage. Jonah then descends into the depths of the sea, tangled about with seaweed and unable to surface he loses consciousness and drowns. The Lord then sends a fish large enough to swallow Jonah whole, which it does. Jonah then spends what must have been a very uncomfortable and frightening three days and nights in the stinking, stigmatic darkness of the fish`s belly from where he cries

out to the Lord. The Lord hears his cries and then commands the fish to vomit Jonah out onto dry land, probably not that far from where he first set sail.

Then the Lord speaks to Jonah again, **Jonah 3: 2-3.** `Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the preaching that I bid you. So Jonah rose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, of three days` journey`. Jonah, not wanting to be chastised again by the Lord, this time does as he is told. Now Jonah was not at all ignorant of the evil deeds that the people of Nineveh had done and were still committing, and he wanted so badly for them to suffer *extreme* punishment for their wickedness. The last thing that he wanted was for any of them to repent of their evil ways and so escape punishment, no, they all had to suffer, preferably die! But the Lord had other intentions for the people of Nineveh. In His mercy He had decided to warn them of that which was going to happen to them if they did not stop the evil which they were committing, and repent. Jonah knew full well that it was *he* who was to be the one to warn them of their impending doom if they did not change their ways, and this really rubbed him up the wrong way! Jonah resented the fact that the Lord God was using him this way. Let`s read **Jonah 4: 1-4.** `But the thing displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, I pray You O Lord, was this not what I said when I was yet in my country? This is why I fled to Tarshish, For I knew that You are a gracious God, and merciful, and slow to anger, and of great kindness, and that You would relent punishment. Therefore now, O Lord, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, What cause have you to be angry?`. Even so, Jonah heads for a vantage point from where he could get a good view of the city, and he settles himself down in the hot sun to see what will happen to it, no doubt hoping against hope, for some great destruction. After all, even to this day, don`t most people like to watch old buildings being demolished by explosive charges? and the bigger the better!

Jonah has been allowed to have his moment of petulance before the Lord, and so God teases him a little because of it, **Jonah 4: 6-9.** `And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to grow over Jonah so that it would create shade for his head in order to ease his discomfort. And so Jonah was very grateful of the gourd. But God prepared a worm, so that when the morning rose the next day, it had attacked the gourd and caused it to wither. And it came to pass that when the sun did arise, God prepared a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down upon the head of Jonah, so much so that he fainted, and he wished within himself that he would die, and he said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Do you well to be angry because the Gourd has died? And Jonah said, (as petulant as ever) I do well to be angry, even unto death`. As with any petulant child, the parent knows that in time, the petulance will pass, and so it was with the way that the Lord dealt with Jonah. Then God explains to him the difference between His loving, kind, understanding and merciful ways as compared to the unrighteous, ignorant and vengeful ways of humankind. **Jonah 4: 10-11.** `Then said the Lord, You felt pity for the gourd, (would have saved it) regarding which you never laboured, neither did you make it grow, it came up in a night and it perished in a night. And so should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand (120,000) persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also many animals?`

We should at this point be able to begin to see a universal trait as regards the relationship between humankind and the Lord God. It is one of a father who is in the

process of bringing up, instructing and disciplining wherever necessary, his children. It also involves his teaching his children how to relate to one another, and of having to be even-handed with them, making a *marked* distinction for any good deeds that they may do which are beyond the norm, and likewise any evil deeds. We may at some times in our lives have thought to ourselves that we are *never* going to be `right` in the eyes of our God, but then we`ve taken consolation by thinking something along the lines of, `Anyway, whatever I may be, at least I`m not as bad as `that lot over there`, why compared to them, I`m a veritable saint`. Here we have the old trait of `finger pointing` raising its` childish head again. By acting in such a way we are, for the most part unwittingly, judging others without really knowing what makes them the way that they are. We are all `free agents`, we have the choice not to behave the way that others behave without openly condemning or judging them. Of course I`m not referring to anybody not making an informed judgment about the obviously evil people who live amongst us such as murderers, child molesters or rapists etc., but I am referring to ordinary people who, with the right spiritual direction and material help given to them, will `blossom` in the sight of the Lord. Let`s remind ourselves where we all stand as regards the way the Lord sees us,

Isaiah 55: 7-9. `Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts`. We have the template for the way that we should treat murderers and the like, it is given to us in the scriptures in books such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy. We have the ten commandments which, if a person keeps, will help them to live lawfully before the Lord. But even with all of this we still need *the most important thing*, let`s read just one segment from a list of admirable qualities that the apostle Paul is talking about in

1 Corinthians 13: 3. `And although I give all of my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but do all these (admirable) things **without love, it profits me nothing**`. If we truly knew ourselves as the Lord knows us, then I think that we would be very downhearted indeed thinking `**who then can be saved?**` just as Christ`s disciples once asked of Him, but Jesus replied, **Mark 10: 27.** `...With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God, all things are possible`. Even so, we should definitely not become complacent or careless about the way that the Lord wants us to behave by thinking that all will be forgiven us no matter what we do, always remember this scripture, **Matthew 4: 7.** `And Jesus said to him, It is written, You shall not tempt the Lord your God`. If we put a murderer to death or imprison somebody for a period of time, we should remember that this is not punishment. The murderer is taken out of the picture so that he definitely cannot murder again, likewise the imprisoned person is removed from normal society so that they cannot repeat their lesser crime. We cannot *really* punish anybody, we do not have the wherewithal to do so. Totally effective punishment is something that only the Lord can, *and will*, do. Let`s read from **Romans 12: 19.** `Dearly beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather contain your anger, for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, **I will repay**, says the Lord`. Any true Christian knows and understands that it is far better to receive any deserved punishment from their loving, heavenly Father **in this life**, than to be a person who receives their punishment in the next life from a vengeful God who they do not know

because *they* have made Him a stranger to themselves! Most, if not all, western world governments are failing to protect their law-abiding citizens because they use their own man-made and consequently inadequate measures to deal with ever increasing lawlessness, disrespect for other people, especially for the weak and the aged, and a rapidly rising *serious crime* rate. These governments and their corresponding politicians have abandoned the decrees and the laws of God Almighty, and now the whole world is to suffer the consequences! And all that they care to do is to bleat about so-called `global warming` and finance their obscenely expensive and pointless `missions` into outer-space to find `other forms of life` whilst at the same time they *refuse* to acknowledge that the answers which they seek are right in front of their own, `blind` eyes!! To conclude part one, these next two scriptures perfectly describe them and their kind!

Romans 1: 21-22. `Because that, when they knew (of a) God, they honoured Him not as God, (instead they like to use the words `mother nature`) neither were they thankful, instead they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. **Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools`.** And now Jesus` description of some of the leaders of the people during His time upon this earth, a description which is still very much relevant to today`s leaders, **Matthew 15: 14.** `Let them alone, for they are **blind leaders of the blind.** And if the blind are leading the blind, then both will fall into the ditch`.

Part 2.

Let`s now take a look at our next `character` from the scriptures, it is Abram, or as he later became known, Abraham. Abraham, a man who even to this day is rightly claimed by both the Jews and the Muslims to be their founding father. This is a fact, **but**, the distinction between these two opposing members of the same family is this; the bloodline of the original Muslims is as a result of Abraham`s planned coming together (more in desperation than desire) with his wife`s maidservant Hagar, and them having a son, Ishmael, who was the firstborn to Abraham. Whereas the bloodline of the tribe of Israel, which at first included those who later became known as Jews, is as a result of Abraham and his wife Sarah having a child together, his second son, Isaac. This type of situation is a recipe for conflict within any family, and it is one (in all its` variations) which is still common in many families across the world today. We have Ishmael, the firstborn to Abraham but a son who was born out of wedlock and **not** to his wife, and we have Isaac, a second son but one born within wedlock to his wife. Under normal circumstances the difference in law between what a man`s first son is legally entitled to as regards inheritance as opposed to what the second son is entitled to (**nothing!**) can be enormous. But the situation is compromised if the first son is born out of wedlock to a woman who is not the married man`s wife, and therefore is, under law, entitled to inherit nothing, whereas the second son, if born into wedlock to the man`s wife, under law, inherits the lot. This type of situation is so often fraught with bitterness and resentment, and it was to be so for Abraham and all his kin. Even as I write, this thousands of years old `family feud` still rages across the world!

What then, was this man Abraham, like? this man who was so blessed by God. Was he for instance, born a saint? that is to say was he from when he first emerged from his

mother`s womb until the day that he died, perfect in every way in the eyes of the Lord God? Well, we can all take heart, he was not, he lied more than once to save his own skin, and he coerced his wife into lying as well. We can read of this in **Genesis 12: 11-13**. `And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that Abram said to his wife, Behold, now I know that you are a fair woman to look upon, therefore it shall come to pass that when the Egyptians see you they shall say, This is his wife, and they shall kill me, but they will keep you alive. Therefore say that you are my sister, so that it may be well with me for your sake, and so that I may live because of you`. Not much of a lie you may think, it had even been put in place for a `good` reason. But this little `white` lie was to cause Abraham more trouble than if he had told the truth, as we can see when we continue to read ,

Genesis 12: 14-20. `And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians saw that his wife was very fair. Also, the princes of Pharaoh saw her and commended her to him, and she was taken into Pharaoh`s house, and he treated Abram well because of her, and he had sheep and oxen and asses, and men servants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of the situation regarding Abram`s wife. And Pharaoh called Abram and said, what is this that you have done to me? why did you not tell me that she was your wife? why did you say that she was your sister? I might have taken her to be my wife. Now, behold your wife, take her and go your way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning Abram, and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had`.

Of course Abraham new better than to tell lies, he was not living in ignorance of right and wrong, the Lord had even spoken directly to him, let`s look at the earliest mention in the biblical scriptures of that account, it`s to be found in **Genesis 12: 1**. `Now the Lord had said to Abram, Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father`s house, to a land that I will show you`. But Abraham, in spite of his having been in direct contact with the Lord, and of having obeyed His word by `upping sticks` and leaving his homeland, lied anyway. Because of an overwhelming fear for his life, Abraham had told his wife to tell a lie, he then must have continually lied himself in order to maintain the original lie, and he and his wife then proceeded to live that lie. Who knows how long that situation would have continued for had the Lord not intervened, after all, as we have read, the lie was providing them both with a very comfortable lifestyle. I should think that most of us at some time, have been tempted to do a similar thing. But I know this for sure, all of the congregations of the so-called `christian` churches of this world are doing a similar thing, because `going with the flow` of the lie of the `Babylonian mystery religion`, which is what these (for the most part, `sunday`keeping) `christian` churches practise, is a much easier and safer option than living a true Christian life and of having to oppose that lie, keep the Lord`s commandments, (especially the fourth one) and `swim against the flow`. Because Abraham lied and then as it where, settled down to live that lie, the question arises, was Abraham selected by the Lord because there was a job that He needed doing, and at the time, Abraham was simply the best of a bad bunch who was capable of doing it? Well the answer to that question is, no, because the scriptures indicate to the contrary. One example of Abraham`s character can be discerned from the event that happened concerning the kidnapping of his brother`s son Lot and all of his retinue by an enemy army. Abraham and his men sought out and fought against this army, overpowered them and rescued all those who had been kidnapped, and recovered many looted

possessions. Inadvertently, his actions also did the king of Sodom a great service for which he consequently wanted to reward Abraham, but Abraham refused any reward, let`s allow the scripture to take up the story, **Genesis 14: 21-23.** `And the king of Sodom said to Abram, give me the people (his people, who Abram had also rescued) but you may keep all of the recovered booty for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have sworn to the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take even a thread or a sandal thong, and I will not take anything that is yours so to give you reason to say, I have made Abram rich`. We can appreciate from reading this that Abraham was indeed an honourable man, and one who was very mindful to keep his promises to the Lord. Some may argue that he was already `comfortably off`, even quite wealthy by modern day standards, and that any reward given to him by the king of sodom would merely have been a bonus. Nevertheless, think on this, how many of today`s wealthy men would refuse even more wealth if it was offered to them `on a plate`, tax free and for work that they`d already done, if a `mere promise` to a god, or even God, not to take it, was all that prevented them from doing so?

As close to the Lord God as he undoubtedly was, Abraham did appear to have his doubts or rather foibles regarding the Lord`s exact intentions for himself. I can only assume that he felt this way because, just like most true Christians throughout history have felt, he had that nagging question within himself that would not stay silent, and it was, `Why choose me Lord? I`m nothing special and one day I just know that I`m going to fall short of Your expectations of me`. Early on in his relationship with God, Abraham`s faith (for want of a better word) and understanding about the way that the Lord worked, were to be found more than a little wanting. For example, when the Lord informed Abraham that he was to be the father of as many descendants as there were stars in the heaven, he must have listened to that with shocked incredulity, because he and his wife Sarah were both very old and she was way past child-bearing age. Hence, (following Sarah`s suggestion) Abraham`s dalliance with Hagar, Sarah`s` maid, a fertile young woman who they both agreed he could have progeny by. And so it was, instead of having the faith that the Lord could do anything that He put His mind to do, including enabling his ancient wife, through his seed, bear his child, Abraham, having colluded with his wife, decided to `help things along`, give God a hand, make Gods words come true. Let`s read some relevant scripture as to what happened, **Genesis 15: 3-5.** `And Abram said to God, Behold, to me you have given no offspring, and therefore my heir is to be one of my servants. And, behold, the word of the Lord came to him saying, This shall not be your heir; but he that shall come forth out of your own body shall be your heir. And God brought him forth abroad and said, Look now towards heaven, and count the stars if you can; And He said to him, so shall your descendants (in number) be`. But as time passed by, Abraham`s wife Sarah, remained barren, and so the collusion between them began, **Genesis 16: 1-2.** `Now Sarai, (Sarah) Abram`s wife, bare him no children: and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, Behold, the Lord has restrained me from bearing, I pray you therefore, go into my maid, it may be that I can build a family through her. And Abraham listened to what Sarai said`. On and on, as more precious time passed, Abraham began to perhaps wonder about the exact wording of the Lord`s promise to himself, after all, it was by now years rather than days since that promise was made. Hagar, Sarah`s Egyptian handmaid, had conceived and given birth to Abraham`s first

child, a son, who they named Ishmael. If only Abraham could have foreseen what his meddling and misgivings about the Lord's promise to himself would lead to, not only in the short term but more importantly in the long, and all because of what? His own impatience, his wife's constant nagging which only helped to reinforce his doubt, his inability to fully comprehend the enormity of the situation, or the common human trait of distorted and confused, long-term memory about exactly what the Lord had said? Perhaps it was a combination of all these things. Whatever, so do we now have a happy family group? Abraham might well have been content to make the best of things as they now stood, but his wife, Sarah, most certainly was not! Let's read

Genesis 16: 5-6. `And Sarai said to Abram, My wrong is upon you; I have given my maid into your bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and you. But Abram said to Sarai, Behold, your maid is under your control, do to her such as it pleases you. And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she (Hagar) fled from her face`.

I wonder how many wives these days could live in the same house with the woman who had copulated with their husband and, as a consequence, given birth to a healthy, doted upon and longed for first-born child, a son, and not feel any resentment?

So what about the Lord's promise to Abraham, and how many years did he have to wait before it was fulfilled? Let's continue with the story. Firstly, we'll find out just how old Abraham and Sarah are at this time as the Lord once again re-affirms His promise to Abraham. (Ishmael is already 13 years old by now) **Genesis 17: 17.** `Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born to him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, be able to bear it?` What are to we make of the all too human Abraham? He talks directly with the Lord God, the all-powerful Creator of all things, One who cannot lie, and yet he still has his doubts, he heard God's words and he `laughed`, perhaps as if to say, `another baby, just what we both need at our time of life`. But in all fairness to Abraham, he more than likely laughed at *his* situation rather than at the Lord. But the Lord God was having none of it, and because of Abraham's misgivings about the whole situation, the Lord spoke these words to him, **Genesis 17: 19.** `And God said, Sarah your wife shall indeed bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him`. So, it was now up to Abraham to either reject the truth of these the Lord's words or totally accept them at face value, what else could he do? I think we all must know by now that the Lord God has never forced anybody to believe anything that He has said. Fortunately for Abraham, (and for us) he believed the Lord. The reader may have realised by now that Abraham was no `shrinking violet` when it came to speaking directly with the Lord, albeit with the deepest of respect, he even had the temerity to keep on `badgering` the Lord for answers to a series of related questions that he persisted in asking, just as a child would do, (often to the exasperation of the `worn-out` parent) but it did not intimidate the Lord. If you want to you can read about these series of questions asked by Abraham, for yourself, they are to be found in Genesis 18: 16-33.

Remember when Abraham lied to Pharaoh about Sarah *not* being his wife and said instead that she was his sister? well he does something similar yet again! We would have thought that he would have learned his lesson by now, especially as only bad things had happened when he went down that particular route before, but no, Abraham, as human as ever, `chances his arm` one more time. Let's read from **Genesis 20: 1-3.** `And

Abraham journeyed from there towards the south country, and dwelled in Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah, his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, you are but a dead man because of the woman who you have taken, for she is a married woman`. Thanks to Abraham we have another lie which led to more serious trouble for those affected by it, but once again the Lord intervened before things really got out of hand. Even for all of his short-comings, Abraham was still to be regarded as an honourable man, a quality (along with his other righteous qualities) which was very acceptable to the Lord. *But the Lord`s greatest test for Abraham was still to come.* By this test the Lord would confirm that all of the good qualities that Abraham possessed were capable of withstanding the severest of pressure, a pressure which ultimately could only be endured because of faith/trust in the Lord. Many reading this article will already know what this final testing of Abraham`s faith/character was. The Lord God wanted Abraham to obey His command to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham and Sarah`s long awaited for and deeply loved, only begotten son. Abraham`s heart must have been churning within himself as he made the decision to choose between the God that he had gotten to know and love over the years, and the son who he and his wife loved dearly and had nourished and watch grow to be a young lad. But Abraham understood that if it had not been for the Lord God`s intervention and blessing, Isaac would not have existed anyway. This did not make the act that he had to perform any easier, but it probably helped him to be willing to go through with it. And so, at the moment that Abraham had his son Isaac trussed up on the altar and had the sharp sacrificial knife raised above him ready to be plunged into his body, the Lord put a stop to it. **Genesis 22: 10-12.** `And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But an angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham, and he said, Here I am. And He said, Do not lay your hand upon the lad, neither do you anything to him, for now I know that you revere God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me`.

Who can accurately say what would have happened if Abraham had made the wrong choice as regards this test. The question arises, if Abraham, possibly the only man alive deemed worthy enough, would have *refused* to sacrifice his son Isaac, would God the Father also have had second thoughts about allowing His Son, in the shape and form of Jesus Christ, to be a future sacrifice for us, that is to say we who *are* Abraham`s descendants? And so, as a consequence of Abraham`s refusal to comply, would the Lord have destroyed the rest of mankind deeming them to be an evil, hopeless case, just as He had done before, but this time there would be no looking for a `Noah`, because the most righteous man alive had already been found in Abraham, and he had failed?

Over the ensuing years, Abraham`s wife, Sarah, died. He took another wife for himself and she bore him seven more sons, and those sons wife`s bore of themselves even more sons, and so on. And so the Lord`s promise to Abraham was fulfilled. **Genesis 22: 17-18.** `That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand that is upon the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your descendants shall all the people of the world be blessed; **because you have obeyed My voice`.**

Let`s now have the first of two scriptures which will conclude my little journey through the life of Abraham, **Genesis 25: 7-8.** `And these are the days of the years of Abraham`s life which he lived, an hundred and threescore and fifteen years. (175 years

old) Then Abraham gave up his spirit, and died in a good old age, an old man, full of years, and he was buried amongst his own`.

To sum up. Abraham was a man with faults, he had fears but he was by no means a coward, he doubted himself far more than he ever doubted the Lord, (presuming that he ever really doubted the Lord at all) and he was a man capable of telling the odd lie in order (as he imagined) to save his own life. Ultimately he demonstrated himself to be worthy of the Lord`s hope in him by enacting his willingness to obey the Lord`s command to sacrifice the object most dearest to him, his only begotten son by he and his wife. A great accolade has been bestowed upon Abraham because of his trust in the Lord, and it can be read in this last scripture, **James 2: 23.** `And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness,: and **he was called `the friend of God`**`.

Now we`ll turn our attentions towards David. As many reading may already know, David was the least impressive to the eye of his father`s sons. We will start with the scripture where the prophet Samuel has been instructed by the Lord God to go and select one of Jesse`s sons to be the successor to the kingship currently occupied by Saul. All of Jesse`s sons, except for David, are brought before Samuel for inspection, and Samuel is particularly impressed by one of them, named Eliab, but the Lord has this to say to him,

1 Samuel 16: 7. `But the Lord said to Samuel, Do not look at his appearance or of the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, (Eliab) because the Lord does not see as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart`. The young David, yet to be appointed king and yet to achieve manhood, has already proved himself, because of his courage and his daring deeds, to be a worthy subject for kingship. We should also remember that all of this was *before* (still as a young lad) he took on man-to-man and slayed, the mighty warrior, the giant, Goliath, when all of the fighting men in the army of Israel were too scared to do so. During the years left by the Lord for king Saul to reign over Israel, David was subjected to many hard and desperate trials and situations, not least of which was the death sentence that the increasingly paranoid and delusional Saul had placed on David`s head. King Saul was not going to give up his crown without a fight! Thus David was forced to become an outlaw in his own land, hiding out with his band of followers in places such as En Gedi, a natural `fortress` on the banks of the dead sea. David and his men were forced to carry out raiding parties on non-Israelite surrounding settlements in order to survive, but these actions, rather than distancing them from the ordinary Israelite people, instead, imbued them with a certain `macho` charisma. It was only when David eventually succeeded Saul as king, that his true human weaknesses and his fleshly desires, were to become all too evident.

David, it would seem, was a complicated person to get to know, maybe even a dangerous person to get to know too closely, especially if you were the kind who erroneously thought to themselves, and possibly told others, `Oh, I`m well friendly with the king, just leave it to me to have a word with him`. Yes, best to remember your place when dealing with King David, unless you *truly did* know him, and just as importantly, he truly did know you, in which case the likelihood of you falling foul of his wrath, accidentally or otherwise, should be minimalised. Let`s read what happened in this particular incident which demonstrates to us just how carefully a person had to tread when approaching king David, even with something as seemingly everyday as bearing

news (*good or otherwise*) of an event. Two men, Rechab and Baanah, had approached king David with news of a murder of one of David's `enemies` that they had committed thinking that it would please him, *it did not*, it had just the opposite effect, and to underline the fact David has this to say to them before having them executed,

2 Samuel 4: 9-10. `And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said to them, As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of all adversity. When once another person came to me saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought me good news, I took hold of him and slew him in Ziklag. He came thinking that I would give him a reward for his news`. As it happens David rightly had the two men executed for the murder that they had committed, but concerning the account that he told them and which we have just read, we can understand that on that occasion he *personally* killed somebody who was *merely the messenger* of news which displeased him!

As king, David strove very hard to keep the law, the commandments of the Lord God, in fact he was zealous for the Lord and His laws. How zealous? well the reading this next piece of scripture written by David, should give us an insight, **Psalm 119. 97.** `O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day`. David had an overwhelming passion for observing and keeping all of the appointed Sabbath days, holy days and feast days. But even so, the Lord did not make any special dispensation for him because of this. David could not expect to commit sin and get off with it `scot free`, rather the opposite, being king he had a lot to be seen to be upholding and promoting concerning the law. These words of Jesus Christ, spoken as a parable, serve to underline this fact, in this case not just for a king but for all men, **Luke 12: 47.** `And that servant who knew of his master`s will, but did not make himself ready and neither did he obey him, will be beaten with many strokes of the whip` . Jesus then goes on to say that those who disobey their master`s will but do so in ignorance of it, will receive fewer strokes of the whip, illustrating the fact that the more that you know to do that which is right, then **the more that it will be expected of you to do it!** And so it was with King David. For all of David`s undoubted love and respect for Him, the Lord God did not in any way consider Himself to be in David`s debt, David was merely performing that which the Lord God *required* of him as being His anointed one and king of Israel. But David`s human, fleshly weaknesses more than once usurped and evidenced themselves by towering above his kingly status. David sinned, sometimes committing `little` sins, and sometimes committing *really* big, evil ones such as adultery and even murder! Let`s read,

2 Samuel 11: 2-5. `And it came to pass on one evening, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king`s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And so David sent and enquired about the woman, and someone said, Is this woman not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, and the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And so David sent messengers and took her, and she came into him and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; and sent and told David, I am with (your) child` .

Now as most of us know, adultery was and still is considered by the Lord God to be one of the most abhorred sins that a person could/can commit, but for a king to commit it, and a king who was also the anointed one of the Lord! As if this was not bad enough, David then conspires to murder the woman Bathsheba`s husband, Uriah the Hittite, so

that he can have her all to himself! He does this by instructing Joab, the commander of his army, to place Uriah in a very vulnerable position during a battle. We can read of this cowardly and premeditated murderous deed further on in the book of

2 Samuel 11: 14-17. `And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter saying, Set you Uriah at the forefront of the hottest battle, and withdraw from him so that he may be smitten and killed. And it came to pass that when Joab observed the city, (which they were attacking) that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew that the strongest defenders would be. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also`. I think that from the reading of those last two scriptures that we can see that the `dark side` of king David could be very dark indeed, and this being the case, the Lord God did not allow him to go unpunished. The next verses of scripture that we shall read indicate to us how some of king David`s *worst* character make-up was *at that time*. I find myself searching for the right words to describe it, but here are some that come to mind; hypocritical, zealous, naive, proud, selfish, impetuous and stubborn, but ultimately you can decide for yourselves. An outline of what happens to David after his murderous treachery against Uriah, is as follows. The Lord sends Nathan the prophet to David to tell him of a miserly, bullying rich man and his consequent treatment of a poor man who was under his direct control. This rich man, even for all of his wealth and his many herds of animals, was mean in spirit and in deed. One day, a traveller came to visit the rich man and he knew it was expected of him to feed his guest with plenty of good food in order to give him a proper welcome. Now, instead of selecting a worthy animal from his own many hundreds to kill and dress for the meal, he ordered that a much loved ewe lamb, the only animal that the poor man had, was to be taken from him and slaughtered for the occasion. Now I`ll let the scriptures take up the tale. **2 Samuel 12: 4-12.** `And David`s anger was greatly kindled against the rich man, and he said to Nathan, As the Lord lives, the man that has done this thing deserves to die. And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, You are the man. Thus says the Lord God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master`s house, and also your master`s wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if this had been too little, I would moreover have given you more. Wherefore have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife, you have made him to be slain with the sword wielded by the children of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword (warfare) shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against you from within your own house, and I will take your wives from before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. (openly, in public view) For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun`. I can imagine that upon hearing these words that David`s bowels `turned to water`. The Lord has finally brought home to David the enormity and the shameful disgrace of the thing which he has done. But there was yet one more price that David was going to have to pay, and it was to be a more immediate one, `a life for a life` as it were. **2 Samuel 12: 13-15.** `And David said to Nathan, I have sinned, against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, The Lord also has put away your

sin, you shall not die because of it. However, because of what you have done, you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord (including Satan and his demons) to show utter contempt, therefore the child that is born to you (and Bathsheba) shall surely die. And so Nathan departed to his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it was very sick`. The child soon died, despite David's fasting and making of many prayers that it might not. David went on to live his life as a king until the day that he died, but, just as the Lord had decreed through the mouth of Nathan the prophet, David's life was to be one of continual warfare and unrest and family intrigues and treacheries. But for all of this continuing trouble and unrest, David was not bitter or resentful towards the Lord God, in fact it only served to bring him even closer to Him because it made him realize that he needed the Lord more than ever just to get himself through it all. We only have to read David's psalms to understand just how close to and reliant upon the Lord, he had become. A good example is **Psalm 54: 1-4**. `Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness: according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is continually before me. Against You, and You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight: that You might be justified when You speak, and be blameless when You judge`. This psalm is in fact the one that David wrote not long after his fateful meeting with Nathan the prophet, and the reading of verse 17 indicates to us that he was learning more about the Lord and His ways very rapidly indeed. **Psalm 54: 17**. `The sacrifices of God (those which He *will* accept) are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, these (present in one who comes to You) You will not despise`. We who are living now can appreciate just how every-day and acceptable the sin of adultery has become within our modern society, and murder is a common occurrence, so much so in fact that it is no longer considered newsworthy unless it has a particularly gruesome or `celebrity` connection associated with it. King David was, at one point in his life, very much a man of our own times, but a very important thing happened to him, he realised that in order to `get on the right side` of the Lord God, he had to change! and this is what we all must strive to do, because no right thinking person should want to fall foul of the Lord and of His judgements especially nowadays **after** the sacrifice of our Lord God Jesus Christ. Let's read, **Hebrews 10: 26-31**. `For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but instead a fearful expectation of judgment and of fiery indignation which shall devour His enemies. For he that rejected the law that Moses gave died without mercy by the testifying of two or three witnesses, of how much more severe punishment do you suppose, shall he be deemed worthy of, who has trodden underfoot the Son of God, and has counted the shed blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, as an unholy thing and thereby has insulted the spirit of grace? For we know Him who has said, Vengeance is Mine, I shall repay, says the Lord, And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a terrible thing (for an unrepentant sinner) to fall into the hands of the living God`. Unfortunately, the sinful wants and needs of king David which he had to suppress and try to overcome daily, are still very much alive and kicking in each and every one of us today in varying degrees, and it is our duty towards the Lord God, just as it was David's, not to let them rule over us but rather, with the Lord's help, that we should have rule over them.

Part 3.

For the final section of this article I'm going to concentrate on characters from the new testament. Now I realise that it may be all well and good for me to continue to try and find a *common bond* between ourselves and persons mentioned throughout the biblical scriptures, but I also realise that some of the character traits that these people possess are not at all pleasing in the sight of the Lord God, nor indeed to any practising true Christian. The problem that many Christians and would-be Christians have, or at one time did have, is that we do tend to 'beat ourselves up' when we realize that we are never (in this present lifetime) going to be as good as we know that we should be in the eyes of our God. Self examination and criticism is a positive and a necessary thing for a true Christian to practice, but nobody should become 'hysterical' with worry about what they find. We are, *none of us*, ever going to be perfect before the Lord in this lifetime, but as long as we sincerely strive to be, then that in itself is an acceptable 'sacrifice' to Him. Only the Lord can (and will) make perfect for Himself those whom He considers have developed the character worthy to receive that reward. Let's read from **Ezekiel 11: 19-20**. 'And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh so that they may walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances and perform them: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God'. Well that piece of scripture is great news. In our eternal lives we will all still be individuals with our own little quirks and personalities, our character traits, but we will have been given a more loving, understanding and perfect 'heart' towards our God and towards one another.

Let's now have a look at the book of Matthew. As a person, Matthew was *it seems*, nobody especially good or worthy of sainthood *before* he was called by Jesus Christ, some may say that he was even the opposite to being saintly considering that his profession was as a 'publican', or as we better understand it, a tax collector! 'So what?' some may say, 'somebody has to do it'. Well yes, but should we expect (considering Matthew's background and therefore what he is chiefly identified as being) that that particular 'somebody' is then going to be called by the Lord God to become not 'just' a saint, but one of *only twelve* very select apostles? Here's an answer to that. As we become more knowledgeable through constant reading of the scriptures, we begin to realise that individuals who have been pre-ordained by the Lord God to later on in their lives be chosen by Him for a particular work, have often in their earlier lives been in professions or work that will then provide them with a solid background of skills suitable for their particular ministerial work when called to perform it. And so it was with Matthew and all others throughout the scriptures and to this present day who had/have been called to do the Lord's work. In Matthew's time as in our own, tax collectors were considered to be amongst the lowest of the low, even the Lord Jesus Christ used their 'profession' as an example of something distasteful as we can read of in **Matthew 5: 46**. 'For if you love those who love you in return, what reward do you have? do not even the tax collectors do the same?' And if we read further on we have this example, **Matthew 9: 10-12**. 'And it came to pass, as Jesus sat down to eat in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it they said to His disciples, Why does your Master eat with tax collectors and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, He said to them,

Those who are healthy do not need a doctor, but those who are sick, do`. There is another example of Jesus telling a story to the chief priests and the elders of the temple, about two sons, one of whom said that he would not do as his father asked but later on did it, and the other son who said that he would do as his father asked but then did not do it. Jesus then asks the listeners the following question, **Matthew 21: 31.** `Which one of the sons did as his father asked? They answered Him, The first. Jesus then says to them, Truly I say to you, That tax collectors and prostitutes shall enter the kingdom of God before you will`. I could give more examples but I think that we have enough for us to realise that Matthew`s `profession` was not one that was held in any great esteem, as we`ve just read, it is even mentioned by no less a personage than Jesus Christ alongside that of prostitutes! But in spite of all the adverse feelings towards tax collectors in general, this did not prevent one, in the shape and form of Matthew, from being chosen by Jesus to become one of His disciples as we can read of in **Matthew 9: 9.** `And as Jesus walked on, from there He saw a man by the name of Matthew, sitting at the tax office: and Jesus says to him, Follow Me, And Matthew arose and followed Him`. Now I do not suppose for one minute that Matthew was suddenly overcome by Jesus` request to follow Him, and then, in some zombie-like state of mind, muttered something like, `I will obey`, and got up and marched off following blindly at Christ`s side. Rather, Matthew, like others at the time, had already heard of the teachings of Jesus and of the wonderous miracles that He performed in the name of God, and it was probably already in his mind to leave a job which he may or may not have hated. So, when Jesus asked him to follow Him, a pre-ordained destiny was set in motion, something deep inside of himself told Matthew that it was time to go, and follow *this`man`.* The same principal is at work today. People are being `called` all the time, and when that call is acknowledged by an individual, more often than not, their lives will change drastically, even to the point of some of them leaving their home and their family in order to create a completely `clean slate` from which to begin their Christian life. Of course this is not something that everybody is capable of doing right away, for most of us it takes time to `wipe the slate clean`, but the important thing is to make a start, and once started, to never turn back, as this next scripture informs us, **Luke 9: 61-62.** `And another also said, Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid the people who are at my home, farewell. And Jesus said to him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, (started `the work`) and who looks back, (usually with longing, to what he knew before) is fit for the kingdom of God`. There will come a time when a responsive, `called` individual, having daily offered up personal prayer for help to overcome the tugs and the pulls of this evil, Satanically- driven world, will eventually be able to recognize (usually to their own amazement) just how far removed from their former, `worldly` self they have now become! This may take many months or even years, so nobody should ever despair or give up trying. One thing is for sure though, no matter how `improved` a true Christian may recognise themselves to be as compared to their former self, none of us will ever reach perfection in this lifetime, we can only hope to get closer to it, and so knowing this, we continue to battle on. The Lord God will never give up on us, as long as we keep our faith and do not give up on Him. He will help us and guide our feet every step of the way, (just as any loving parent does when teaching their own child to walk) oftentimes letting go but always being ready to catch us should we stumble and fall.

Well we know what Matthew worked as before Jesus called him, but what about the other disciples, what was it that they were doing to make a living? The scriptures inform

us about some of them and their pre-apostleship lives, and so we'll start in **Matthew 4: 18-22**. `And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two bretheren, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, and they were casting a net into the sea because they were fishermen. And Jesus says to them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they immediately left their nets and followed Him. And going on from there, Jesus saw another two bretheren, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother. They were in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. Jesus called them, and they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed Him`. Now I cannot accurately comment about the fact that it is stated that all four of these newly recruited disciples `immediately` left what was in effect their livelihood and also their family to `up sticks` and walk off with somebody (albeit in the shape and form of Jesus Christ) who they may have heard of but I don't think had ever met before. But, if this was the case, then it only serves to demonstrate the divine power and influence of Jesus Christ, God as man. Anyway, we have four of Christ`s disciples who at the time of being called were nothing more than common, probably un-educated and illiterate, fishermen. They were more than likely a bit `rough and ready`, shabbily dressed and bore the `aroma` of the sea. They would not I imagine, have felt at ease in dealing directly with authority, and even less at ease with having to engage with `polite` society or of having to breathe in its `rarified atmosphere, they being totally devoid of `social graces`. Nevertheless, they more than likely all had a sense of decency, and of right and wrong and were probably brutally honest, something which is characterised as being `artless` these days. Being fishermen, they would have thought nothing about diving naked into the sea as being part of an everyday occurrence to untangle nets or whatever, and this having been done in full view of whosoever happened to be around them at the time. They (nor, I should suppose, their families) had no `hang-ups` about nakedness when nakedness was seen to be required, let`s read from **John 21: 7**. `Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved, said to Peter, It is the Lord. Now, when simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his fisherman`s coat, (for he had been naked) and he dived into the sea`. Peter was naked because he was fishing. It is far easier to remain naked than to keep dressing and undressing every time you have to get in and out of the water. When Jesus appeared on the shore of the lake however, Peter appeared to do a strange thing by actually *putting on* his clothes *before* diving into the water. This seems to indicate that a social gathering of sorts was taking place on the lake shore, (in fact the scriptures go on to tell us that a dinner had been prepared) and the last thing that Peter would want to do would be to make landfall by arriving on the scene as naked as the day that he was born! Would anybody in their right mind today want to arrive at a dinner party completely starkers? Being in a state of nakedness has its `proper place, and when it is in its `proper place then there should be no shame or guilt attached to it.

Up to now we have four of Jesus` disciples who were fishermen and one who was a tax collector. The questions arise, what type of people were being called back then? and what types are being called today? The reading of this next scripture will tell us. **1 Corinthians 1: 26-29**. `Consider your calling, bretheren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But rather, God has chosen the foolish things of the world in order to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world in order to shame the things which are mighty. And also the lowly things of the world, and the things which are despised, God has chosen, yes, and also things which are not, in order to bring to nothing the things which are, so that no flesh

shall glory in His presence`. As for the rest of Jesus` disciples, I cannot find any information that relates to us their former occupations, (Luke, `the physician`, being the exception) but as that last scripture indicates, their jobs of work were probably nothing special, with maybe one or two of them such as Matthew, having been literate and educated to a certain standard. But as many of us realise, being un-educated and illiterate does not necessarily indicate that an individual is stupid, it merely means that they have not, *as of yet*, received appropriate schooling.

Jesus` disciples were, *when they were first called*, just the same as the vast majority of the people who make up the population of the world today. They all had their various likes and dislikes, their bigotries and their foibles, fears and ambitions, loves and hates, humour and sarcasm, weaknesses and failings. Let`s have a look at two disciples who were brothers, James and John. They had probably throughout their lives been squabbling with each other (as brothers often do) about which of them is the best at this or that, or about which of them has the better chance of finding a wife before the other. Even as disciples of Jesus, they *may* have had a rivalry with each other as to which of them was of the most value to Him, but that aside, their mother had other ideas, she wanted the *best* for *both* of them as this next scripture tells us. **Matthew 20: 20-21.**

`Then came to Jesus the mother of Zebedee`s children, with her sons, worshipping Him and desiring a certain thing of Him. And He said to her, What do you want? She says to Him. Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Your right hand, and the other on Your left, in Your kingdom`. Wow, not much to ask for, and Jesus went on to explain to her that this request was a thing which was not possible for Him to grant to her or to them, but He also added that if they agreed to certain terms and conditions, then her sons could embark on the same path as He Himself was on. Then, having heard the terms and conditions, James and John readily agreed to them. But I wonder, did they really understand what they were letting themselves in for when they accepted? Let`s read those terms and conditions for ourselves in **Matthew 20: 22-23.** *`But Jesus answered and said, You know not what you ask. Are you able to drink of the cup that that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They answered Him, We are able. And He says to them, You shall indeed drink of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with. . .`* Remember, how in time to come, that even Jesus prayed fervently to His heavenly Father for that very `cup` to be removed from Him? **Luke 22: 42.** *`Saying, Father, if You be willing, remove this cup from Me, nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done`.* I wonder then how James and John managed to deal with it?

Let us now take a look at Thomas. I cannot say that I blame Thomas for having his doubts, or rather for being cautious, about taking things at face value, after all, does not the scripture of **1 Thess. 5: 21.** warn us to `prove all things`? And likewise, in **1 John 4: 1.** we are told not to believe every spirit without first testing them. Even so, was Thomas` doubt about Jesus being He who He said that He was justifiable? (Thomas was reacting on being told the story about Jesus appearing to the disciples after His crucifixion) or was Thomas (as is the case of more and more people these days) merely a sceptic at heart? It is also worth mentioning that Thomas may have been feeling a little bit upset, frustrated and left out that he had not been present when Jesus had appeared to the rest of the disciples, and so had childishly overreacted on hearing the news that he had missed out on something really rather special. Anyway, what Jesus had to say to him in verse 29 of this next scripture that we shall read seems to indicate that Thomas, as part

of his character make-up, was indeed more than just the cautious type, but you can judge for yourselves, **John 20: 24-28**. `But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore, said to him, We have seen the Lord. But he replied to them, Except that I see the print of the nails in His hands, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe. (that who you saw was Him) And after eight days had passed, His disciples were once again within the house, and Thomas was with them. Then Jesus appeared, the doors being shut, and He stood in the midst of them and said, Peace be with you. Then Jesus said to Thomas, Reach here with your finger, and behold My hands, and reach here your hand, and thrust it into My side, and be not unbelieving but believing. And Thomas answered Him and said, My Lord and my God`. and **verse 29**. `Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen Me, (met Me) you have believed, blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed`.

Concerning the disciples themselves, (a *very select* group indeed) was everything always harmonious and peaceful? where they now all above human fallibility having been personally selected by God himself? Well, apparently not, and an example of how they sometimes `got it wrong` as individuals and thus caused friction between themselves is demonstrated by Paul having to publicly admonish Peter. This happened largely because of Peter`s hypocrisy and cowardliness, character traits which were never far from the surface and which were in evidence right up to Jesus` crucifixion and beyond.

For a start, we`ll read of that particular incident concerning the apostle Paul in the book of **Galations 2: 11-14**. `But when Peter was come to Antioch, I (Paul) confronted him face to face, because he was at fault. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles, but when they arrived, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews likewise did the same, in so much as Barnabus was also influenced by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they did not walk upright according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter, before them all, If you being a Jew live after the manner of the Gentiles, and do not as the Jews do, why compel the Gentiles to live after the manner of the Jews?` As we can appreciate, Peter, at this point in his life was not yet a strong character, and not one it seems who could be relied upon to rigorously uphold the teachings of the gospel in spite of all that Jesus Christ had said and warned him about, which includes this next piece of scripture, and it is probably the one that portrays Peter at his worst. We enter upon the scene where Jesus has been arrested under armed guard and is now being interrogated by the authorities, **Matthew 26: 69-75**. `Now Peter sat outside in the palace, and a young woman came to him saying, You also were with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before all present saying, I don`t know what you mean. And when he left to go out onto the porch, another woman saw him, and said to all that were there, This man was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again Peter denied with an oath saying, I do not know the man. And after a while, those who were standing near came to him and said, Surely, you are also one of them, because your accent gives you away. Then Peter began to curse and to swear, saying, I do not know the man. And immediately the cock crowed. And then Peter remembered the words of Jesus which He had spoken to him; Before the cock crows, you will deny Me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly`.

Even for all of this, things did not really improve as regards Peter`s character inasmuch that Jesus, after His resurrection, once again had to have words with him.

John 21: 15-19. `So, after they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these? (that is the other disciples) And he answered Him, Yes Lord, You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My lambs. For the second time, Jesus says to him, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me? Peter replies, Yes Lord, You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep. Jesus then says to him for a third time, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me? Peter was now grieved because Jesus had asked him for the third time, Do you love Me? And so he said to Him, Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You. Jesus answered him, Feed My sheep. For truly I say to you, When you were young you dressed yourself, and walked wherever you wanted, but when you grow old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall dress you, and carry you where you don't want to go. This spoke Jesus in order to signify by what kind of death Peter would undergo in order to glorify God. And when Jesus had spoken those words He said, You, follow Me`. But even now, after hearing these words, Peter tried to comfort himself by saying to Jesus, something along the lines of, `Well, if I am to suffer in the same manner as You did Lord, are any of the other disciples going to have to suffer in the same way as well?`, probably thinking to himself that maybe he wouldn't feel so bad about it if this were to be the case. Let's read about what he did actually say by continuing in the book of **John 21: 20-22.** `Then Peter, turning around, sees the disciple whom Jesus loved, following them, this is being same disciple who leaned on Jesus` breast at supper and said, Lord, which is he who betrays You? So, Peter seeing him said to Jesus, Lord, and what of this man? (meaning, how then will this disciple die?) And Jesus answered him, If I were to will that he lives until I come, (meaning His second coming) what concern is it of yours? You follow Me`. Oh dear, not much if any comfort for Peter with those words.

Before we leave off looking at the character of the apostle Peter, just one more thing to mention. Even before He had informed Peter that he would deny Him three times before the cock crowed, Jesus had had this to say to him, and these words must have left him (as with any other right-thinking person) feeling more than uneasy! **Luke 22: 31.** `And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Behold, Satan has desired to have you, so that he may sift you as wheat`. But, right after that terrifying statement, I think that in order to test his faith, (because if Peter had little or no faith in Jesus then these next words spoken to him would be of no comfort to Peter at all considering what he had just heard) Jesus said this to him, **Luke 22: 32.** `But I have prayed for you, so that your faith will not fail: and when you are converted, strengthen your bretheren`. And so, in spite of his initially weak and cowardly character, Peter was converted, meaning that he changed, he overcame that which he knew were the `unsavoury` aspects of himself. And if he, an ordinary man with *many* faults and failings, can do it, then, with Jesus` help, so can we!

I think that maybe all who are reading this article realise just what a thoroughly nasty piece of work Saul was before his conversion and having his name changed to Paul, and eventually becoming the apostle Paul. We will break into our first scripture regarding Saul (Paul) at a point where saint Stephen is about to be stoned to death by the assembled mob. **Acts 7: 57-59.** `Then they cried out with a loud voice, and refused to listen to Stephen anymore, and they ran upon him in a mob. They cast him out of the city and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes (for safe keeping) at a young man`s feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, who called upon God, saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit`. And now **Acts 8: 1-3.** `And Saul was in

agreement with Stephen`s death. At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. And devout men carried away Stephen`s body for burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he began ravaging the church, entering into every house and hauling men and women away, arresting them and throwing them into prison`. Saul really comes across as an unrelenting, un pitying zealot who was intent on following the dictates of the official line no matter what. He mercilessly punished those who contravened it or got in his way during the execution of his `duty`. But the Lord saw that most of the characteristics that Saul possessed could be put to a better use, all that was needed would be a little `persuasion`! Paul then went on for the rest of his new life in Christ struggling to try to stay on the right side of the Lord God, most accounts of which can be read about in the book of `Romans`. Even to this very day, we who profess to be, or rather practise *trying* to be, true Christians, *never* have a continuously smooth ride through life. This is because Satan and his demons *never* rest in their attempts to try and seduce us into taking the easy way out and `go with the flow` of this world, and one of the easiest ways for them to succeed in doing this is by exploiting our personal weaknesses as individuals. Regarding this, let`s have a read of **Ephesians 6: 10-13**. `Finally, my bretheren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you will be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers. against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take to yourself the whole (spiritual) armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, having done all to survive`. Although we know of Satan and of the power that he is (for the moment) *allowed* to wield, no true Christian should allow themselves to be overcome by fear or by dread concerning him or his demons. We have a far greater and more powerful (*all* powerful!!) God protecting us, all that we have to do is submit ourselves to Him by obeying His commandments thereby demonstrating our true love for Him and for our fellow men. Let`s read these words of Jesus in **John 14: 15**. `If you love Me, keep My commandments`. and these words of James in **James 4: 7**. `Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you`.

Satan has no power over a righteous person, and for each and every Christian individual to become righteous and to maintain righteousness it is a *constant* battle. Righteousness is not something like an Olympic medal which can be achieved through hard work and dedication and then becomes the recipient`s inalienable right to hold on to for the rest of their lives. Righteousness has to be *maintained*, and achieving it in the first instance is as nothing compared to the life-long battle of trying to hold on to it! So what exactly is righteousness? well, it is a condition of being agreeable in the sight of the Lord God. How we, as individuals, can achieve this state can be found in **1 Peter 3: 8-16**. `Finally, be you all of one mind, having compassion for each other, loving as bretheren, be humble, be courteous. Do not render evil for evil, neither insult for insult, but rather give blessing, knowing that this is a duty of your calling, and thereby you will inherit a blessing. For he that would love life and experience good times, should refrain his tongue from speaking evil, and his lips from speaking guile. Let him turn from evil and instead do good, let him speak peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord watch over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers: but the face of the Lord is

against them that do evil. And who is he that can harm you, if you be followers of that which is good? But, and if, you suffer for righteousness` sake, happy are you, and do not be afraid of their terror, neither worry about it`.

Staying in the new testament, let`s continue to have a look at a few more of the other `personalities` mentioned within its` pages and of their character traits and their oh-so-human fallibilities and failings. I think that one of the more amusing (that is from the reader`s point of view!) is the account of the bungled exorcism. I can just imagine this group of Jews, (made jealous/zealous of the power that they had witnessed being wielded by the apostle Paul) attempting to exorcise a moderately powerful demonic spirit from a man, with probably nothing more to aid them than a sense of self importance and childlike anticipation. They appear to have arrived upon the scene full of misplaced self-belief and with a `can do, will do` attitude. Failure concerning their ability is not ***yet*** a word that has entered their heads. The scripture that relates this story is more than just an amusing anecdote, it is also a warning for those who, even if they believe, call on the name of Jesus Christ just to try to test and demonstrate His power and thus provide a sensation for others to witness just so that they themselves can bask in any audience-given glory and praise which is ***not*** theirs to bask in! They would have done well to have known and to have obeyed this old testament scripture, as spoken of here by Jesus, **Matthew 4: 7.** `Jesus said to him, **It is also written, You shall not tempt the Lord your God**`. Also, these words of Jesus Christ should be taken into account by the reader when requiring anything special from the Lord **Matthew 6: 6.** `But you, when you pray, enter into your closet, (private place) and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father in secret, and your Father who sees in secret, shall reward you openly`.

Before calling on and using ***the*** power of ***the*** Lord Jesus` name for something like a public healing or an exorcism, a person has to be of `the right stuff`, and being of `the right stuff` is something that ***very few*** have ***ever*** achieved in their lifetime upon this earth. All true Christians should be aware of the fact that most ***if not all*** public`miracles` performed these days and claimed to be the workings of Jesus Christ or one of His `saints`, are in fact the work of Satan and/or his demons! However, through quiet, private prayer, divine miracles are granted by the Lord God to true Christians as and when the Lord deems a particular miracle to be of benefit to them.

Let`s now return to the story of the bungled exorcism. We`ll start at the scripture which describes the sort of `things` that the apostle Paul (with the Lord`s power) was making happen and which probably inspired this group of Jews to `have a go at it` as well. **Acts 19: 11-16.** `And God worked special miracles by the hands of Paul, insomuch that from his body were produced handkerchiefs and aprons which were then brought to the sick, and their diseases then left them and any evil spirits departed from them. Then, certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took it upon themselves, to call over them which had evil spirits, the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We command you by Jesus whom Paul preaches. Now there were seven sons of one named Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, who did so. But the evil spirit answered them and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you? And the man who was possessed of the evil spirit leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded`.

I now find the question arises; Should we condemn unconditionally anybody *outside* of a ***true*** Christian church who has obviously not come to understand the proper

workings of Christian belief and practice by being directly taught it by others, but who, by way of their own individual efforts are somehow managing to perform a worthwhile `work`? Now I`m not talking about `work` such as so-called `missionary` work as performed by the Roman catholic church and its `multitudinous` `sister` churches who are only hell-bent on converting as many `innocents` as they can to their twisted and Satanic way of Babylonian mystery religion worship. I`m talking about people who have an `inbuilt` and proper knowledge and love of the Lord and His ways, but as of yet have not been introduced to others of a like mind, that is to say, to the bretheren of God`s true church. There is a scripture that instructs us about such people, and it is to be found in **Mark 9: 38-42.** `And John answered Jesus saying, Master, we saw a person casting out demons in Your name, but he does not follow us; and so we forbad him because he does not follow us. But Jesus said, Do not forbid him, because there is no man which shall perform a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us, is for us. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. But, whosoever shall make to falter one of these little ones who believe in Me, (a `babe` in Christ, a new believer) it would be better for him if a millstone were hanged around his neck, and he were cast into the sea`. *And there we have another warning.* Basically, I think that what Jesus is implying in those last few lines of that scripture is this: Be very careful about that which you do and say publicly in My name, because if your faith is not true or strong enough, ***you will fail***, and *your failure* can/will deter those who have witnessed it from believing in Me and the *true* power that I and my Father have. What then is true faith, that is to say faith that is strong enough to be demonstrated in public? Well, I can best answer that by leading the reader to this next section of scripture, **Mark 11: 22-23.** `And Jesus answering said to them, Have faith in God. For truly I say to you, That whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be you removed, and be you cast into the sea; and shall not have any doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things that he says shall come to pass; then he shall have whatsoever he says`. Of course all *divine* miracles are conditional, insomuch that they will not happen at all without the Lord God`s approval. It is also indicated in that last scripture (were Jesus says `those things that he says shall come to pass`) that a person should not always expect a miracle to happen instantaneously, some will take time. Patience, it would seem, oftentimes goes hand-in-hand with faith.

Knowing what we do know about the disciples, should any of them be fairly described as hypocrites? Did some say one thing and then proceed to practice another? Well yes, and no. It is obvious that *some* were *at first* weak in their faith and not all of their spoken good intentions were matched by their later deeds, but *eventually* they *all* achieved righteousness. (except of course for Judas Escariot) It must also be taken into account that what we read about them in the scriptures is of but a moment in time concerning the `growing pains` of converted, ordinary men striving to overcome their base, human emotions and fears to try to reconcile themselves to God the Father, and become men worthy to be followers of His Son, Jesus Christ. Let`s remind ourselves of their battle as *ordinary men*, a battle which is now become our battle, **1 Corinthians 1: 26-29.** `Consider your calling, bretheren, how that not many wise in the eyes of other men, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But rather, God has chosen the foolish (in the eyes of other men) things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world in order to confound the things that are mighty, and

the unassuming things of the world, and the things which are despised, (looked down upon) has God chosen. Yes, and also things which are not, in order to bring to nought those things which are, so that no flesh should (have) glory in His presence`. Of course the Lord knows what each and everyone of us is like, what we once were and that which we are capable of eventually becoming **if** we continue with our battle to overcome this world. Remember, even Jesus Christ, very God in the flesh, had to continually battle to overcome this world, it was not `handed to Him on a plate` by God the Father! Let`s remind ourselves of these words which He spoke to His disciples, **John 16: 32-33**. `Behold, the hour comes, yes, it has already come, that you shall be scattered, everyone having to look out for themselves, and you shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world`. With the words of that last scripture deeply imbedded in our minds we should take heart that even although we might begin to feel that we are failing in our battle to overcome this world, we have our Saviour (who has already done it in the flesh) to fall back on and help us if and when we ask Him. Jesus spoke these words of comfort for our benefit, **Matthew 11: 28-30**. `Come to Me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am humble and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls, because My yoke is easy, and My burden is light`.

The Lord God, in the shape and form of Jesus Christ, was born of a woman as a flesh and blood human being. He grew up to be a man and in His lifetime He experienced the *same things* that most of us have experienced. But His life culminated in a gruesome, slow and agonizing death by Him being nailed to a piece of wood and hoisted aloft for all to see. Jesus had the tremendously difficult task of not only experiencing the many seducing `attractions` of the flesh but of also having to resist and overcome them (without resorting to His divine power which He could have used!) and also by not breaking *any* of the ten commandments. It must be remembered that He suffered and endured all this **not** for His sake, but for ours! Yes, God the Father and Jesus Christ know *exactly* what the character make-up of humankind was, and still is, and more importantly they knew and know to what depraved depths that character is capable of sinking to, and they both knew this **before** God became Jesus Christ, making what He did for us all the more astounding and courageous! Let`s read from **2 Chronicles 6: 30**. `Then hear You from heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive and render to every man according to all that he has done, whose heart you know; because only You know the hearts of the children of men (Adam)`.

So where does such courage and unrelenting commitment come from, especially in a God who wants for nothing and has nothing to prove? This next scripture, words spoken by God Himself as Jesus Christ, gives us the answer, **John 3: 16**. For God so loved the world (meaning His human creation) that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life`.

The base make-up, the inherent character traits of humankind, were firmly established way back in the garden of Eden when, because of the direct influence of Satan the devil, they were irrevocably tarnished and made subject to be easily swayed by the temptation to commit sin. Such characteristics left to their own devices would never be able to be controlled and kept to a manageable level and would subsequently completely engulf, corrupt and ultimately destroy every flesh and blood human being.

Which is why we had to have our flesh and blood Saviour Jesus Christ and which is why we still continually need His presence (within us and without us) to watch and guard over us. There are not many of us who *fully* realise just how fragile our human condition is as compared to those who are spirit beings and who are evil and hell-bent on seeing us **all** destroyed.

Even though we are all tarnished with sin from birth, the Lord has allowed it to be so since the first sin was committed in the garden of Eden. This is because sin, to those of us who recognise it as such, is not just a threat to us all but it is also a challenge, a contest if you like, to see who can beat it and overcome it. And as with all worthwhile contests, the prizes, the rewards for the winners, are great! All true, *baptised* Christians have a great advantage in this contest, for, just as in some TV game shows, we can `call a Friend`, but with one big difference, we can *always* call on our Friend Jesus Christ for the help that we need, when we need it, and He *always* knows the right answer. All that we then have to do is to recognize that answer as and when we are given it and then have the faith to believe it and to put it into practice.

Let`s have a read of **1 Corinthians 10: 5-13**. `But with many of them, God was not well pleased, and they were destroyed in the wilderness. Now these things were examples for us, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be you idolators, as were some of them, as it is written of them; The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and because of that there fell of them in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither should we tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and because of that they were destroyed by serpents. Neither should we grumble (against God) as some of them also grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all of these things happened to them for an example, and they were recorded in writing for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him who thinks that he stands, (is right before the Lord) take care lest he falls. There is no temptation (to commit sin) set before you other than that which is common to all men: but God is faithful, He will not permit you be tempted beyond that which you (as individuals) are able to bear, but will, with the temptation, also provide a way for you to escape (overcome) it, so that you will be able to deal with it`.

And so for those ordinary people who we meet in our everyday lives, and who think that the bible is nothing more than an out-of-date compilation of ancient and irrelevant Jewish `fairy tales` and fantastical myths, which we in our oh-so-modern and superior advanced technological age have little or nothing in common with any more, we can answer them by pointing out that ***every one*** of the character traits found within the people of the bible all those thousands of years ago are still very much alive, and can be found in each and every one of us living today.

There is one final scripture that I should like to use to sum up this whole article because it indicates to the reader that all things relating to the `human condition`/character have *not* changed over the thousands of years since the bible was first written, **Ecclesiastes 1: 9**. `The thing that has been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; **and there is no new thing under the sun**`.

