

After the Counsel of His Own Will

Does Mankind Have Free Will?

Including Twelve Examples of How God Deals With Mankind

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Introduction

Most Christians will readily admit that the God they serve is a sovereign God. The dictionary defines sovereignty as "supreme authority." Few indeed deny that God is the supreme power in the universe. The scriptures certainly affirm this:

"Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing" (Isa. 40:15).

"The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all" (Psa. 103:19).

In the fourth chapter of Daniel, God gives King Nebuchadnezzar a 'troubling' dream. Four times in this one chapter we are told "...that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" (Dan. 4:17, 25, 26 & 32).

According to Daniel chapter four, God rules in the kingdoms of men and 'wills' to 'set up' the "basest of men" over those kingdoms.

Even evil men are under the sovereign rule of the supreme authority according to the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. Though troubling to the carnal mind, even this assertion is acknowledged by most Christians.

The question naturally arises as to how far this sovereignty extends. Does God rule in the kingdoms of men, but not in the wills of men? How could that possibly work? If God wills to place base men over the kingdoms of men, it would seem He must first know which particular leader will not break down and repent of his low ways right in the middle of his rulership. We are told emphatically and repeatedly that God had to "harden Pharaoh's heart" to keep him from letting Israel go before God planned on their release from Egypt (Ex. 4:21, 7:13 & 22).

Does God therefore harden the hearts only of world leaders, but not the hearts of the average individual?

Our only concern in this paper is 'what saith the scriptures'. That brings us to the scripture from which we have taken our title: "In whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated **ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF HIM WHO WORKETH ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL**" (Eph. 1:11).

This paper was inspired by a friend who doesn't believe that Eph. 1:11 includes his 'freedom of choice'. If we have no freedom of choice, he asked, how could those who were invited to the "wedding dinner" of Matt. 22 and the 'great supper' of Luke 14 have refused their invitations? Didn't they clearly choose not to attend?

It is the purpose of this article to show from the scriptures why these invited guests refused their invitations and also **WHY** we all make the decisions we enact. Truly the scriptures teach the law of cause and effect. Though this is demonstrated throughout the scriptures, we will use but twelve examples to shed light on how God works **ALL THINGS** after the counsel of **HIS OWN WILL**. First, let's notice to whom the parables of Matt. 22 and Luke 14 are addressed.

Part 1 - Who Are They Who Refuse Christ?

Matt. 21:45 and Luke 14:1 tell us Jesus was talking to the "chief priests and Pharisees" in Matt. 22.

In Luke 14, the excuses given for not coming to the supper were "I have bought a piece of ground", "I have bought five yoke of oxen" and "I have married a wife". In response to these excuses, the "Lord" the "master of the house" had these men of industry replaced with "the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind".

Christ concludes this parable "none of those men...bidden shall taste of my supper". "Taste of my supper" is to receive and understand Christ. (John 6:32-35). This declaration "I am the true bread: is placed right after Christ fed the five thousand (John 6:10).

Clearly Christ is saying that those who refuse to come to the "great supper" are those who refuse Him. The parable of the marriage supper is preceded by this statement: "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them" (Matt. 21:45). So there is no question who those who were too industrious to attend the "marriage ...dinner" of Matthew 22 or the "great supper" of Luke 14 are. They are the religious leaders of the people of God of every generation. These are the very same people mentioned in Rev. 3:17 who say "I am rich and increased with goods (industrious people both physically and spiritually) and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

The question more precisely is why did they refuse to accept the invitation to come to the "great supper" of Luke 14:16 or the wedding 'dinner' of Matt. 22:4? The question at the heart of these parables is: WHY WOULD ANYONE REFUSE AND REJECT THEIR SAVIOR? Why are "the multitudes" led by their leaders away from Christ?

Why is one blessed if he accepts the invitation to this marriage supper? "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

Once again the question is still why would anyone refuse and excuse himself from what is simply the single greatest honor that can be bestowed upon anyone in all of the history of mankind? No one doubts that these two parables represent the first resurrection: "...Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb..." (Rev. 19:9).

The excuses given in both parables are the same: "But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" (Matt. 22:5).

Part 2 - The Real Reason Christ is Rejected

When we ask 'why', what we are really asking is "does man have a 'free will'". "Does man make 'free choices'?" No one denies that we make choices every day; "Will I take this job or that job?"; "What time will I get up?"; "Will I take time for breakfast?"; "Which food will I choose?"; "Which route will I take to work?", etc. We make hundreds of decisions every day. No one denies that we make decisions. Those who declined their invitation to the great supper and the wedding chose not to attend. We are told what they chose. It's not debatable.

But we are also told why they failed to accept their invitation to be in the marriage supper of the Lamb. All know that Israel has rejected her Messiah. "When the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them" (Matt. 21:45). These are the leaders of God's people.

It wasn't just the leaders though: "...The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should...destroy Jesus" (Matt. 27:20). The multitude...? What multitude? It was the same multitude which the day before had said "blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Luke 19:38). Verse 37 says: "The whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen." This is called the triumphal entry into Jerusalem the day before Christ's betrayal.

One day the multitudes are calling him "the king that comes in the name of the Lord", and the next day the same multitude is "persuaded [by the chief priests and elders]...that they should...destroy Jesus."

How is it possible to be so fickle? Outwardly it was "...because he was nigh Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. But overnight Christ had been taken prisoner and was standing before them in shackles before Pilate. "All the mighty works they had seen "that had inspired the multitudes to say "blessed is the king that cometh in the name of the Lord" all of a sudden didn't seem so mighty. No matter how many times we may think scripture says otherwise "he that taketh a city" will always be considered "mightier than he that ruleth his spirit" (Pro. 16:32).

This is only the apparent reason for the multitudes and their leaders rejecting Christ. The scriptures give us the true reason. Here is the true reason: "And when He was come near He beheld the city and wept over it, Saying IF THOU HADST KNOWN, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! BUT NOW THEY ARE HID FROM THINE EYES" (Luke 19:"41-42).

This of course is in complete accord with Matt. 13:11: "...To them it is not given...to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God." This 'blindness of Israel' referred to by Christ here in Matt. 13 is quoted from Isa. 6:9-10 and is repeated again and again in the other gospels (Matt. 4:11 and Luke 8:10 and John 12:40) and throughout Paul's epistles (Rom. 11:8, etc.).

Why does Israel reject their Messiah? "Because...to them it is not given...to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." Who blinds them to this vital knowledge? What are we told? Are we told anywhere in the pages of scripture that because of the free will of the chief priests and elders and because of the free will of the multitudes, Israel ends up refusing their invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb? No, we are not told such a thing.

Here is what we are told. "...Of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together FOR TO DO WHATSOEVER THY HAND AND THY COUNSEL DETERMINED BEFORE TO BE DONE' (Act 4:27-28). That is the "of a TRUTH" of the whole matter.

Just how far does this "thy counsel determined before to be done" go? Does it go no further than man's free will permits? Could Judas, the chief priests and elders, Pilate or the multitude possibly have of their own free will chosen not to destroy Christ?

Will we believe what a minister tells us or will the word of God have pre-eminence for us? Here is what the scriptures teach from Genesis to Revelation: "Having made known to us the mystery of HIS WILL according to HIS GOOD PLEASURE which HE hath PURPOSED IN HIMSELF... ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF HIM WHO WORKETH ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:9 and 11).

Is it unfair at this point to ask, did the nation of Israel reject Christ after the counsel of their own 'free will'? Is there anything that is not after the counsel of His will? Is anything too evil to be included in all things? Only if you believe that the lives of 'X' number of men are more valuable than the life of Christ whom God according to Acts 4:28 "determined before" to be slain. All the lives and suffering of all the men and women, boys and girls from Adam to the consummation are not to be compared to that which was sacrificed for their sins. That sacrifice was by the counsel of God and Him alone. Men's choices were simply used to accomplish that end.

Yes, we 'choose' in all the decisions we make every day, but is this really the result of our free will? What happens when our free will conflicts with "the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of HIS OWN WILL"?

The answer is obvious. There can only be one truly free will to which all others are subordinate. Only One will can work "all things after the counsel of His own will." All other decisions are 'worked', caused by that One will and may appear to be free, but we will demonstrate they are always in "all things" caused decisions.

Too often we read these parables of Christ and apply them to the religious leaders of Christ's day instead of applying them to Christianity today and to ourselves as well. What do the scriptures say of this "pass the buck" attitude? "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12), and "...continue in His goodness, otherwise you also shall be cut off" (Rom. 11:22).

The point made repeatedly in Christ's parables was two-fold: 1) the first shall be last and the last, first, and 2) many are called but few are chosen (Matt. 20:16).

Nowhere in scripture are we told "many decide to come to God, but few decide to endure to the end". There are many admonitions given to us in scripture; 'don't eat of the tree', 'choose therefore life' (Deut. 30:19), 'come to the marriage...dinner' and 'come to the great supper', etc., etc.

This God, who gives us so many admonitions, wants us to "know...that...I form the light AND...darkness...good AND evil" (Isa. 45:7). He informs us that the trials of Job were HIS idea (Job. 1:8); that "all the evil that the Lord had brought upon" Job was indeed from the Lord himself (Job 42:11).

Yes, Adam was told 'don't eat'. Did an all-knowing God choose not to know what Adam's choice would be? Has He chosen not to know what our choices will be? After all, we are all "in Adam". What do the scriptures teach ultimately happen to "all" who are in Adam? "For as **in Adam all die**, even so **in Christ shall all be made alive**" (I Cor. 15:22).

We are told that we were called in Christ "before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9). So God must have known in advance what Adam and each of us and those who refused to come to the wedding would choose.

Israel has been broken off for rejecting her Messiah, and yet Peter and John and the entire church in Jerusalem prayed "with one accord" (Acts 4:24): "...of a truth against thy holy child Jesus whom you hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do **WHATSOEVER THY HAND AND THY COUNSEL DETERMINED BEFORE TO BE DONE**" (Acts 4:27-28).

Why did the Jews refuse to come to the wedding feast? Was it because they chose to put other things ahead of their Messiah? Of course that is the obvious, outward, carnal, fleshly explanation. Yet we are plainly told that while we appear to make choices, good or bad, of our own "free will", the spiritual, scriptural fact is: "We wrestle [in our apparent 'free will'] not against flesh and blood, but against [spiritual] principalities, against [spiritual] powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places [the celestials - Strong's' #2032 - *epouranious*]" (Eph. 6:12).

Yet it appears from our perspective that the chief priests and Pharisees and "the people of Israel" chose "of their own free will" to refuse their Messiah.

The "first Adam" in the temple of God, "the beast" is loath to leave that temple. He of his own 'free will' will never admit that while yes, he makes choices every day, those choices have nothing to do with 'free will'. Every choice we make, from casually scratching our head to choosing Christ as our savior is a **caused** choice.

Why did "the people of Israel...gather together...against thy holy Child Jesus"?: "...to do whatsoever [God's] counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28).

Was this a unique situation that was of such importance that God had to personally step in to see for sure that Satan would enter Judas, and Judas would betray Christ to the chief priests and they would send him to Pilate to be crucified? Is this what "thy counsel determined before to be done" means?; that God steps into the affairs of men only occasionally for Esau, Pharaoh, maybe even Jeremiah, certainly in the case of Christ's crucifixion, yet only occasionally? Is that what scripture teaches us about the counsel of God?

"Having PREDESTINATED US...according to the good pleasure of HIS will...In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being PREDESTINATED according to the purpose of Him who worketh ALL THINGS after the COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL:" (Eph. 1:5 and 11).

If "the very hairs of our heads are numbered", why would we believe that the all-knowing God who hardens hearts, blinds eyes and stops ears is not also, through the "principalities and powers" at His disposal, causing every trial and test, every chastening and scourging, and yes, causing ALL things especially our very hearts and thoughts and choices "according to the counsel of HIS WILL?"

These are the scriptural truths concerning the extent of the counsel of His will. Nowhere do the scriptures teach otherwise. The fact that God holds us accountable for our sins has nothing whatsoever to do with our being responsible for our wretched actions and condition.

It was **God's** free will that created us of dust instead of spirit. It is from His hand that every person born comes into this world naked, testifying of our sinful, dying, of the dust composition.

God Himself takes the responsibility for every evil act ever committed (Isa. 45:7), even the most evil act of all time, the death of our sinless, perfect, spotless Savior. (Acts 4:28).

This all being made so clear in scripture, one would expect a just God who hardens hearts, blinds eyes and stops ears to make provision for the salvation of all of his creatures. Is that indeed the case? Here is what the Savior Himself has to say: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw (Strong's #1670 - *helkuo* - drag) ALL MEN unto me" (John 12:32).

Part 3 - Did Peter agree with Christ?

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that ANY should perish but that ALL should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9).

Indeed we must all choose day by day to pick the good and reject the evil. But it seems that the God of the universe, the God who not only created light to bring us out of darkness, is also the creator of the very darkness out of which we are to come.

The God who creates the good we are to choose, is also the God who creates the evil we are to refuse (Isa. 45:7).

These are profound scriptures rigorously avoided by the bulk of Christendom. I need to reword that because the scriptural truth is that they do not avoid this scripture; the truth, according to Christ, is that God has blinded them to this scripture, and they don't even know that it is in the Bible. Being blinded by God Himself, when it is pointed out to them they still cannot see it: "To them it is not given...to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11).

To whom is it not given to know the mysteries of the kingdom? "All these things spake Jesus to the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake He not unto them" (Matt. 13:34). For what purpose did Christ speak in parables? "...lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and should understand with their heart and should be converted and I should heal them" (Matt. 13:15).

Here's the way Mark puts it: "But without a parable spake He not unto them: and when they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples" (Mark 4:34).

I've already quoted Matt. 21:45, but let's be clear that the "chief priest and Pharisees" and "lawyers and Pharisees" were indeed included in those to whom Christ spoke in parables "to whom" it is not given...to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven". Here again is Matt. 21:45: "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they perceived that he spake of them".

As I understand the question you asked, "Who are these people who refuse to come to the wedding supper?" The answer is: it is those to whom Christ spoke these very parables. It is those to whom it is not given to "know" or to "see" or to "hear" or "be converted" or "be healed".

Why are these things not given to them while on the other hand we are told "because it is given unto you to know...but to them it is not given"...blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear" (Matt. 13:11 and 16).

The answer is: God had decided, not "before the world began", but "before **eonian** times (the Greek word is *aiionios* - Strong's #166) that certain predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works ALL THINGS after the counsel of HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:11) would be "called... with an holy calling, not according to our works but ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PURPOSE and grace which was given us in Christ before the world began (before *chronos aiionios* - before times eonian)" (II Tim. 1:9).

Now John the Baptist had admonished the same scribes, lawyers and Pharisees to "repent for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). Had the multitudes, including the scribes and lawyers and Pharisees, repented, Christ would never have been crucified, and we would have no savior. But things are not left to chance with God.

Those who crucified Christ certainly did not consider themselves robots any more than you or me. Indeed robots are nowhere to be found in scripture. The scriptural word for us all is far more basic and simple than robot. In God's eyes, we are nothing more than slightly moist dust. We are **clay**, and God is the Potter. Here are God's words to every one of us: "And the vessel made of clay [the first Adam made by the Potter] was marred in the hand of the Potter [that's God]: so He made it again [the second Adam] another vessel as seemed good to the Potter to make. Then came the word of the Lord unto me saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold as the clay is in the potters hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel" (Jer. 18:4). This too, is couched in admonitions to repent, yet in the same breath we are told that it is God who makes the "marred vessel first and then destroys the marred vessel and replaces it with "another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make".

This is in accord with how the first Adam [that's us] comes right from the hand of the creator, the Potter. He [we] was naked, meaning according to Rev. 3:17, he was a sinning machine, and of the dust, corruptible. Serpents do not literally eat dust, but the Adversary certainly does feed on our flesh. "Dust shalt thou eat", has been the nourishment of the Adversary since Adam. We have all come from the hand of the creator naked, sinful, and of the dust, corruptible. Anyone who believes that Adam would never have died if he hadn't eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil believes that flesh is after all incorruptible and can live forever.

One must eat of the tree of life to live forever. The first Adam never did that. Adam did not die and become corruptible because he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam sinned, was spiritually naked, because he was corruptible and of the flesh, of the dust, and was dying: "In the day that you eat thereof DYING you shall die" (Gen. 2:17). Few people notice that the tree of the knowledge of good has the same root as the tree of the knowledge of evil. Consequently they are confused as to why Cain's offering to God was rejected. After all Cain "brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord" (Gen. 4:3).

They are very few indeed who are given eyes to see that it was God Himself who planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Fewer still see that both good and evil HAVE THE SAME ROOT.

But there is much more revealed here in chapter two of Genesis: "And OUT OF THE GROUND [dust] made the Lord to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9).

The truth which seems to be the least understood of all is that even the tree of life is 'made to grow out of the ground'. The truth of this simple statement gives the lie to Satan's "you shall not surely die" untruth (Gen. 3:4). Satan convinced the first Adam of a lie which has been ensconced in Adam's children from the beginning. In effect what Satan told our parents and is still telling us today is 'you will never surely die.' But Christ tells us: "I am the resurrection and the life..." (John 11:25). That is why Christ had to come in the flesh and partake of our earthy, dust composition. "OUT OF THE GROUND made the Lord to grow...the tree of life" (Gen. 2:9).

Both trees grow 'out of the ground'. What this tells us about ourselves is: "that they [mankind] might see that they themselves are beasts" (Ecc. 3:18). Paul puts it like this: "...that was NOT first which is spiritual but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is OF THE EARTH [even Christ, the tree of life] earthy: the second is the Lord from heaven" (I Cor. 15:46-47).

The scriptures teach us that ONCE Christ died to put away the sins of the world, and "it is appointed unto man ONCE to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:26-27). We are NOT immortal, and we are NOT 'spirits having a physical experience.' "Dust thou art", destined to have a spiritual experience, but only after Christ enters into our lives. When He does enter our lives, we receive His spirit as an earnest of the paid-for possession: "Now are we the sons of God", but we still have to die to the flesh here and now, and even if we live till "He shall appear [and] we shall be like Him" (I John 3:2), we still must be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye because *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*. Salvation is not in us coming out, it is rather outside of us through Christ coming into us and changing us.

The essence of this whole subject is that "the Lord made to grow..." ALL is of God, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life BOTH "the LORD MADE TO GROW." And they both have their beginnings "OUT OF THE GROUND", not out of the spirit.

The elect are saved "by means of death" (Heb. 9:15 & 27), not from death. That is how 'life' comes 'out of the ground'.

This is all a perfect picture in types of Eph. 2:8-10. "By grace we are saved through faith...for we are HIS workmanship." Christ, our sacrifice, shed his blood for us "while we were yet in our sins" (I Cor. 15:17). It is not shed for those who 'decide to repent'. It was shed for us "while we were yet in our sins". Those who fill the master's house at the wedding feast are not those who willingly chose to come to the wedding: "the Lord said...go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23).

Who fills the master's house for the wedding? Those people who are compelled and dragged to the wedding; that is what scripture teaches everywhere.

We don't even contribute the faith to our calling. "It is the gift of God." We are dragged and compelled to accept Christ. The Greek for compel here in Luke 14:23 is *anagkazo* - Strong's #315. It appears nine times in the New Testament and never has anything in common with the concept of "free will" or "free moral agency".

Anagkazo is the same word in Acts 28:19: "I was constrained to appeal to Caesar...". Paul did not want to appeal to Caesar. He felt "constrained" to do so. In all nine instances it has this concept. Those affected by

being "compelled" are never the initiators of the actions taken upon them. "And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme..." (Acts 26:11).

Another scripture tells us who it is who will fill the master's house at the wedding supper: "No man can [choose to] come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). Very few Christians indeed are aware that the Greek word translated draw here in John 6:44 should be translated "dragged". The Greek word is *helkuo* - Strong's #1670. It appears *eight* times in the New Testament. Every time this word is used, it is instructive to us to understand exactly how God "the Father draws" us to His wedding supper. Counted down they are:

8) James 2:6 - "...do not rich men **draw** (drag) you before judgment seats."

7) Acts 21:30 - "And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul and **drew** (dragged) him out of the temple..."

6) Acts 16:19 - "And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas and **drew** (dragged) them into the market place unto the rulers."

5) John 21:11 - "Simon Peter went up and **drew** (dragged) the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three...yet was not the net broken."

4) John 21:6 - "And he said unto them, cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to **draw** (drag) it for the multitude of fishes."

3) John 18:10 - Before I quote this scripture, let me say that it is my strongest desire to avoid what Peter does here. It is typical of overzealous Christians to use the sword (the word of God) as Peter does, and it is hard for anyone to hear if his "ear" has been cut off by the sword. The high Priest's servant was obviously not being "dragged" by the spirit of Christ. Nevertheless, there is a spiritual message in this and in every incident recorded in the scripture. The lesson here is that God's word (the sword) when used rashly on a noninquisitive and unreceptive soul has the effect of cutting off their 'ears'. Those who are not being dragged by the Spirit, but are still forced by overly zealous converts to look at scriptures they've never seen and don't want to see, end up without "ears to hear" (Matt. 13:13). But Christ gave the high priest's servant back his ear. I personally like to think that this is telling us that this entire experience gave this one servant the ability to see and hear the words of salvation from the One who is capable of "dragging all men" to himself (John 12:32) each in his own order (I Cor. 15:22 and 23). But now back to John 18:10: "Then Simon Peter having a sword **drew** it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus." Depending on the weight, it is most likely that 'dragged it' would not be the best translation here, but one thing is certain; swords do not decide to jump out of scabbards any more that fish decide to come to land or jump into boats. It is God who tells us that we are "given eyes to see and ears to hear". If we don't see and understand, the only reason we don't is because "to them it is not given...to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11-16).

2) John 12:32 & 33 - "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw [drag] ALL MEN UNTO ME. This He said signifying what death He should die."

Has Christ been lifted up on the cross of crucifixion? Of course, He has. Now through the fiery chastening and scourging of grace, He will drag every man who has ever been born to Himself: "For God so loved THE WORLD [while we were yet in our sins - I Cor. 15:17] that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life...that THE WORLD through Him might be saved" (John 3:16 & 17). Is this just a weak wish on God's part or is this what will happen? "Every knee should bow... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10 & 11).

1) John 6:44 - "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me DRAW [drag] him..."

No doubt many would have followed Christ before His crucifixion just as they did, 3000 in one day, after His resurrection. But they were not dragged to Him by the Father. Instead, He gave them eyes not to see, ears not to hear and hardened hearts lest they should be converted and He should heal them.

These are the eight times the word 'draw' appears in the entire New Testament. Once again, we are shown that it is "the Lord God made to grow every tree...the tree of life...and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:9).

This is the real reason the Jews rejected Christ. This is the real reason most people are (temporarily) 'lost' during this age. This is also why Christendom in general will refuse to come to the wedding.

Here are a few plain, straightforward scriptures regarding God's methods of operation. Eph. 1:11 - "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him WHO WORKETH ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL." Eph. 2:8 - "By grace are ye saved through faith: and that (faith) not of yourselves: it is the gift ["to you it is given" - Matt. 13:11] of God."

Paul equates this gift of faith with God showing **mercy** on us: "So then IT IS NOT OF HIM THAT WILLETH [no free moral agency] nor of him that runneth, **BUT OF GOD THAT SHEWETH MERCY.**" (Rom. 9:16).

This plain, straightforward statement, which annihilates the false doctrine of man's "free will", is preceded by this declaration from Him who "worketh all things after the counsel of HIS own will": "...I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy..." God is insistent that we understand that **we have virtually NOTHING to do with our being called** and being dragged to Him. It is all by "predestination" and "the counsel of HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:11).

The life that we "now live in the flesh [is not of our choosing but] by the faith of [not in] the son of God" (Gal. 2:20) "that [faith] not of yourselves IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD" (Eph. 2:8). It is the faith of the Son of God, not of you or me or any other man, but the faith of Christ.

"Moreover whom he did predestinate, them He also called..." (Rom. 8:30). "So then it is NOT of him that willeth...but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16) is in this context: "For the children [Jacob and Esau] BEING NOT YET BORN, neither having done any good nor evil [before ever being given a chance to choose the good and refuse the evil], THAT THE PURPOSE OF GOD ACCORDING TO ELECTION [predestination - Rom. 8:30 and Eph. 1:11] MIGHT STAND...as it is written 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau

have I hated" (Rom. 9:11 and 13). This is before they were born, and it is written for our admonition. This is not telling us of an exceptional case. This tells us how God operates "all after the counsel of His own will."

This, Paul knows, sounds so unfair, unjust and unrighteous to us. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God...?" (Rom. 9:14). He then goes directly into the total sovereignty of God: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy...It is not of him that willeth, but of God who showeth mercy" (Rom. 9: 15-16). To reinforce the truth of which Paul was well aware: "I [God] create evil (Isa. 45:7), he adds this to the fact

that God hated Esau before he was even born: "...the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in thee, And that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore HE hath mercy (Drags) on whom HE will have mercy and whom HE will HE hardeneth [blinds]" (Rom. 11:17). But doesn't the scripture teach that blindness comes from "the God of this

world"?

Of course, "the God of this world (age - *aion*) hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:4). That's the same reason Christ spoke in parables "lest they should be converted and I should heal them" (Matt. 13:15). Who sends the god of this age to blind the minds of unbelievers? "He [God] hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted and I should heal them" (John 12:40).

And again: "God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear unto this day: (Rom. 11:8). This is what Paul means two chapters earlier where he says: "So then it is not of him that willeth...but of God who sheweth mercy...Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy and whom He will He hardeneth(blinds, gives them the spirit of slumber, does not open their eyes or ears) (Rom. 9:16 & 18).

Since He hardened Pharaoh's heart before Moses ever arrived back in Egypt (Ex. 4:21), since it is He who blinds people's eyes and stops their ears and since it was He who gave the murderers of our Lord the power to do their evil deed, since "none is able to withstand..." Him (II Chron. 20:6); why DOES He yet find fault?

In other words, if the people who chose not to attend the wedding supper were actually fulfilling God's purpose, and if those who do attend are dragged against their own fleshly will, through chastening and scourging to the wedding supper, WHY DOES HE YET FIND FAULT?

Does Paul now contradict himself and the entirety of scripture and say God finds fault with sinners because they choose to close their eyes, they choose to stop their ears, they want the spirit of slumber, they have chosen to harden their hearts and they chose not to attend the wedding feast?

No, that's not his answer. He first rebukes us for our ignorance: "Nay, but, O man, who are you that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed [Esau, Pharaoh, those who refuse to attend the wedding feast, you or me] say to Him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20).

Paul realized that those who repent and come to Christ only do so because they have experienced something from God which opened their blinded eyes and their deaf ears; raised them from their spiritually deaf condition, and brought, or dragged them to realize that they were in desperate need of a savior. Here are those who will fill the seats at the wedding supper: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:5).

Why were these people blind, lame, leprous, deaf, dead and poor? The answer is because they are being dragged to Christ. These are all absolutely incurable conditions that require a "road to Damascus" experience to be cured of them. We sometimes think "if I were struck to the ground, saw a bright light, heard a voice and became blind for three days, I, too would be a dedicated disciple."

God tells us of our walk with Him:

Σ "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth *EVERY son who He receiveth*" (Heb. 12:6).

Σ "...We must through MUCH tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

Σ "If...we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17).

Σ "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him..." (II Tim. 2:12).

Paul's experience on the road to Damascus is not given to tell us

How unique Paul was, rather it is for *our* admonition. Anyone, who truly knows Christ, knows Him not because he has been a zealous disciple of some organized church, as Paul was. Those who truly know Christ read His word for themselves. Jesus Christ Himself strikes them down and "chastens...and scourges EVERY SON He receiveth." He brings *them to see* how blind they have been while in their service to the organized church. While being made aware of our blindness, we are assured that we will be given sight.

We must be brought to understand that we are, of ourselves as good as dead; we must see ourselves as incurably lame and leprous and deaf. Now we have been 'dragged' to Christ. Now we have a personal experience and relationship with the only head of the church. We eventually see ourselves as the temple of God for He now dwells in us. The beast of Ecclesiastes 3:18 has been cast out of the temple. We no longer serve the beast. We have overcome his mark for "here is wisdom, let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man..." (Rev. 13:18).

There may or may not ever be a physical temple built in earthly Jerusalem. Neither the temple, nor the beast with which God concerns Himself, are built with hands. "He that hath understanding" will see that our warfare is spiritual (Eph. 6:12). Knowing the time of the appearing of some man, his date of birth and his name and street address will do one no spiritual good if the spiritual beast is still demanding one's wholehearted worship in the only true temple of God.

"To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). The true temple is a spiritual temple, not made with hands. It is occupied by the beast from the moment of birth. That's why John, two thousand years ago could say "the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:3). "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads" (Rev. 13:16). Two thousand years ago Christ said "the time is at hand".

We all belong in at least one of those groups: either small, great, rich, poor, bond or free.

Who are those who stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire before the throne of God?: "...and them that had gotten the victory over the beast [in themselves - Ecc. 3:18] and over his image [churches claiming to be Christian that are truly in the image of the first beastly Adam] and over his mark [in their right hand and their foreheads] and over the number of his name ["it is the number of a man..."]...And they sing the song of Moses..." (Rev. 15:2 & 3).

Why do they "sing the song of Moses"? It is because like Israel of old, they have been dragged toward God. Israel did not ask to be delivered from Egypt. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they [Moses and Aaron] called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images" (Hosea 11:1-2). Israel was constantly wishing they had never left Egypt. At the first opportunity, when Moses was in the mount forty days, they returned to the idol worship to which they were so accustomed.

The point is that Israel did not choose God; God chose "Israel according to the flesh." And "as [He] called them so they went from [Him]."

Is it the same under the new covenant? "Now ALL THESE THINGS happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world [#165 -] are come" (I Cor. 10:11).

So why did all these things happen to "Israel according to the flesh"? "Now these things were [for] our example...now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [#5179 - Greek word is *typos* or types] and are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends [Greek - *telos* #5056 - the predetermined end or outcome] of the world [*aion* #165 - age; a long or short lifetime or a long or short period of time]. Never in

scripture used to mean eternity or endless time. More on this later...] are come" (I Cor. 10:5 and 11). Where in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James or Jude is there even a hint at "free moral agency"?

Part 4 - Does James Teach 'Free Will'?

You might answer 'right here in this passage Paul says this is for our admonition.' Then you would probably ask, why are we given admonitions if we don't have freedom of choice? Does not James teach us "Let no man say...I am tempted of God...but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed" (James 1:13-14). Is not this scriptural proof of "free moral agency"? Doesn't this statement of James prove that we have freedom of choice?

The scriptural answer is absolutely not! Doesn't it prove we choose? It surely does! Does it prove our choices and choosing is 'free' and uncaused and of ourselves without a cause? Not according to James. James teaches us we ought never to say "we will...for that [because] ye ought to say IF THE LORD WILLS, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:13-15). Does that sound like James believed in man's 'free will'? Notice what James says leading up to this statement that "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." Does he teach us that this proves we have freedom of choice apart from the will of God? Is James teaching us that our salvation hinges upon our free choice? Here is the whole of what James taught concerning being tempted: "My brethren count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. Knowing this that THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH WORKETH PATIENCE. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-3). He then ties this need for patience to a need for wisdom. An impatient person is certainly not a wise person since "in you patience possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19). Now we come to verse 12 of James 1: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

Now for the oft quoted verse 13: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." This word 'tempted' in the Greek is *peirazo* - Strong's #3985. This is the singular form of the same word used in verse two: "My brethren count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations (*peirosomos* - Strong's #3986). Why is James in verse two telling us to "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations", and then in verse fourteen telling us that "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed?" Is James saying we should be aware of our own lust and rejoice in it?

Of course that is not what James is saying. If you believe in

Σ 'freedom of choice' however, or if you believe that

Σ your choices are free from the influences of a God who "creates evil", who "blinds and stops ears lest they should be converted", who "hated Esau before he was born while he was in his mother's womb having done neither good nor evil", who "hardens whom He will and shows mercy to whom He will", who declares "so then it is not of him that wills, but of God that shows mercy... therefore hath He mercy on whom he will have mercy and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:16 & 18);

Σ if you still believe that "grace through faith and that [faith] not of yourselves" actually means freedom of choice, then you must certainly believe that James too is teaching 'freedom of choice'.

But James is **not** teaching the sovereignty of man in his own salvation. James knew that "the spirit that dwells in us [given us by God - Rom. 9:20-21] lusteth to envy" (James 4:5). He also understood that the solution was not 'freedom' of choice but "He giveth more grace." James also knew the whole meaning of the word grace (Titus 2:11 & 12). This scripture teaches us that GRACE CHASTENS US. The word "teaching" is really "chastens".

James 4:15 Explains James 1:13 & 14

It is James who reveals to us the exact opposite of what christendom deduces from James 1:14-15. It is not what the flesh will accept. Here again is the true teaching by James regarding 'freedom' of choice: "Go to now ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. [And what's his point?] For what is YOUR LIFE? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time and vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings [freedom of choice]: all such boasting is evil" (James 4:13-16). Our lives are as a vapor and subject to "if the Lord wills."

That is the teaching of James concerning the subject of free moral agency and freedom of choice. Unless, of course, our stubborn flesh wants to ignore Romans 9, "It is not of him that willeth" and here again in James "what is your life." Are we to believe that James is teaching God's sovereignty over our financial affairs, but he stands back and leaves our salvation entirely up to us? No. James taught "if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that." If our very life in the flesh, which we must all experience before we are given the opportunity to choose Christ, is dependent upon "if the Lord will", then surely that choice itself will be "His workmanship".

This teaching of James concerning the sovereignty of God in all things is in accord with the teachings of Paul that the elect are "predestinated unto the adoption of children according to the good pleasure of His will...being predestinated according to the purpose of Him WHO WORKETH ALL THINGS [Jacob, Esau, Pharaoh, you and I all of the same lump] AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:5 & 11). His is the only free will mentioned in scripture. All other wills are contingent upon "If the Lord will...: (James 4:15). "If the firstfruit [those in Christ] be holy, the lump [those who reject Christ in this age] is also holy" (Rom. 11:16).

Let's return to Romans 9. Here Paul tells us that God "hated Esau before he was born" while he was in his mother's womb having done neither good or evil, THAT THE PURPOSE OF GOD ACCORDING TO ELECTION MIGHT STAND...As it is written Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated...so then IT IS NOT OF HIM THAT WILLETH [man's 'free' will] BUT OF GOD THAT SHEWETH MERCY...For the scripture sayeth unto Pharaoh even for this same purpose have I raised thee up. That I might shew my power in thee and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath He mercy [by dragging some to him through chastening and scourging - Heb. 12:6] on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth [by 'giving them eyes that CANNOT see and ears that CANNOT hear lest they should be converted and healed']" (Rom. 9:18). "Thou [those who believe in 'free' will - this is definitely not James] will say unto me, Why doeth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? [No one! II Chron. 20:6).

"Nay, but O man [who refuses to admit his will is not a 'free' will], who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed [by God] say to him that formed it [for destruction], Why hast thou [God] made me thus? Hath not the potter [God] power over the clay [man] of the same lump [all humanity] to make one

vessel [those He drags to the wedding supper] unto honor, and another [those who refuse their invitation to the wedding supper, those He blinds, gives ears that CANNOT hear and hardens "lest they should be converted and I should heal them"] to dishonor" (Rom. 9:11-21).

Paul concludes this chapter: "But Israel which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness... because they sought it not by faith but by works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone..." (vs. 31-32).

Is Paul contradicting himself? Do verses 11-21 place all the responsibility for the wrong choices of Esau and Pharaoh on God's shoulders while verses 31 and 32 place the responsibility for Israel rejecting their Messiah on Israel's shoulders? Does Israel refuse to accept their wedding supper invitation without a cause? Is their choosing to refuse their invitation "free" choice? Was God gambling that the Jews would reject Christ and crucify him when He sent down His son? Did they stumble at that stumbling stone by choice, of their own 'free' will? NO! "God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this day" (Rom. 11:8).

"But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail [placed there by God] untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day when Moses is read the vail is upon their heart" (II Cor. 3:14-15).

"But to them it is not given...to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God" (Matt. 13:11).

All these statements and many, many others are made concerning the very people who were being admonished by John the Baptist and Christ to "repent" and be converted (Matt. 3:2 and 4:17).

Why then does James say "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed...? James said those words because they are true. God himself does not force us to sin. He doesn't have to force us to sin. He created us of the dust, corruptible. We came this way from the creator's hand. Adam was flesh and blood which "cannot inherit the kingdom of God"; and he was this way from the creator's hand.

The statement is made before they even ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "and they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). This is not a simple statement of history here is Gen. 2:25. It is the same statement made in Rev. 3:17: "Thou...art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked...[but you aren't ashamed] because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..." (Rev. 3:17).

Do you think Adam was ashamed of his nakedness? We are told that neither he nor his wife was ashamed. Was Adam thinking "Wow, I'm in a terrible spot, I'm flesh and blood; I'm corruptible and subject to death. I need a savior." No, Adam never saw his wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked condition until he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "...I had not known sin but by the law..." (Rom. 7:7). Only after Adam saw that he had disobeyed God, did he see that he needed a savior, a covering for his 'nakedness'. Even then there was only the type of the ultimate sin offering at hand for Adam and his sons until the real sin offering was finally offered by God's sovereign decree (Acts 4:27-28).

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a type of the "law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). It made Adam aware of the already existing death he was dying: "In the day that you eat thereof, dying you shall die" is the proper translation of Gen. 2:17. Adam was dying by virtue of being made of the dust and being naked from the creator's hand. So there was no doubt in God's mind what Adam would do. Did God Himself tempt Adam? He didn't have to do that. Did God have to force David to be tempted by Bathsheba? No, and like David we are all willing volunteers for the job of sinning. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Like Adam, we are not aware of our sin until we are under the law: "I had not known sin, but by the law..." (Rom. 7:7). "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24).

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not the "tree of sin". The tree of the knowledge of good and evil did not make Adam and Eve naked and of the dust, corruptible. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid...(Rom. 7:7). The law, like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, does not cause us to sin; it merely tells us what sin is: "I had not known sin but by the law" (Rom. 7:7). So what was the ultimate cause of Adam's sin? It was his earthy, dust, fleshly composition combined with his naked [in sin] condition (Rev. 3:17). Add to this also a tempter and Adam's fate was sealed. Now, let's ask honestly and scripturally who was responsible for all of this. "I am the Lord and there is none else...that they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none beside me...I form the light [open spiritual eyes I've blinded and ears I made not to hear] and create darkness [harden hearts, blind eyes and stop ears to the truth]. I make peace [with those to whom I show mercy] and create evil [vessels for dishonor, hardened hearts, blind eyes, deaf ears, leprous dying bodies, etc.]" (Isa. 45:7). Whether it is physical or spiritual "who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing or the blind?" have not I the Lord?" (Ex. 4:11). "Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight [make righteous or honorable] which he hath made crooked [hardened and made dishonorable]?" (Ecc. 7:13).

Let's now ask a few questions and answer them with the scriptures James knew so well.

- **Who makes evil men?** "The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea even the wicked for the day of evil (Pro. 16:4). "Behold I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and **I have created the waster to destroy** " (Isa. 54:16)
- **Who causes some to refuse their invitation to the wedding supper?** "O Lord why hast **thou made us to err from thy ways** and hardened our heart from thy fear..." (Isa. 63:17).
- **When our hearts are hardened and we sin against God, who is responsible for our chastening afflictions?** "Wilt **thou** refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt **thou** hold thy peace and afflict us very sore?" (Isa. 64:12).

Who is responsible for those who repent and end up filling the seats at the wedding supper? "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, AND THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OF ME, saith the Lord" (Isa. 54:17).

- **Who is responsible for our repentance and turning from our own ways?** "...**Thou** hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; TURN **THOU** ME, [by chastening grace - Titus 2:11-12; Heb. 12:6] and I shall be turned; for **thou** art the Lord my God" (Jer. 31:18).
- **Who is responsible for the fate of Israel?** "And the vessel that He made of clay was **marred in the hand of the potter**..." (Jer. 18:4) [God the potter does not make mistakes; He deliberately created a 'marred vessel' first: Adam, Cain, Ishmael, Pharoah, Esau, King Saul and physical Israel] vessels of dishonor, created for "the destruction of the flesh that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord" (I Cor. 5:5).

Since the vessel was made marred, God made it again [the new vessel is not the same as the old one; it is the new covenant of II Cor. 3:6 and Gal. 6:16 as opposed to "my kinsmen according to the flesh" of Rom. 9:3 - another vessel] as seemed good to the potter to make it...O house of Israel [the physical descendants of Abraham, the marred vessel; the many seeds of Gal. 3:16], cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" (Jer. 18:4-6).

When the world turns on God's people, who will ultimately be responsible? "Israel came into Egypt and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham... **He [God] turned their heart** [Egypt, the world] to hate His people..." (Psa. 105:23-25).

When Paul says that we are "predestinated according to the purpose of HIM WHO WORKETH ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:11) does He really mean ALL THINGS? "The lot is cast into the lap; but **the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord** (Pro. 16:33). "The preparations of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (Pro. 16:1).

Scripturally, the sovereignty of God is **total**. The flesh will not accept this for *it leaves the flesh with nothing in which to boast*.

Have we made a choice to reject the admonitions of scripture? Woe be unto us. Every statement concerning the sovereignty of God in the lives of individuals or nations is always followed by admonitions to choose the good and refuse the evil. This is true because God has always reserved a remnant to Himself. (Rom. 9:27, Rom. 1:5)

Do we *choose* to die to self, take up our cross and follow Christ? Very well. We will all be judged according to our deeds [Greek - *ergon*, Strong's #2041 meaning works]

But either way the scriptural truth is: "But now O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay and thou our potter; and we are all the work of **THY HAND**" (Isa. 64:8). In other words, "By grace [chastening and scourging - Heb. 12:6] are ye saved through faith and THAT [even just the faith] NOT OF YOURSELVES, it is the gift of God. Not of works [that we do ourselves - Isa. 54:17] lest any man should boast. For we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto GOOD WORKS, which GOD HATH BEFORE ORDAINED [predestinated] that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OF **ME** saith the Lord" (Isa. 54:17).

Clearly there is no room for the flesh to take credit for any righteousness which "Christ in us" may perform through us. "We are HIS workmanship."

God's sovereignty is not limited to "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17). The fact that every good and perfect gift is from above does not say that ONLY the good and perfect gifts are from above.

Both James and Paul agreed that "all things" (Eph. 1:11) depend upon "If the Lord will..." (James 5:15).

The Lord has been gracious to reveal to us that not only does every good and perfect gift come from above, but that for the sake of "the good pleasure of HIS will" (Eph. 1:5), [He] worketh ALL THINGS after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). 'All things' includes both the good and perfect and the evil: "O Lord, why hast THOU **MADE US TO ERR FROM THY WAYS, AND HARDENED OUR HEART** from thy fear?" (Isa. 63:17). "It is not of him that willeth, but of God that showeth mercy... therefore hath he mercy on whom HE will have mercy and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:16, 18).

James was well aware that the "trying of our faith worketh patience" (James 1:3) and that all things depend on "If the Lord will" (James 4:15). So when he tells us "...God cannot be tempted with evil neither tempteth He any man" (James 1:13), it becomes obvious that James was aware of the details of God's methods. "It is God which worketh in you both to will [the desire to please God] and to do His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

So what does scripture reveal to be the method God uses whereby it can be said that God is sovereign over the good and the evil and yet God himself tempts no man?

Part 5 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #1 - The Tempting of Mankind (Adam and Eve)

The first example is the pattern for all of God's sovereign actions concerning the tempting of man. God's sovereignty had Christ slain for Adam's transgression before Adam was ever created: "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to HIS OWN PURPOSE and grace, which was GIVEN US IN CHRIST JESUS BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN" (II Tim. 1:9). And again: "Paul...in hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:1 & 2).

Obviously God had decided in advance that Adam would be tempted and would transgress his direct command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is most instructive to note that the made-of-the dust, weak, corruptible and "naked" [which scripturally means sinful (Rev. 3:17)] Adam, as well as the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, were both the product of the Creator. The only question now is how will Adam be tempted so that God can truthfully say that He Himself tempts no man? This was no problem for the creator. Adam and Eve were "drawn away of their own lust and enticed" (James 1:14). What was the instrument used to effectuate the temptation for which Adam was "made to err from your ways" (Isa. 63:17)? It was and always is the Adversary himself or one of his minions called in scripture "evil spirits". Did God Himself tempt Adam? No, He did not. Did God force Adam to transgress His command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Absolutely not.

God never needs to force anyone to sin or transgress. He made us weak and corruptible "of the dust" to begin with. God never needs to tempt us because the serpent is nourished by the 'dust of the ground'. Serpents never literally eat the dust of the ground. Serpents are carnivorous. They eat rats, mice, small reptiles, etc. The dust spoken of in Genesis is "the spirit that dwelleth in us which lusteth to envy" (James 4:5). This statement is made by James, the same New Testament writer who tells us in chapter one: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed."

Will anyone who claims to be familiar with these scriptures: "It is the spirit that giveth life (John 6:63); "Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created..." (Psa. 104: 30); "There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8); etc, etc. deny that "the spirit in us lusteth to envy" is the very spirit the Creator breathed into Adam which gave Adam his "breath of life"? Yes, it was God who gave us "the spirit in us [which] lusteth to envy."

No, James was not teaching 'freedom' of choice. James was simply teaching choice; choices caused to be made within the influence of the Creator. The Creator is the ultimate cause of all things, including every choice we make. Understanding God's sovereignty does not relieve us of accountability to God for our actions, nor does it relieve us of our daily decisions and choices. Understanding God's sovereignty simply means that we now understand that all of our choices and decisions are CAUSED choices and decisions.

In our pride and vanity, we do not want to admit it, but the truth of the scriptures is that every choice we make is a caused choice. "Freedom of choice" and "free moral agency" are false doctrines that defy the declarations of God in His word that "Man's goings [good and evil] are of the Lord; how can a man understand his own way?" (Prov. 20:24); "...It is not of him that willeth...but of God" (Rom. 9:16); "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13); "...who worketh ALL THINGS after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11); and "for of Him and through Him and to Him are ALL THINGS..." (Rom. 11: 36).

Part 6 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #2 - The Trials [Temptations] of Job

Most of us are aware that Job was a man of great patience. In one day Job lost all his oxen, asses, camels, sheep and all but one of the servants that cared for each group, and finally all his sons and daughters died in the home of the eldest with only one servant escaping to bring the bad news to Job.

This first chapter of Job is a perfect parallel to what happened to our original parents in the garden of Eden. Note the parallels:

- Whose idea was it to try Job in this way? "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job?" (Job 1:8). It was the Lord who drew Satan's attention to Job. What was Satan doing up to that time? "...going to and fro in the earth...walking up and down in it" (Job 1:7). Why does Satan do this? "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he MAY devour" (I Pet. 5:8). That's why Satan is "...going to and fro in the earth and walking up and down in it." He is "seeking whom he may devour."

- Whose idea was it for Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil Satan's creation? No, God "creates evil" (Isa. 45:7). Did Satan place this tree in the middle of the garden and make it so pleasant and appealing to the eyes that it would tempt our parents? No, this too, was by God's "predestinated" design and counsel (Eph. 1:11). Why, on the other hand, were they not attracted to the tree of life? God NEVER told them they could not eat of the tree of life. Why did they not desire the tree of life? Because it: "hath no form or comeliness and when [they saw it] there [was] no beauty that [they] should desire it" (Isa. 53:2). Who was it that created the crooked serpent to entice our parents to transgress God's command? "By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens: His hand hath formed the crooked serpent" (Job 26:13). It was God who formed the serpent and placed him in the garden to tempt Adam and Eve. The entire event was "for to do whatsoever thy hand [God's] and thy counsel [God's] DETERMINED BEFORE to be done" (Acts 4:28).

We know this is so because, besides this scripture here in Acts, we are also told twice "Who [God] hath saved us and called us with an holy calling not according to our works [freedom of choice] but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9). And again, "In hope of eternal life which God, which cannot lie, promised BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN" (Titus 1:2). And once again Rev. 13:8 refers to "the lamb slain FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD." Ask yourself, did God know from the foundation of the world and before the world began that the Lamb [Christ] would be slain for our sins and that we would be called with a holy calling "in Christ", but he didn't know for sure what our parents would do when He commanded them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Was God trying to thwart His own plan when He gave Adam and Eve that command not to eat of the tree? In other words, did God's plan and purpose hinge upon Adam's 'free will', or was it all of God "...being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things [including our caused choices] AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:11)?

No, the scriptures reveal from Genesis to Revelation that "all things [are] of God" (I Cor. 11:12); "and ALL THINGS [including our good or bad choices] are of God..." (II Cor. 5:18); and "...the Father of whom are all things" (I Cor. 8:6) and finally, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

Now if the most heinous crime of all time, the unjust murder of the perfect lamb of God was "whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28), why would lesser crimes be any less so? The truth is they are no less "whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

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Satan comes before God daily "seeking whom he may devour." Here is the truth of scripture. Look beyond the physical and believe what the spirit [the words that I speak unto you...are spirit - John 6:63] reveals. Here is what the spirit, the word of God reveals is the truth of what we are really dealing with: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood [freedom of choice] but against principalities, against powers against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" [Strong's #2032 - *epouranios* - the celestials or the heavens] (Eph. 6:12).

"Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed" is certainly the truth of James 1:13 & 14. This scripture, however, in no way negates or contradicts the fact that the spiritual reality is that our "own lusts" are the very 'dust' on which the "spiritual wickedness in the heavens" dines. It is "all of God" who "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

What James is saying is "...ye know not what shall be on the morrow" so it serves no purpose whatever to say "I am tempted of God."

James wants us to "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this that the trial of your faith worketh patience...If any man lack wisdom [gives in to his own lusts] let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally...Blessed is the man that endureth temptation for WHEN HE IS TRIED, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:2-12).

It is right at this point, after informing us of the absolute necessity for trials and temptations in the life of the believer, predetermined by the sovereign will of God, before we can "receive the crown of life"; it is right at this juncture that we are told not to use the truth of the sovereignty of God's will for an excuse to yield to our lusts (James 1:13 & 14).

James is so like Paul. Immediately after telling us we are really wrestling with spiritual wickedness in the heavens, Paul says: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day..." (Eph. 6:13).

Understanding and believing "an evil spirit from the Lord" is used to "[draw us] away of our own lusts" in no way relieves us of still being held accountable for being drawn away of our own lusts. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God [and I can't resist His will]: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He [Himself] any man" (James 1:13). James is saying that since "you know not what the morrow bringeth" [but God certainly does], that to use such a mindset is counter-productive.

Both James and Paul teach us to "resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). The fact that we cannot successfully "resist God's will" (II Chron. 20:6, Rom. 9:19) is not an admonition to lay down and do nothing. "Not knowing what the morrow bringeth" James tells us, should make us want to say "the Lord willing, we will..." "put on the whole armor of God" and "...resist the devil". In other words, what James teaches is that since we know that God's will will be done on the morrow, therefore we should strive even harder to do that very will; "if the Lord will...we shall...do this..." (James 4:15).

Paul puts it like this: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). James says "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). In another place Paul tells us: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). There is no difference in the teachings of these two great men of God. There was no doubt schism in the body of Christ, but it was never between James and Paul. Both of them saw and understood the sovereign will of God in all things: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow...for that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:14 & 15).

On the other hand, God knows exactly what shall be on the morrow because He is "the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22:13).

Why Temptations?

Our trials and tests are never for God's information or benefit. They are rather for our own information and benefit. God is our maker. "He knows our frame, he remembereth that we are dust" [just a meal for the tempter] (Psa. 103:14).

Our trials, our being drawn away of our own lusts and enticed, show US what we are: "The heart is deceitful ABOVE ALL THINGS, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)

So what is it Job needs to see about himself? Why did Job have to suffer the loss of everything he owned including his own children and later head-to-toe painful boils?

If Job were "perfect [Heb. *tawm* - Strong's #8535, undefiled rather than perfect] and upright [man] and one that feared God and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1), why did God 'take down the hedge' and all of a sudden, send the adversary to take everything Job owned away from him and shortly thereafter to strike him with "sore boils from the sole of his feet unto his crown" (Job 2:7)?

The answer to this question has to do with much more than simply teaching us about the patience of Job. The very purpose for the book of Job is to teach us that our '*tawm*' [the word translated 'perfect' in Job 1:1], our 'good works' are NOT OF OUR OWN FREE WILL. In other words, what Job had to suffer so much to learn and what WE MUST LEARN, is that **our** righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), that though we may appear to make good decisions on our own, the truth and the reality is that we are "HIS workmanship" (Eph. 2:10), and that "thou...hast wrought all our works in us" (Isa. 26:12).

When we claim 'free moral agency', our works are filthy rags. When we admit we are His workmanship then "thou hast wrought all our works in us", and now God can accept us.

There is that word ALL again. He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). "For of Him and through Him and to Him are ALL THINGS" (Rom. 11:36).

Job did not yet realize this. Job actually believed that his righteousness was of himself. He thought that he was a good man because HE had chosen to be righteous. It was his lack of understanding that "all things are of God" (II Cor. 5:18 and Isa. 26:12) that precipitated and required the trials that Job endured. It was Job's belief in his 'freedom' of choice, his 'free moral agency' that he had of himself chosen the good and refused the evil, that God had not chosen him, but he had chosen God; this is what cost Job so dearly. Here are the scriptures:

- "For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment. Should I lie against MY right? MY wound is incurable without transgression" (Job 34:5 & 6). These are the words of Job. Elihu, who is quoting Job, was the only comforter who the Lord did not rebuke for his advice to Job. Had Job really claimed to be righteous? Yes, he did. Here are his own words:

- "God...hath taken away my judgment...and...hath vexed my soul. ...Till I die I will not remove MINE integrity from me. MY RIGHTEOUSNESS I HOLD FAST AND WILL NOT LET IT GO: MY heart shall not reproach me as long as I live" (Job 27:2,5 & 6).

That attitude cost Job dearly. It will also cost us dearly. So long as we cling to ANY claim whatsoever, to contributing anything whatsoever toward our salvation, we are no better than Job. We are saved by grace [chastening and scourging, Titus 2:11 & 12, the word "teaching" is actually chastening] through faith and that faith is not even ours. "It is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "We are HIS workmanship" (Eph. 2:10). "That no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:29).

Now concerning Job, does God agree with Elihu? "...The Lord answered Job and said, shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct Him? He that reproveth God [like Job], let him answer it...Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" (Job 40:1,2 & 8). God did not pass the buck to Satan or Job's 'free will'.

What does Job answer? Does he resort to 'till I die I will not remove MY INTEGRITY from me. MY RIGHTEOUSNESS I hold fast and will not let it go: MY heart shall not reproach me so long as I live'? Is that how Job answered God when God showed Job that his belief in his free moral agency was essentially saying that he (Job) could disannul God's judgment by making good choices of his own free will, his own righteousness?

No. Like Saul of Tarsus, whose 'free' choice was to disannul God's judgment, Job saw the light. Powers and principalities in high places were at work on Job's [and on Saul's] 'free' choice. Instead of persecuting the Lord, Saul of his own 'free' will recognizes his blindness and asks, "Lord what will thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). And Job, of his own 'free' will now answers "I know that thou canst do everything [including CAUSING our choices by either hardening our hearts or showing his mercy through chastening and scourging till we of our own 'free will' say 'not my will but thine be done]...wherefore I abhor myself and REPENT ['perfect' men don't need to repent] in dust and ashes." Job had come to see that his righteousness acts were filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Job now realized "the Lord hath brought forth [my] righteousness" (Jer. 51:10).

"I know that thou canst do everything, and that NO THOUGHT can be withholden from thee" (Job 42:2), is the truth of the scriptures. The trouble with this scriptural fact is that it flies in the face of the false doctrine of 'free' moral agency which of necessity teaches that God has chosen not to know what our choices will be. Therefore His hands are tied, and responsibility for our salvation is in our own hands in the final analysis. The most critical thing to our salvation, outweighing even the death and resurrection of Christ, is our 'freedom' of choice, our 'free' will; so this false doctrine teaches.

Free Will Exposed

This doctrine teaches that God sent His son into this world to save only those who choose of their own free will to believe in Christ in this fleshly life. If He hardens your heart, blinds you and gives you ears not to hear, He only does this to those who of their own 'free will', choose not to accept their invitation to the marriage of the Lamb. So all of God's efforts to draw all men to Himself are for the most part nullified by man's 'free will' according to this doctrine of 'free will'. The thinking goes like this: 'It is because of free will, that many are called, but few are chosen. As much as this pains our Father, our 'free will' has tied His hands. It's out of His hands; most will, depending on just how heartless and helpless a Father one serves, be either eternally dead or eternally tormented, because God has chosen NOT TO KNOW IN ADVANCE what our choices would be. Therefore, so the teaching goes, our eternal death or torment is after all, our own fault, because we of our own free will, have chosen not to attend the wedding of the Lamb.'

Is this what Job learned as a result of all of his trials? No, this is NOT the message of the book of Job. Here are Job's own words concerning what God chooses to know: "NO THOUGHT CAN BE WITHHOLDEN FROM THEE" (Job 42:2).

- "The preparations of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue is FROM THE LORD" (Pro. 16:1).
- "The kings [Pharaoh, King Saul and King Ahab and our] heart is in the hand of the Lord...He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Pro. 21:1).
- "Man's goings [ways] are of the Lord, how can a man then understand his own way?" (Pro. 20:24).
- "O Lord, I know that the way [goings] of man is not in himself: IT IS NOT IN MAN THAT WALKETH TO DIRECT HIS STEPS" (Jer. 10:23).

What room is there for 'free will' in these scriptures?

Let us go back to Job chapter one, and notice how God manipulates the Adversary to accomplish His purpose in Job. It is the Lord who draws Satan's attention to Job. Satan never asks God first for permission to prove Job. Showing Job His total sovereignty is God's purpose in this book. It is the Lord who first mentions Job: "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect [good] and upright man, one that feareth God and esheweth evil?" (Job 1:8) So the Lord himself admits that Job is a good man that fears God and hates evil.

Job's only fault was his mistaken belief in his own freedom to choose to "fear God and eschew [hate] evil." Job did not yet appreciate the sovereignty of God; "you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44).

Satan has no doubt about the sovereignty of God: "Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 1:11).

How does the Lord go about "put[ting] forth thine hand" to "touch all that he hath"? "And the Lord said unto Satan, behold, all that he hath is in thine hand..."

Here is God about to do what he tells us in Isa. 45:7 He does: "I... create evil. I the Lord do ALL these things." How does the Lord do all these things? Does God Himself "put forth his hand?" No, that is not how he "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). "God cannot be tempted of evil neither tempteth He [Himself] any man" (James 1:13). How can God insist on his sovereignty in all things, including the evil, and yet say He tempteth no man" Job himself tells us: "By His Spirit...His hand hath formed the crooked serpent [the tempter, Satan - Rev. 12:9](Job 26:13). Lo, these are part of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand? (Job 26:13 & 14) Evil spirits are not self created "His Hand formed the crooked serpent." Satan is not a loose cannon walking to and fro in the earth robbing God of 99% of His creation. Satan "could have no power at all...except it were given [him] from above" (John 19:11). He entered Judas and convinced him to betray Christ to the religious leaders of God's people of that day (Luke 22:3). Was Judas aware of Satan's influence upon him? Of course not. Judas, like so many of God's people today thought he was exercising his "freedom of choice". Judas, like Adam, and like all of us, was certainly exercising choice. Like Adam and all of us, he will certainly be held accountable for those choices and will "suffer loss" for "works" of "wood, hay and stubble" [wrong choices producing sin] (I Cor. 3:12-14).

But neither Adam, nor Judas, nor any of us are exercising "freedom of choice". Our choices clearly are not free but are all worked "after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Our choices, good choices like following Christ, and our sinful choices, like betraying Christ and living lives dominated by the flesh, are all 'caused' choices. All ultimately are caused by the ultimate cause of all: "We wrestle not with flesh and blood [our supposed free will] but with...spiritual wickedness in the heavens" (Eph. 6:12).

Adam's chances of making the right choice because of some fabled 'freedom' of choice were about as slim as Judas' chances of deciding not to betray Christ. Satan's "entering into Judas" (Luke 22:3) was no more a matter of Judas' 'free' will than when Satan influenced Peter to rebuke Christ for informing His disciples of the necessity of His impending death. Christ did not turn to Peter and encourage him to make better choices: "But when He had turned about and looked on His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things of men" (Mark 8:33).

Christ was not merely using a figure of speech. Christ knew that Satan "savored the things that be of men". It was Christ Himself, the word of God, who had decreed in the garden "dust shalt thou eat." Christ knew how the universe operated, for the Father had used him to set it up as it is (Rom. 11:36). Christ knew that Peter was at that very moment losing, and losing badly a 'wrestling match' with spiritual wickedness in the heavens (Eph. 6:12).

Peter had to be brought to see this in himself. Because God had predestinated Peter to mercy, he chastened him with a rebuke: "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6).

There was no rebuke or chastening for Judas but rather, right from the mouth of our Savior Himself: "that which thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27). Satan "entered into" Judas to harden his heart or Judas would never have been able to carry through with his dastardly assignment: "So then it is not of him that willeth [how clear!]...but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:16-18).

Man boasts of his 'free' will: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow...ye rejoice in your boasting [we will do this or that; reject or accept Christ] all such rejoicing is evil" (James 4:14 & 16). Whether we accept or reject Christ will be decided by whether we are dragged to the Father by circumstances beyond our control or hardened into rejection by 'spiritual wickedness in the heavens'. Yes, we do make choices, but they are never free from "Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will."

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Satan comes before God daily "seeking whom he may devour." Here is the truth of scripture. Look beyond the physical and believe what the spirit [the words that I speak unto you...are spirit - John 6:63] reveals. Here is what the spirit, the word of God reveals is the truth of what we are really dealing with: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood [freedom of choice] but against principalities, against powers against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" [Strong's #2032 - *epouranios* - the celestials or the heavens] (Eph. 6:12).

"Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed" is certainly the truth of James 1:13 & 14. This scripture, however, in no way negates or contradicts the fact that the spiritual reality is that our "own lusts" are the very 'dust' on which the "spiritual wickedness in the heavens" dines. It is "all of God" who "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

What James is saying is "...ye know not what shall be on the morrow" so it serves no purpose whatever to say "I am tempted of God."

James wants us to "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this that the trial of your faith worketh patience...If any man lack wisdom [gives in to his own lusts] let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally...Blessed is the man that endureth temptation for WHEN HE IS TRIED, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:2-12).

It is right at this point, after informing us of the absolute necessity for trials and temptations in the life of the believer, predetermined by the sovereign will of God, before we can "receive the crown of life"; it is right at this juncture that we are told not to use the truth of the sovereignty of God's will for an excuse to yield to our lusts (James 1:13 & 14).

James is so like Paul. Immediately after telling us we are really wrestling with spiritual wickedness in the heavens, Paul says: "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day..." (Eph. 6:13).

Understanding and believing "an evil spirit from the Lord" is used to "[draw us] away of our own lusts" in no way relieves us of still being held accountable for being drawn away of our own lusts. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God [and I can't resist His will]: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He [Himself] any man" (James 1:13). James is saying that since "you know not what the morrow bringeth" [but God certainly does], that to use such a mindset is counter-productive.

Both James and Paul teach us to "resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). The fact that we cannot successfully "resist God's will" (II Chron. 20:6, Rom. 9:19) is not an admonition to lay down and do nothing. "Not knowing what the morrow bringeth" James tells us, should make us want to say "the Lord willing, we will..." "put on the whole armor of God" and "...resist the devil". In other words, what James teaches is that since we know that God's will will be done on the morrow, therefore we should strive even harder to do that very will; "if the Lord will...we shall...do this..." (James 4:15).

Paul puts it like this: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). James says "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). In another place Paul tells us: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). There is no difference in the teachings of these two great men of God. There was no doubt schism in the body of Christ, but it was never between James and Paul. Both of them saw and understood the sovereign will of God in all things: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow...for that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:14 & 15).

On the other hand, God knows exactly what shall be on the morrow because He is "the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Rev. 22:13).

Why Temptations?

Our trials and tests are never for God's information or benefit. They are rather for our own information and benefit. God is our maker. "He knows our frame, he remembereth that we are dust" [just a meal for the tempter] (Psa. 103:14).

Our trials, our being drawn away of our own lusts and enticed, show US what we are: "The heart is deceitful ABOVE ALL THINGS, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)

So what is it Job needs to see about himself? Why did Job have to suffer the loss of everything he owned including his own children and later head-to-toe painful boils?

If Job were "perfect [Heb. *tawm* - Strong's #8535, undefiled rather than perfect] and upright [man] and one that feared God and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1), why did God 'take down the hedge' and all of a sudden, send the adversary to take everything Job owned away from him and shortly thereafter to strike him with "sore boils from the sole of his feet unto his crown" (Job 2:7)?

The answer to this question has to do with much more than simply teaching us about the patience of Job. The very purpose for the book of Job is to teach us that our '*tawm*' [the word translated 'perfect' in Job 1:1], our 'good works' are NOT OF OUR OWN FREE WILL. In other words, what Job had to suffer so much to learn and what WE MUST LEARN, is that **our** righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), that though we may appear to make good decisions on our own, the truth and the reality is that we are "HIS workmanship" (Eph. 2:10), and that "thou...hast wrought all our works in us" (Isa. 26:12).

When we claim 'free moral agency', our works are filthy rags. When we admit we are His workmanship then "thou hast wrought all our works in us", and now God can accept us.

There is that word ALL again. He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). "For of Him and through Him and to Him are ALL THINGS" (Rom. 11:36).

Job did not yet realize this. Job actually believed that his righteousness was of himself. He thought that he was a good man because HE had chosen to be righteous. It was his lack of understanding that "all things are of God" (II Cor. 5:18 and Isa. 26:12) that precipitated and required the trials that Job endured. It was Job's belief in his 'freedom' of choice, his 'free moral agency' that he had of himself chosen the good and refused the evil, that God had not chosen him, but he had chosen God; this is what cost Job so dearly. Here are the scriptures:

- "For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment. Should I lie against MY right? MY wound is incurable without transgression" (Job 34:5 & 6). These are the words of Job. Elihu, who is quoting Job, was the only comforter who the Lord did not rebuke for his advice to Job. Had Job really claimed to be righteous? Yes, he did. Here are his own words:
- "God...hath taken away my judgment...and...hath vexed my soul. ...Till I die I will not remove MINE integrity from me. MY RIGHTEOUSNESS I HOLD FAST AND WILL NOT LET IT GO: MY heart shall not reproach me as long as I live" (Job 27:2,5 & 6).

That attitude cost Job dearly. It will also cost us dearly. So long as we cling to ANY claim whatsoever, to contributing anything whatsoever toward our salvation, we are no better than Job. We are saved by grace [chastening and scourging, Titus 2:11 & 12, the word "teaching" is actually chastening] through faith and that faith is not even ours. "It is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "We are HIS workmanship" (Eph. 2:10). "That no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:29).

Now concerning Job, does God agree with Elihu? "...The Lord answered Job and said, shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct Him? He that reproveth God [like Job], let him answer it...Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" (Job 40:1,2 & 8). God did not pass the buck to Satan or Job's 'free will'.

What does Job answer? Does he resort to 'till I die I will not remove MY INTEGRITY from me. MY RIGHTEOUSNESS I hold fast and will not let it go: MY heart shall not reproach me so long as I live'? Is that how Job answered God when God showed Job that his belief in his free moral agency was essentially saying that he (Job) could disannul God's judgment by making good choices of his own free will, his own righteousness?

No. Like Saul of Tarsus, whose 'free' choice was to disannul God's judgment, Job saw the light. Powers and principalities in high places were at work on Job's [and on Saul's] 'free' choice. Instead of persecuting the Lord, Saul of his own 'free' will recognizes his blindness and asks, "Lord what will thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). And Job, of his own 'free' will now answers "I know that thou canst do everything [including

CAUSING our choices by either hardening our hearts or showing his mercy through chastening and scourging till we of our own 'free will' say 'not my will but thine be done]...wherefore I abhor myself and REPENT ['perfect' men don't need to repent] in dust and ashes." Job had come to see that his righteousness acts were filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Job now realized "the Lord hath brought forth [my] righteousness" (Jer. 51:10).

"I know that thou canst do everything, and that NO THOUGHT can be withholden from thee" (Job 42:2), is the truth of the scriptures. The trouble with this scriptural fact is that it flies in the face of the false doctrine of 'free' moral agency which of necessity teaches that God has chosen not to know what our choices will be. Therefore His hands are tied, and responsibility for our salvation is in our own hands in the final analysis . The most critical thing to our salvation, outweighing even the death and resurrection of Christ, is our 'freedom' of choice, our 'free' will; so this false doctrine teaches.

Free Will Exposed

This doctrine teaches that God sent His son into this world to save only those who choose of their own free will to believe in Christ in this fleshly life. If He hardens your heart, blinds you and gives you ears not to hear, He only does this to those who of their own 'free will', choose not to accept their invitation to the marriage of the Lamb. So all of God's efforts to draw all men to Himself are for the most part nullified by man's 'free will' according to this doctrine of 'free will'. The thinking goes like this: 'It is because of free will, that many are called, but few are chosen. As much as this pains our Father, our 'free will' has tied His hands. It's out of His hands; most will, depending on just how heartless and helpless a Father one serves, be either eternally dead or eternally tormented, because God has chosen NOT TO KNOW IN ADVANCE what our choices would be. Therefore, so the teaching goes, our eternal death or torment is after all, our own fault, because we of our own free will, have chosen not to attend the wedding of the Lamb.'

Is this what Job learned as a result of all of his trials? No, this is NOT the message of the book of Job. Here are Job's own words concerning what God chooses to know: "NO THOUGHT CAN BE WITHHOLDEN FROM THEE" (Job 42:2).

- "The preparations of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue is FROM THE LORD" (Pro. 16:1).
- "The kings [Pharaoh, King Saul and King Ahab and our] heart is in the hand of the Lord...He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Pro. 21:1).
- "Man's goings [ways] are of the Lord, how can a man then understand his own way?" (Pro. 20:24).
- "O Lord, I know that the way [goings] of man is not in himself: IT IS NOT IN MAN THAT WALKETH TO DIRECT HIS STEPS" (Jer. 10:23).

What room is there for 'free will' in these scriptures?

Let us go back to Job chapter one, and notice how God manipulates the Adversary to accomplish His purpose in Job. It is the Lord who draws Satan's attention to Job. Satan never asks God first for permission to prove Job. Showing Job His total sovereignty is God's purpose in this book. It is the Lord who first mentions Job: "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect [good] and upright man, one that feareth God and esheweth evil?" (Job 1:8) So the Lord himself admits that Job is a good man that fears God and hates evil.

Job's only fault was his mistaken belief in his own freedom to choose to "fear God and eschew [hate] evil." Job did not yet appreciate the sovereignty of God; "you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44).

Satan has no doubt about the sovereignty of God: "Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on

every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 1:11).

How does the Lord go about "put[ting] forth thine hand" to "touch all that he hath"? "And the Lord said unto Satan, behold, all that he hath is in thine hand..."

Here is God about to do what he tells us in Isa. 45:7 He does: "I... create evil. I the Lord do ALL these things." How does the Lord do all these things? Does God Himself "put forth his hand?" No, that is not how he "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). "God cannot be tempted of evil neither tempteth He [Himself] any man" (James 1:13). How can God insist on his sovereignty in all things, including the evil, and yet say He tempteth no man" Job himself tells us: "By His Spirit...His hand hath formed the crooked serpent [the tempter, Satan - Rev. 12:9](Job 26:13). Lo, these are part of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand? (Job 26:13 & 14) Evil spirits are not self created "His Hand formed the crooked serpent." Satan is not a loose cannon walking to and fro in the earth robbing God of 99% of His creation. Satan "could have no power at all...except it were given [him] from above" (John 19:11). He entered Judas and convinced him to betray Christ to the religious leaders of God's people of that day (Luke 22:3). Was Judas aware of Satan's influence upon him? Of course not. Judas, like so many of God's people today thought he was exercising his "freedom of choice". Judas, like Adam, and like all of us, was certainly exercising choice. Like Adam and all of us, he will certainly be held accountable for those choices and will "suffer loss" for "works" of "wood, hay and stubble" [wrong choices producing sin] (I Cor. 3:12-14).

But neither Adam, nor Judas, nor any of us are exercising "freedom of choice". Our choices clearly are not free but are all worked "after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Our choices, good choices like following Christ, and our sinful choices, like betraying Christ and living lives dominated by the flesh, are all 'caused' choices. All ultimately are caused by the ultimate cause of all: "We wrestle not with flesh and blood [our supposed free will] but with...spiritual wickedness in the heavens" (Eph. 6:12).

Adam's chances of making the right choice because of some fabled 'freedom' of choice were about as slim as Judas' chances of deciding not to betray Christ. Satan's "entering into Judas" (Luke 22:3) was no more a matter of Judas' 'free' will than when Satan influenced Peter to rebuke Christ for informing His disciples of the necessity of His impending death. Christ did not turn to Peter and encourage him to make better choices: "But when He had turned about and looked on His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things of men" (Mark 8:33).

Christ was not merely using a figure of speech. Christ knew that Satan "savoured the things that be of men". It was Christ Himself, the word of God, who had decreed in the garden "dust shalt thou eat." Christ knew how the universe operated, for the Father had used him to set it up as it is (Rom. 11:36). Christ knew that Peter was at that very moment losing, and losing badly a 'wrestling match' with spiritual wickedness in the heavens (Eph. 6:12).

Peter had to be brought to see this in himself. Because God had predestinated Peter to mercy, he chastened him with a rebuke: "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6).

There was no rebuke or chastening for Judas but rather, right from the mouth of our Savior Himself: "that which thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27). Satan "entered into" Judas to harden his heart or Judas would never have been able to carry through with his dastardly assignment: "So then it is not of him that willet [how clear!]...but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:16-18).

Man boasts of his 'free' will: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow...ye rejoice in your boasting [we will do this or that; reject or accept Christ] all such rejoicing is evil" (James 4:14 & 16). Whether we accept or reject Christ will be decided by whether we are dragged to the Father by circumstances beyond our control or hardened into rejection by 'spiritual wickedness in the heavens'. Yes, we do make choices, but they are never free from "Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will."

Part 8 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #4 - Joseph and His Brothers

Why are "our works" and "our righteousnesses" so despised by God? God Himself calls them "righteousnesses" (Isa. 64:6). He does not say our *iniquities* are as filthy rags. Is it nothing more than taking credit for what HE has done in either "drawing" us to Him or "hardening" us? Is it not simply because this fleshly claim of man's sovereign choices denies the truth that "O Lord, thou art our father; we are [merely] ...clay, and thou art our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (Isa. 64:8).

The story of Joseph and his brothers demonstrates how true this is. Joseph had 'chosen' to share a dream he had with his brothers: "Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed" (Gen. 37:6). He then delights them with the story of their "sheaves stood round about and made obeisance to my sheaf" (vs. 7). Jacob had 'chosen' to show favoritism toward Joseph. "When his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they [chose to] hate him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (Gen. 37:4). It was just at this juncture that Joseph decides to tell his brothers of his dream. "And they hated him yet the more" (Vs. 5).

To make matters worse, Joseph then dreams another similar dream. He dreams that "the sun and the moon and eleven stars made obeisance to me" (vs. 9). Joseph shares this dream with his father and his brothers. This time even "his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What...shall I and thy [dead] mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" (Vs. 10).

Now even Jacob rebukes Joseph. Joseph's decisions are not winning him many friends. Of course, this all leads to his brothers plotting his death and being talked out of that by Judah who talks his brothers into selling Joseph to some Ishmaelites who, in turn, sell Joseph to Potiphar, Pharaoh's captain of the guard.

Potiphar's wife falsely accuses Joseph of attempting to seduce her, and Joseph ends up spending years in prison where his gift of interpreting dreams finally falls on the receptive ears of Pharaoh's imprisoned baker and cup bearer. But the dreams are not his dreams now, and Joseph was no doubt questioning whether the dreams he had shared with his family would ever be fulfilled. Next, the Pharaoh himself has a dream which none of his wise men can interpret. The Pharaoh's cup bearer, whose dream Joseph had correctly interpreted, finally remembers Joseph and tells Pharaoh of Joseph's gift. Joseph is brought before Pharaoh, interprets the dream and is given control of the entire nations to prepare for the famine about which the Pharaoh had dreamed. Every person involved in this long gripping story is making what we might call large and small decisions and choices every day.

As Egypt's famine intensified, Joseph's brothers decide to go down to Egypt to buy grain. At this point God uses Joseph as His 'lake of fire' to burn up the wood, hay and stubble in his guilt-ridden brothers. The story climaxes with Joseph and his brothers and their father having a tearful reunion. After saving Egypt from

famine, Joseph now saves his own family, and in the process, they end up literally bowing down to Joseph and begging him for their lives.

Several years later, Jacob died in Egypt and was carried back to Canaan for burial. At this point, Joseph's brothers become concerned for their lives and again beg for forgiveness from Joseph. "And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him..." (Gen. 50:17).

What Joseph says to his brothers when they beg for his forgiveness after the death of Israel is no doubt the most complete and yet succinct commentary in all of scripture, on the origin and purpose for all evil. Can we believe what is clearly stated here in the book of beginnings?

"And Joseph said unto them, fear not for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you thought [assuming you had free will] evil against me; BUT GOD MEANT IT UNTO GOOD, TO BRING TO PASS, AS IT IS THIS DAY, TO SAVE MUCH PEOPLE ALIVE" (Gen. 50:19 & 20).

Here we have the reason for everything that has ever occurred; both good and bad. "Having made known unto us the mystery [the secret] OF HIS WILL [not ours], ACCORDING TO HIS GOOD PLEASURE WHICH HE HATH PURPOSED IN HIMSELF" (Eph. 1:9). What is His good pleasure that He has purposed in Himself?

Is it to save only a remnant of mankind? Or is it to save all of Egypt - the world? Is it not to "save much people alive"? "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one, ALL THINGS IN CHRIST [as in Adam SO in Christ - I Cor. 15:22] both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him. [It is all] predestinated according to the purpose of Him who WORKETH ALL THINGS [even Joseph's brothers evil deeds] AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:10 & 11). Salvation must depend upon only one will. It cannot be BOTH ours and Gods. The only one it depends on is "HIS OWN WILL".

Part 9 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #5 - Pharaoh's Heart is Hardened

While the churches of Babylon would have us believe that the Pharaoh who withstood Moses was simply an extremely stubborn man, the scriptures lead us to believe the exact opposite. While Moses was still in Midian, before he ever returned to Egypt,...the Lord said unto Moses, "When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but **I will harden his heart**, that he shall not let the people go" (Ex. 4:21). The Lord drug Moses back to Egypt against every excuse Moses could come up with and now he is telling Moses that when he does tell Pharaoh to let my people go, even before the Pharaoh is told to release Israel, God tells Moses, "I will harden his heart, that he shall not let my people go."

Is God working against himself. Of course not. Anyone who asks such a question is missing the whole point. The point being that God "works all things after the counsel of His own will". Understanding the sovereignty of God in no way exempts us of being under that same sovereign will in our own lives:

- "Now these things were [for] our examples..." I Cor. 10:6)
- "ALL these things happened unto them for our ensamples [same Greek word as examples] and they are written for our admonition" (I Cor. 10:11)

In other words, it was all predestined by God "for our ensamples" and "for our admonition". To what intent were they done for our admonition?... "That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west, that I am the Lord, and there is none else, I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I THE LORD DO ALL THESE THINGS...Woe to him that striveth with his Maker!...Shall the clay [that's mankind] say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou..." (Isa. 45:6 -9). Put Isa. 45 with Rom. 9 and 'free' will is revealed for the boasting of the flesh that it is. Certainly we have a will but nowhere is it said to be 'free' of the Potter's hand.

Part 10 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #6 - Abimelech and the Men of Shechem

Another story revealing just how much free will man has is the story of Abimelech, the son of Gideon. Gideon himself, as with all men, was the work of the Potter's sovereign hand. Gideon did not choose to conquer the Midianites. God chose Gideon and as always, drug him to do His will. His will was for Gideon to throw off Israel's oppressor, the Midianites. God was so insistent that we understand how very little flesh has to do with His work that He sent 31,700 men back to their homes and kept only 300 men to conquer vast numbers of Midianites.

Why keep only 300 out of 32,000? "And the Lord said unto Gideon, the people that are with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand [my freedom of choice] hath saved me...by the three hundred men...will I save you and deliver the Midianites into thine hand..." (Judges 7:2 & 7). God literally drug Gideon to do His will, then God saved Gideon and Israel. He worked it all after the counsel of His own will.

But the story of Gideon's son Abimelech is even more blatant in making the point that God is responsible for all things: "And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives. And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. And Gideon, the son of Joash, died in a good old age and was buried in the sepulcher of Joash his father, in Ophrah, of the Abiezrites" (Judges 8:30 & 31).

After Gideon's death Israel immediately forgot God and returned to idol worship. His son Abimelech, the son of "his concubine that was in Shechem", conspired with his relatives in Shechem to massacre his seventy brothers in Ophrah: "And he went unto his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren...being threescore and ten person, upon one stone: notwithstanding yet Jotham the youngest son...was left for he hid himself" (Judges 9:5).

Soon after this bloody event, Abimelech was "made...king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem" (vs. 6). At this point, scripture reveals to us much of the mind and workings of the Potter. The question posed by the apostle Paul in Rom. 9:20 "Why hast thou made me thus?" is answered here. Equally revealing is the biblical use of words such as 'fire', 'trees', 'vines' and 'brambles'. How these words were understood and used by Christ, His apostles and all the prophets is revealed here in a prophetic challenge issued by Jotham to his brother Abimelech and the men of Shechem: "And when they told it [Abimelech's coronation] to Jotham, he went and stood on Mt. Gerizim and lifted up his voice and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you" (Judges 9:7).

Jotham then puts forth a prophetic parable: "The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them: and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my

fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, come thou and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble [thistle] Come thou and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon. Now, therefore if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king and if ye have dealt well with [Gideon] and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; ...then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: BUT if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech. And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother" (Judges 9:8-21).

What are the trees but the unfruitful, idol worshiping people of God?

What is the olive tree, the fruit of which furnishes the fuel to light the seven lamps in the house of God, but those who having God's Spirit in them "are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14)?

What is the fig tree but those who have "learn[ed] to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be no unfruitful" (Titus 3:15)?

What is the vine but those branches on the true vine who "bring forth much fruit" (John 15:1-5)?

But there exists on this earth, mammoth trees which bear no fruit. Such trees when cut down can be used to build the temple of God, but while standing are proud and fruitless. These are the world renowned cedars of Lebanon whose "lofty looks...shall be humbled" (Psa. 29:5; Isa. 2:10-13).

What is the bramble under whose shadow the cedars of Lebanon so willingly place themselves? Is it not those who "bear thorns and briars [and are] rejected, and [are] nigh unto cursing' whose end is to be burned" (Heb. 6:8)?

We now come to the most revealing verse. This verse, like so many which convey the same truth, has been in God's word all along. But God has given us "eyes that cannot see" through false doctrines like the almost universally accepted doctrine of man's free moral agency. Man is an 'agent' true enough. But he is anything but free. Man is a slave. He is either a servant [Greek- slave] of sin or a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-20). Either way man is never a 'free' moral agent.

Here now is another verse which teaches us blatantly "man's goings are of the Lord, how can a man then understand his own way?" (Pro. 20:24). This verse shows us why "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Is there "evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6). Here is the way God does it: "Then GOD SENT AN EVIL SPIRIT between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech" (Judges 9:23).

This is the 'fire' that "came out of the bramble and devoured the cedars of Lebanon". This is the 'fire' that "came out from the men of Shechem and the house of Millo, and devour[ed] Abimelech."

Is this not the same fire with which Christ says EVERY sacrifice will be salted? (Mark 9:48 & 49). Is this not also the 'fire' of verse 47: "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire"? Of course, it is. Does anyone seriously believe that we will enter into the kingdom of God with one eye? Of course not! This is figurative language. Christ is not teaching us self-mutilation, but rather a whole-hearted life of service to our heavenly Father. The subject does not change from verse 47 to verse 48. Christ, Paul and Peter all understood the

meaning of the word 'fire' in scriptural terms. It is a figurative word typical of burning out the wood, hay and stubble in our works. So Paul also says: "Every man's work [not his physical body] shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by FIRE; and the FIRE shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (I Cor. 3:13).

So what happens to us if our works are "wood, hay and stubble" like the men of Shechem and of the household of Millo? "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE [the lake of fire]" (I Cor. 3:15). This is the "destruction" of I Cor. 3:17 - "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are". When the evil works are all burned up, the old man is "destroyed" yet "he himself [the new man in Christ] is saved though as by fire".

What kind of fire is this? It is the kind of 'fire' that came out between the men of Shechem and Abimelech: "That the cruelty done to the threescore and ten sons of [Gideon] might come, and their blood be laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem which aided him in the killing of his brethren" (Judges 9:24).

If "God sent an evil spirit [to let fire come out] between Abimelech and the men of Shechem", then He no doubt sent an evil spirit to cause "fire to come out between Abimelech and his brethren." "Shall there be evil in a city [of Ophrah] and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6). Understanding God's sovereignty is the secret spoken of in Amos 3:7 - "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets."

Once again it is apparent that God "worketh ALL THINGS after the counsel of HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:11). This is the first time the scripture blatantly informs us of the origins of evil spirits: "Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech" (Judges 9:23).

Did God Himself tempt the men of Shechem? No, they were drawn away of their own lust and enticed. But how was this accomplished? Was it by stripping the men of Shechem of their ability to make choices? No. It was accomplished by giving them the ability to choose. They may well have felt they were exercising 'freedom' of choice. But what was the actual truth when viewed through the opened spiritual eyes the Word of God affords us? "God had sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem." And what was God's purpose in doing this? "...and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech" (Judges 9:23).

Adam, Job, Pharaoh, Abimelech, King Saul, Judas, Pilate, Saul of Tarsus and you and I must all choose. But don't boast in your 'freedom of choice'. It is nothing more than another nourishing meal for the serpent. It is what Eze. 14 calls an "idol of the heart". God's people today think they are too sophisticated to bow down to a physical idol. But they will kill you and think they do God a service over an 'idol of the heart'. The adversary couldn't care less which idol we serve. Any idol makes just another good meal for him. Notice also how Ezekiel puts it: "And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel" (Eze. 14:9).

So who claims to be responsible for all the "many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:5), "and many false [deceived] prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:11). Read Ezekiel 14:9 for the true, ultimate answer.

Who did Job see as responsible for the incredible trials he endured? "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). "...and they [Job's friends and family]...comforted him over all the evil that THE LORD HAD BROUGHT UPON HIM..." (Job 42:11).

The first chapter of Job, like Judges 9, informs us that the Lord Himself does not try men. He uses Satan for that purpose because that is the purpose for which HE "formed the crooked serpent" (Job 26:13).

Part 11 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #7 - Samson and His Philistine Wife

Only five chapters later we find the second blatant, straightforward statement in the book of Judges revealing to us that evil is "of the Lord."

Judges 13 is the story of Samson's parents and the birth of Samson. Samson's father was a man of the tribe of Dan. "His name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and bare not" (Judges 13:2). The angel of the Lord appears to Samson's mother and informs her she will conceive and bare a son. He tells her "no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Verse 5).

So we now know that God had determined before he was even conceived, that Samson would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines". But how had He determined to accomplish this?

This chapter concludes: "and the woman bare a son and called his name Samson: and the child grew and the Lord blessed him. And the spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Estaol" (Judges 13:24 & 25).

How had "the Lord blessed him?" Exactly what does "the spirit of the Lord began to move him at times" mean? Had God written His laws on Samson's heart? Was Samson blessed with an indwelling of God's Spirit? Is that what "the Lord blessed him" means? Is that how "the spirit of the Lord began to move him at times"? Hardly! The Lord worked evil even in Samson after the counsel of His own will.

The very next few verses tell us what Samson did that "was of the Lord" (Judges 14:4). Immediately after telling us "And the spirit of the Lord began to move him..." the very next verse tells us: "And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman of the daughters of the Philistines. And he came up and told his father and his mother and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath, of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore get her for me to wife" (Judges 14:1 & 2).

God had told Israel "take heed to thyself, lest thou...take of their daughters unto thy sons..." (Ex. 34:12 & 16). Yet this is what we are told Samson did immediately after telling us "...the Lord blessed him. And the spirit of the Lord began to move him..."

Are we being told that God was responsible for Samson's disregard for the laws God had given Moses forbidding the sons of Israel to marry the daughters of the people of the land? Samson's parents knew this would displease God: "Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me for she pleaseth me well" (Judges 14:3).

Does this sound like Samson had the Spirit of God? Yet we are told "the Lord blessed him. And the spirit of the Lord began to move him..."

It should begin to become obvious that "Put forth thy hand" and "the spirit of the Lord...mov[ing] him" in the old covenant is a far cry from the "walk in the Spirit" of the new covenant.

But was Samson's self-centered, rebellious decision to marry a 'daughter of the Philistines' really "after the counsel of [God's] own will?" (Eph. 1:11). Here is the brazen, explicit answer of the word of God: "But his father and his mother knew not that it [Samson's self-centered disobedience to God] WAS OF THE LORD, THAT HE SOUGHT AN OCCASION AGAINST THE PHILISTINES..." (Judges 14:4).

The workings and the mind of God are both once again revealed in stark contrast to the workings and the mind of man and of the flesh. In spiritual terms, Samson was as carnal and self-centered as the day is long. Yet he is God's instrument in "seeking an occasion against the Philistines". Even his motivation for the greatest act of his Philistine slaying career was not one of repentance. His disregard for the need of obedience to the source of his strength and might persisted to the bitter end.

- After slaying a lion with his bare hands,
- After slaying thirty Philistines for their garments,
- After catching 300 foxes and releasing them with firebrands into the crops of the Philistines,
- After slaying the Philistines who had burned his Philistine wife and father-in-law,
- After slaying one thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass,
- After carrying the gates of Gaza "and the two posts...bar and all...to the top of a hill before Hebron",

After performing all these mighty works THROUGH "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD...MOV[ING] HIM" (Judges 13:25), Samson still could not see that God was using A CARNAL MAN OF GOD to accomplish his goal of destroying his enemies.

While Samson was alive he never conquered either the beast within himself or the enemy without.

7. It was only "THROUGH DEATH" that both of these were accomplished: "...So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (Judges 16:30). "...That THROUGH DEATH He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). "In the body of His flesh THROUGH DEATH, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight" (Col. 1:22).

This story of the life and death of Samson demonstrates that the ultimate work of God is never accomplished through the works of the flesh. More abundant life, the ultimate work of God, is performed THROUGH DEATH.

To be one of the "blessed and holy" who has part in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6), we must DIE TO THE FLESH NOW and "bring forth much fruit" (John 12:24). But being in either resurrection still requires the death of literal physical flesh for "flesh and blood CANNOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD..." (I Cor. 15:50): "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life" (Judges 16:30). "Let me die with the Philistines" was Samson's last prayer (same verse). Carnal Samson, like the carnal Corinthians, "came behind in no gift" (I Cor. 1:7). But like gifted Samson, denominational tendencies proved the Corinthians were "yet carnal and walk[ed] as men" (I Cor. 3:3).

The message of Judges 13-16 is the same as the message of the book of Revelation: "I will come unto you quickly and will remove your candlestick out of his place except you repent" (Rev. 2:5). This is the exhortation of all of God's word from Genesis to Revelation.

The function of grace is to "teach [chasten]... us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11 & 12).

Samson is a type of those who want only to hear of the ultimate outcome but never the process. That's because the process is a fiery trial: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial WHICH IS TO TRY YOU...(I Pet. 4:12). This is the chastening Paul speaks about in Titus 2:11 & 12; this is the "fire [that] shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (I Cor. 3:13-15); this is the "everyone shall be salted with fire" that Christ tells us about (Mark 9:49); this is the "flaming sword which turned every way, to keep THE WAY of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). That 'way' is Christ: "I am the way, the truth and the [tree of] life: no man cometh to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

Christ is a "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), and being consumed by a fire is a "chastening and scourging" that is not pleasurable. "Get her for me to wife...for she pleaseth me well" and one should "be rich and increased with goods and [in] need of nothing" sounds so much more appealing that "deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

It is not the vocalized name of Christ that is denied in the last days. The enemies of Christ love to use His name: "Many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:5). It is not the use of the name they despise; it is the mention of the cross, the mention of the process that is so despised: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies [not of the name but] of the CROSS of Christ" (Phil 3:18). But Samson and the churches of God see no need for this process. They are the called, the people of God. And they say if there is any doubt about that, witness the supernatural gifts we have. We "come behind in no gift"; we can slay a thousand Philistines in a day"; "...have we not...in thy name done many wonderful works" (Matt. 7:22).

Yet both the church of Laodecia and Samson must come to see that they are "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

Samson was a man "moved" by the spirit of God. He was led by the spirit and he knew nothing of the fruits of the Spirit. Indeed, contrary to what many believe, the Spirit had not yet been given to anyone, for Christ had not yet died and "...If I go not away [die] the Comforter will not come unto you..." (John 16:7). It is important that we understand that so long as we are living for the flesh, the Spirit cannot dwell in us. Christ did not die to the flesh so we could live in it. He died to the flesh so He could live in us, and then we, since He is living in us, can also die to the flesh: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me..." (Gal. 2:20).

Those who want only to hear of the ultimate outcome of grace and want to hear nothing of the process must still endure the process, for the flaming sword turns "EVERY way, to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). Teaching salvation by grace without teaching the burning out process of grace is nothing less than deception and darkness.

Let us ask the Father to give us the spiritual discernment to be able to distinguish the moving of the Spirit from the fruits of the Spirit. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but as Samson, the carnal Corinthians and the church of Laodecia all demonstrate, gifts and the moving of the Spirit do not necessarily produce the fruits of the Spirit. We do not know them by their gifts. We know them [God's true called ones] only by their fruits (Matt. 7:16 & 20).

An evil tree is very often gifted by God even as Samson, the prophet Balaam, King Saul, Solomon and many other men of God demonstrate. But an evil tree can NEVER bring forth good fruit, therefore we know them ONLY by their fruits. That fruit is described in Gal. 5:22: "...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith..." etc. God quite frequently gives gifts of the Spirit without the gift of an indwelling Holy Spirit as Christ's own yet unconverted disciples demonstrated (Luke 10:20). The deception we face is not obvious and would deceive the elect if possible. Let us try the spirits. Gifts are good in their place, but don't try spirits by gifts. "Ye shall know them by their **fruits**" (Matt. 7:16 & 20).

Part 12 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #8 - "An Evil Spirit from the Lord Troubled [Saul]" I Sam. 16:14

There are two prominent Sauls in scripture. Both were God's rejected anointed. Both were popular with the rejected people of God. Both persecuted the true people of God, and both were predestinated to destruction. That's right - King Saul and Saul of Tarshish were destined for destruction. There is, of course, one major difference. King Saul died in the flesh, while Saul of Tarshish died 'to the flesh'. But once again both by God's sovereign design and for our admonition.

Four times in this one chapter we are told

- "The spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and AN EVIL SPIRIT FROM THE LORD troubled him" (I Sam. 16:14).
- "And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit FROM GOD troubleth thee [the extent of God's sovereignty apparently used to be common knowledge.
- "...and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit FROM GOD is upon thee, that he [David] shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well" (I Sam. 16:16).
- "And it came to pass when the evil spirit FROM GOD was upon Saul, that David took an harp and played with his hand" (I Sam. 16:23).

Twice more in I Samuel we are clearly and straightforwardly told "the evil spirit from God came upon Saul" (I Sam. 18:10) and "the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul as he sat in his house..." (I Sam. 19:9).

Six times in this one book we are told the function of evil spirits is to work the counsels and the purpose of God. Maybe we really don't wrestle against flesh and blood! (Eph. 6:12)

Part 13 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #9 - David Numbers the People

"And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and HE moved David against them to say, Go number Israel and Judah: (II Sam. 24:1).

In Exodus 30:12-16, God had instructed Moses never to number the people without collecting a "ransom for his soul": "When thou takest the sum of the children after their number then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; THAT THERE BE NO PLAGUE AMONG THEM WHEN THOU NUMBEREST THEM" (Ex. 30:12).

This census of Israel was for one reason only: "And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation..."

Apparently Joab and his captains were aware of this warning: "And Joab said unto the king, now the Lord thy God add unto the people how many so ever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing" (II Sam. 24:2)?

The story goes on. Though Joab finds this a repugnant assignment which he and his captains try to talk David out of doing, David is insistent. The people are numbered and as a result seventy thousand are slain in one day by "a pestilence" (II Sam. 24:15).

Notice who we are told "moved" David against them to say, go number Israel and Judah." "...the Lord...HE moved David." Now my KJV Bible margin tells me the 'he' in this verse is Satan. They refer us to I Chron. 21:1 to prove their point: "And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number the people."

Those bible scholars were so uncomfortable with the idea of God using Satan as an instrument to fulfill His preordained plan and purpose, that they were willing to violate the rules of grammar rather than admit to doctrinal error. "...the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and HE [not Satan] moved David..." The subject of this sentence is "the Lord" not Satan. The pronoun 'he' refers back to the subject, the Lord.

Now, let us go on over to I Chron. 21 and see if here at last we can say we have a scripture which does not show God to be responsible for evil: "and Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel" (I Chron. 21:1).

Is there anything in this verse which tells us that Satan was doing something contrary to the sovereign will of God? Is there anything here which would contradict Paul's numerous assertions that "all is of God"? Does this contradict Paul's statement " ...according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will"? (Eph. 1:11).

Let us see if the writer of I Chron. 21 thought this was all really Satan's idea: "And God was displeased with this thing, therefore He smote Israel" (I Chron. 21:7).

Why, if God is more powerful than Satan, and we all agree He is, why does He hold Israel accountable for what Satan tempted David to do? Why is Satan never punished for all the misery for which he is supposedly responsible.

The answer is that "the crooked serpent" is simply "an evil spirit from God" doing what he is commissioned to do. He can do no more, and he can do no less than what he is sent to do by the only sovereign power of the universe: "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem..." (Judges 9:23); "an evil spirit from the Lord troubled" [king Saul] (I Sam. 16:14). "The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof..." (Isa. 19:14). When the Lord mingles a perverse spirit, man's presumed freedom of choice doesn't deter "Him who worketh all thing after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Part 14 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #10 - Ahab Goes to Ramoth-Gilead

II Chron. 18 is the story of Jehoshaphat the king of the southern kingdom of Judah 'joining affinity' with Ahab the king of the northern kingdom of Israel. Ahab is a very wicked king married to Jezebel, a very wicked queen, responsible for the death of many of the true prophets of God.

Once again we are given a glimpse into the spiritual realm. Once again it is revealed that evil spirits are daily sent by God to accomplish His purpose. Truly "we wrestle not against flesh and blood [as it seems], but against...spiritual wickedness in the heavens" (Eph. 6:12).

To the carnal mind, Ahab seems of his own 'free will' to have decided to go to war with the Syrians at Ramothgilead. He has given a feast in honor of Jehoshaphat and asks Jehoshaphat to go to war with him. Jehoshaphat "answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war" (II Chron. 18:3).

But Jehoshaphat had one request to make of Ahab before they go to war: "And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire I pray you, at the word of the Lord today" (vs. 4). So Ahab rounds up four hundred prophets who dutifully tell Ahab, "go up for God will deliver it into the king's hand" (vs. 5).

There must have been something about these prophets that made Jehoshaphat recognize them for the hirelings and money hungry men of God they were, because he turns to Ahab and asks him: "...is there not a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" (vs. 6).

"And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, there is yet one man by whom we may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he never prophesies good unto me but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so" (vs. 7).

So Ahab, wanting to appear as an objective seeker of truth before Jehoshaphat sends a messenger for Micaiah. The messenger tells Micaiah that four hundred prophets had prophesied in favor of the king's desire of his own 'free' will to go to war. "Let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good" the messenger urges Micaiah (vs. 12).

"Even what my God saith, that will I speak" was Micaiah's response. So the messenger places Micaiah before the two kings, between the kings before him and four hundred paid prophets behind him. "And when he was come to the king, the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-Gilead to battle or shall I forebear? And he [Micaiah] said, Go ye up, and prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hand." (vs. 14).

Now Micaiah had just told the messenger sent to fetch him that he would speak only "what my God saith." That being the case the Lord must have told Micaiah that Ahab had told Jehoshaphat that Micaiah never prophesies good unto me but always evil. The Lord apparently wanted the truth to be given to Ahab at his own request. "And the king said unto him, [still feigning as an objective truth seeker]. How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the Lord." (Vs. 15).

So Ahab asked for nothing but the unvarnished truth, which he is about to receive. Ahab was the old covenant equivalent of the leader of modern day Protestants because Israel broke away from the house of David and started a 'new church' over the extortion of money from the people. Jehoshephat was the old testament type of 'a good pope' whose fathers had extorted money from the fathers of the Protestants.

The modern day equivalent of this scene would be a summit of the leaders of every European nation whether Catholic or Protestant; every leader of the Western Hemisphere whether Catholic or Protestant; the leaders of any nation which mentions the name of Christ, along with about four thousand of the religious leaders from all these nations.

One leader of these "Christian" nations is particularly intent upon going to war against the perennial enemy of the 'people of God'. He is willing to go it alone if necessary, for this is a clear-cut case of good versus evil. We know this is a case of 'the people of the true God' versus those who don't even profess the name of Christ. But this leader of the greatest "Christian" nation on earth would really rather form a coalition to 'go up to Ramoth-Gilead.' The four thousand Christian leaders operating under a carnal understanding of a biblical principle, "resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7), tell the political leaders of this imaginary summit that God is on their side. While they are obviously a group of groveling men-pleasers, they think they are operating and speaking of their own "free will".

But what is the truth about the choices we make. Micaiah is about to give us a lesson in 'spirit realm civics 101'. This lesson is "written for our admonition." It is **not** a tale of the extraordinary as our stubborn flesh wants us to believe. If this tale is an unusual event, then it is of no value for the admonition of the believer, but this is NOT an unusual event, any more than the events related in Job 1. "These things were our examples...and they are written for our admonition" (I Cor. 6 & 11). These are "examples" FOR US. This is how the universe is run every day: "Then [after Ahab insisted on hearing the truth] he [Micaiah] said, I did see all Israel, scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in peace. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, did I not tell thee that he would not prophecy good unto me, but evil?" (vs. 17).

Ahab must have known his four hundred prophets were lying, for when Micaiah agreed with them, Ahab insisted on hearing the truth. But Ahab did not have a love of the truth anymore than the religious leaders of our day who are ridiculing the advice of our Lord to Peter: "then said Jesus unto him, put up again thy sword into his place: for ALL they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 25:52).

If ever there appeared to be a worthy cause to fight for, Peter had chosen the most worthy. He was fighting for the Son of God and against the forces of evil. Or at least it appeared so to a yet unconverted Peter (Luke 22:32). Yes, right after telling Peter he wasn't yet converted, Christ did say "...he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (vs. 36). But for what purpose? "For...this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, and he was reckoned among the transgressors" (vs. 37). That was the only reason given by Christ to buy [not take up] a sword. It was only for the purpose of fulfilling the prophecy that Christ was to be "reckoned among the transgressors".

The four thousand modern day prophets of 'Ahab and Jezebel' who are beating the war drums today, often remind us that Christ said "sell you cloak and buy a sword", but how many remind us of what the Lord told Peter when Peter took up the sword and cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant? "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword?"

But "all things are of God" (II Cor. 5:18) and this is especially true of deceived prophets (Eze. 14:9).

But Micaiah was only getting started on spirit realm civics versus 'free will', when Ahab interrupted him complaining, then as now, "did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good unto me, but evil?" (I Chron. 18:17). The truth of God is always negative concerning fornicating religious and political leaders of God's people.. Yes, the truth of God always has been negative concerning the rejected firstborn like Cain, Ishmael and Esau and the rejected anointed like Eli, King Saul and Ahab. These are all types of the flesh, and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 15:50): "...therefore hear the word of the Lord; I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. [These are the "powers and principalities" including the "spiritual wickedness in the heavens" of Eph. 6:12] AND THE LORD SAID, who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one spake saying after this manner and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, wherewith [how]? And he said, I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of ALL of his prophets. And THE LORD SAID, THOU SHALT ENTICE HIM, and THOU SHALT PREVAIL: go out and do even so" (vs. 18-21).

"All the host of heaven" no doubt included righteous spirits who no doubt suggested Ahab's conversion. But the hosts of heaven are not privy to the knowledge God reveals to those who seek to know his mind.

I have attended numerous funerals in my fifty-five years on this earth. Invariably the ministers will read I Cor. 2:9 - "But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." And that is where they always stop.

Why do they stop here? Because God has not opened their eyes to see the next verse: "But God has revealed them unto us by His spirit; for the spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:10).

Do the angels understand the deep things of God? "...which things the angels desire to look into" is a statement made by Peter concerning the salvation of those in Christ. "Which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently...searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ did signify..." (I Pet. 1:10-12).

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and power in heavenly places might be known BY THE CHURCH the manifold wisdom of God." This phrase 'principalities and powers in heavenly places' is the exact thought and words translated spiritual wickedness in high places in Eph. 6:12. High places and heavenly places are both the Greek word *epouranios*, [Strong's # 2032]. No, the angels do not know the "deep things of God." They will in due time learn the manifold wisdom of God BY THE CHURCH.

Understanding the sovereignty of God is one of "the deep things of God". It is one thing to say 'yes, I believe God is sovereign.' It is quite another to understand the depth of God's sovereignty.

•Matt. 13:11 - "...He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."

• Matt. 13:17 - "...many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

'Freedom of choice' is not a scriptural phrase and is in fact an unscriptural doctrine. "having made known unto us the mystery of HIS will, according to HIS GOOD PLEASURE which HE hath purposed in HIMSELF" (Eph. 1:9) is a scriptural statement and is in fact a scriptural doctrine. "All things are of God" (II Cor. 5:18) and are "predestined according to the purpose of HIM who worketh all things after the counsel of HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:11) is the exact opposite of man's free will. Yet it is accomplished through the choices men make because, as we have demonstrated, it is God who "moves" men (II Sam. 24:1) to make the choices they make.

So what is "His good pleasure which HE hath purposed in HIMSELF? Here is the answer. Believe your Bible! "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the LAST DAY" (John 6:44). Does that sound like God wants us to believe that 'no one can come to me except he chooses to by his own free will?'

Who will be drawn to Christ? What does the Bible teach? "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, WILL DRAW ALL MEN UNTO ME. This He said signifying what death [crucifixion] He should die" (John 12:32-33).

Was Christ lifted up in crucifixion?

Who do the scriptures [not the prophets of Ahab and Jezebel] teach will be "made alive in Christ"? "**AS** in Adam **ALL** die, [it wasn't by our own 'free will' we were born in Adam] **SO in Christ will ALL be made alive**" (I Cor. 15:22).

The entire fifth chapter of Romans makes this same statement five times in a row. If all were made sinners and subject to death in the first Adam then ALL will be made righteous and given life in the second Adam. Notice Romans 5:18 says "ALL MEN" receive justification "AS" all received condemnation. Five is the number of grace, and grace chastens us until we overcome our 'idols of the heart' (Eze. 14:7).

Getting back to Micaiah's class on spirit realm civics, someone might ask why did God allow "all the host of heaven" to participate in this discussion of His predetermined fate of King Ahab and then choose a "lying spirit in the mouths of all of his [Ahab's] prophets" to accomplish this end? Why did He not deal with Ahab as He did with Jonah or as He dealt with David when David numbered the people or with Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus? Are some people simply too evil for God, with all the powers and principalities at His disposal; are they simply too evil for Him to convert? Hardly! "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump [this is Adam] to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonor?" (Rom. 9:21). God did not make us 'robots' as some contend this doctrine signifies. We are simply a lump of clay in HIS HANDS: "as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" (Jer. 18:6). Even when we turn the world upside down as Ahab and Jezebel, this "turning of things upside down [is to be] esteemed as the potter's clay" (Jer. 29:16).

How clear! "All is of God" (II Cor. 5:18). Oh, yes, we think WE have chosen God of our own free will, but the truth straight from the mouth of our Savior Himself as "ye have not chosen me [or your own 'free will'] but I have chosen you..." (John 15:16). We think evil men are evil because THEY have chosen to be evil, but Paul says it is "the Potter" who has made them to be "vessels of dishonor". If "the thing formed" does not have the right to ask "why had YOU made me thus", what right has a 'vessel of honor' to say "I chose to live for God"? Or, "I may not have contributed much to my own salvation, but I did contribute the faith to choose God." This is what many of us have been taught. We simply did not understand Romans 9, and our eyes were blinded to Eph. 2:8 which says "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that [that faith] NOT OF YOURSELVES: **it is the gift of God.**"

Part 15 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #11 - Judas and the Murder of Christ

If the very faith to be saved is "not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"; if "ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16); if God simply has "mercy on whom HE will have mercy" (Rom. 9:18) and if He truly "works all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11), then He must also indeed "hate evil" (Isa. 45:7) and "hate" people before they are even born (Rom. 9:11-113), "harden hearts" (Rom. 9:18), blind eyes, keep from understanding, keep from being converted and keep from being healed (John 12:40).

Is this true? Is God really the one who is responsible for all the evil in the world?

Ask yourself, what is the most evil action of men of all time? Because you are "of the earth, earthy", you may think it was the burning of witches at the stake, pulling men apart with horses, sawing men in two, etc. You might think that certain men ordering the deaths of so many people make those men the most evil men of all time. If you think any of these things, you are wrong. There has been one death that was worth more than all deaths of all kinds, of all time in the eyes of God. This was the death of the only sinless human being whoever lived - the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whom are we told to hold responsible for this most heinous crime of all time? Are we told that our sins killed Christ? No, we are not! We are not told that we loved and therefore chose Christ, but rather that we

did NOT choose Christ (John 15:16). We are told "not that we loved God, but that HE loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10). Propitiation means "atonement, that is, (concretely) an expiation" (Strong's Concordance #2434). Anyone for whom sins are atoned is saved from the penalty of sin, which penalty is death (Rom. 6:23).

But those who have been 'dragged' to God and saved by the fiery chastening and cleansing of grace in this age, are not the only ones to be saved by this 'propitiation' of Christ: "...if ANY man sin, we have an advocate [*parakletos* - Strong's #3875 - "COMFORTER WHICH IS THE HOLY SPIRIT" John 14:26] with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous" (I John 2:1).

But we are not the only ones this propitiation covers. We are simply "...a kind of FIRST fruits of his creatures...[begotten] of HIS OWN [not our] will" (James 1:18). Since we are only "a kind of first fruits", "he is the propitiation of our sins; and not for ours only, BUT ALSO FOR THE WHOLE WORLD" (I John 2:3). Christ did not die for our sins only, but for all sin of all time, "THE WHOLE WORLD" "...specially [but not limited to] of those that believe" (I John 4:10).

We still haven't discovered who the scriptures say was responsible for the death of Christ. Was it the Jews who knew that his parables spoke of them (Matt. 21:45)? No, we are told by Christ Himself that it was not given to them to understand who He was, nor to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:11-16). Therefore, while hanging on the cross, Christ admitted "they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Was Judas responsible for the death of Christ? He felt so guilty that he hanged himself shortly after the death of Christ (Matt. 27:5). But Judas could never have carried through with this deed if Satan himself had not been sent to "enter...into Judas" (Luke 22:3), hardening him to carry through with the task that Christ Himself had told Judas "that thou do, do quickly" (John 13:27). Christ in no way discouraged Judas. It took both Christ and Satan to get Judas to commit this dastardly act.

Who then was responsible for the greatest crime and evil of all time? Peter tells us who was really responsible for the death of Christ. We are told twice, so we cannot possibly misunderstand, even though the whole world is blinded: ".....Him [Christ] BEING DELIVERED BY THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). Was Christ slain by the Jews? NO! He was "delivered [to death] BY THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD."

Did the other disciples see it this way? "Against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, FOR TO DO WHATSOEVER [crucify Christ] THY HAND AND THY COUNSEL DETERMINED BEFORE [the world began - I Tim. 1:9] TO BE DONE" (Acts 4:27 & 28).

There it is! Who killed Christ? "...the Gentiles and the people of Israel" (pretty much covers EVERYBODY). Were they responsible for this the worst crime of all time? Absolutely not! "They know not what they do." Who did know what He was doing? Who is responsible for the death of Christ? "Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done."

Will Judas or the Jews be held accountable for their deeds even though they can truthfully plead "why has thou made me thus?" Yes, they will be held accountable for their deeds even though they are not responsible: "that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth..." (Matt. 23:35).

Will the Gentiles be held accountable for their evil deeds? Certainly: "the wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23).

The truth will always remain the same: "HE WORKETH ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:11).

Part 16 - Twelve Examples of God's Modus Operandi

Example #12 - Saul of Tarsus

We have one final example which should dispel any doubts about the foolishness of a doctrine which teaches that man's will is free from the hand of the Potter. IT IS TRUE GOD DOES NOT FORCE US TO DO ANYTHING: "...the goodness of God LEADETH thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). God is the potter and we, mankind, are all the lump of clay (Rom. 9:21). A potter does not force the clay to do anything; he 'leads' it, he forms it. Since salvation is of the Jews, we must all, Jew or Gentile, be formed as Gentiles first: it is God who leads and forms us this way first: "Ye know that ye were [past tense] Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, EVEN AS YE WERE LED" [formed by the Potter] (I Cor. 12:2). Before Adam ever ate of the tree, he was formed by the Creator "of the earth, earthy" flesh and blood and therefore corruptible (I Cor. 15:50).

Thus David tells us: "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51:5). David was a man "after God's own heart", yet he made this statement concerning our original state. Do we dare to disagree? We are all born naked, composed of clay, dust, 'shapen in iniquity', 'conceived in sin'.

Saul of Tarsus was no exception. He was first formed a vessel of dishonor, "marred in the Potter's hand" (Jer. 18:6). Notice how God led Saul to repentance. If only God will give us eyes to see that these twelve examples are NOT exceptions to God's way of working. If only God will let us see that all these things are for our examples and are written for OUR admonition. Then we can give Him His due credit and recognition. Then we can rest in His assured love knowing that "He worketh ALL THINGS after the counsel of HIS OWN will" (Eph. 1:11).

Saul as a zealous young church leader had consented to the stoning of righteous Stephen. He was constantly "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). Let us observe how God reforms this "marred vessel". Observe how the goodness of God led Saul to repentance. Is Saul's own will free of the forming and leading of the Potter? Of course not.

Saul went to the high priest "and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way [following Christ], whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1 & 2). He 'freely' chose to slaughter the disciples of 'this way'. This Saul was a marred vessel in the hand of the Potter: "and the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the Potter" (Jer. 18:6). The Potter does not make mistakes. He deliberately makes vessels to honor and vessels of dishonor.

The vessels of dishonor are endured "with much longsuffering" so God can "demonstrate His wrath and make His power known" (Rom. 9:22). These vessels of wrath are "fitted to destruction that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy which He hath AFORE prepared unto glory. Even us whom He hath called not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." Saul's experience demonstrates how God "destroys" a vessel of wrath.

"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

And he said, who art thou Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:3-6). At this point Saul's highly esteemed 'freedom of choice' was looking very much like a pile of dung. "Kick against the pricks" is scriptural lingo for pitting our 'free will' against the will of the Potter.

"And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: and they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink" (Acts 9:7-9). God didn't force Saul to do anything. He forms and leads Saul to willingly ask the very man he was moments before threatening to slaughter, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" One moment Saul is asserting his 'own free will' and the next moment he is conscious of how blind he was. He is now seeking to know the will of Him who worketh ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL. He did this willingly. God didn't need to force him to ask "what wilt THOU have me to do?" God simply destroyed the marred vessel and "he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the Potter to make it...as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand..." (Jer. 18:44-6).

Are we so spiritually blind that we think this account of Saul is just an interesting segment of early church history? No, this too, is for our admonition.

Jesus said "...I am come into this world that they which see not might see; AND THAT THEY WHICH SEE MIGHT BE MADE BLIND" (John 9:39). Saul of Tarsus certainly thought he could see: "Touching the righteousness which is in the law, [Saul was] blameless" (Phil. 3:6). Saul had to be shown just how blind he had been. "He was three days without sight..."

After three days of total darkness, a disciple named Ananias, who lived on a street called Straight, prays for Saul. "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith..." (Acts 9:18). This was written for our admonition. Saul's road to Damascus experience once again is NOT an exception to the ways of God. It may be unusually dramatic, but that is for the purpose of making the truth an open door for those to whom "it is given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom" of God, while hiding the truth from those to whom "it is not given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God."

Saul of Tarsus had more than any other man "...whereof he might trust in the flesh" (Phil. 3:4). He thought he had need of nothing, yet he was brought to see AGAINST his own fabled 'free will' that in reality he was naked and blind (Rev. 3:17).

Until we are chastened and scourged as was Saul (Heb. 12:6), we will not be received by God. We will continue in our blind, naked condition thinking we have need of nothing. Christ will tell us "you have not chosen me" and we will maintain we still have freedom of choice. He will say we are "predestinated" and "he worketh all things after the counsel of HIS OWN will" we will yet take the credit for accepting Him as our savior.

Such is the reluctance of the beast of Ecc. 3:18 to vacate and relinquish its claim to the temple of the Holy Ghost [Spirit] (I Cor. 6:19). Through the false, deceptive doctrine of free moral agency, the abomination that maketh desolate is "standing where it ought not (let him that readeth understand)..."

It takes no spiritual vision to see a physical man standing in a physical temple in a physical nation called Israel. It takes no spiritual vision to see a physical number stamped in a physical right hand and a physical forehead. So while the whole deceived, blinded Christian world allows Jezebel and those who say they are Jews but are not to cause them to commit fornication, He causeth ALL, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond to receive a mark in the [spiritual] right hand and in their [spiritual] foreheads. He that hath understanding counts the number of the beast and understands that it is [spiritually] the number of 'a' [any

one in Adam] man. For Adam, along with all the other beasts, was created on the sixth day. It is 'Adam' who stands in the temple demanding our worship.

And all those to whom it is not given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God will and do worship this beast in themselves and will gladly kill any who dare suggest that we love our enemies, or put up our sword, or in any way suggest that 'Adam' is poor, miserable, blind and naked. To propose that it is those who name the name of Christ who need to repent is considered the same as giving aid and comfort to the enemy. In reality, of course, it is those who want to fight a physical fight who are giving aid and comfort to old unrepentant Adam.

"The weapons of our warfare ARE NOT CARNAL, but mighty through God to the pulling down of [spiritual] strongholds" (II Cor. 10:4). "For we WRESTLE NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, AGAINST SPIRITUAL WICKEDNESS in high places [heaven]" (Eph. 6:12).

Though the opposite may appear to Adam to be so, those who know Christ, and see things through the eyes of Christ, will not let the "things which do appear" to deceive them into thinking that the weapons of our warfare are physical and carnal.

Part 17 - What About Eternal Life and Eternal Torment?

Now if anything in these pages has had any effect on your understanding of the sovereignty of God in all things, then what lies ahead will be a struggle to understand how the Bible can say "as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive" and at the same time, teach that "the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever" (Rev. 14:11). "Lying spirits", which are nothing more than false doctrines which have set up their abode in us, are loath to leave their dwelling to which they are so accustomed. Lying spirits teach that God is a monster who through either eternal torment or eternal annihilation will destroy most of His creation. Ridding the temple of God of these spirits will take a mighty spiritual struggle. It has always been so for anyone coming out of the Babylon of the apostate people of God. An in-depth investigation of the word translated eternal, eternity, forever, forever and ever, everlasting, etc. will be the next step. What one will discover is that the Greek word behind these five English words, plus about thirteen other words and phrases, including phrases such as 'world without end', 'courses of time', 'end of the world', 'before the world began', are ALL translated from the same little Greek word. That word is *aion* [Strong's #165] in its noun form or *aionios* [Strong's #166] in its adjective form.

To this day, it seems incredible that the leaders of every Christian denomination on earth would agree the best translation for the question the disciples asked in Matt. 24:3 - "What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world" should really read "end of the age". Yet these same leaders would rather condemn most of mankind either to eternal torment or eternal death rather than to acknowledge how little the flesh, with its fabled 'freedom of choice' has to do either with salvation or the affairs of this world. They are blinded to the other places in scripture where this same little word is used. To have the blinders removed would be to destroy at least one of their huge idols of the heart.

There are many 'idols of the heart' which deceive the masses of humanity. Some have a stronger grip on us than others. The "immortality of the soul", "eternal torment" or "eternal death", "salvation by works", or "no works are needed whatsoever" and thousands of other 'lying spirits' are "idols of the heart". The most ingrained idol of all is that of man's 'free will'. To give up this idol amounts to nothing less than casting the

beast (Ecc. 3:18) out of the temple of God (I Cor. 3:16). The beast in each of us will not go without a mighty spiritual struggle.

Acknowledging that God really is the creator of the good AND the evil gives the flesh NOTHING to claim lordship over, not even evil. It leaves the flesh feeling desperate. The flesh will not accept this the most completely dramatized and blatantly stated of all doctrines: "That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there is none beside me. I am the Lord and there is none beside me" (Isa. 45:6)

So what does that mean? Simply: "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil: I THE LORD DO ALL THESE THINGS" (Isa. 45:7).

We can cling to this idol and argue that God only brings evil on those who choose evil, that Cain chose to be the 'seed' of the serpent instead of the 'seed' of the woman. Such statements deny that God knew in advance what Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, the serpent and each of us would be before He ever created man, or that He made provision for it all "before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9) and Titus 1:2). It denies James' teaching that God knows "what shall be on the morrow" (James 4:14). Whether good or evil, circumstances will be what "the Lord wills" (James 4:15), because they will ALL be "according to the purpose of Him who worketh ALL THINGS after the counsel of HIS OWN WILL" (Eph. 1:11).

Part 18 - The New Testament on the Subject of ALL IN ADAM

We have already covered Christ's teaching to his disciples that He would DRAG all men to himself (John 12:32). We have mentioned Paul's statement that "AS in Adam all die SO in Christ will all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22).

We have shown that no one can come to Christ except the Father draw [drag] him (John 6:44). We have demonstrated that it is only those to whom it is GIVEN to understand the mysteries of the kingdom who will do so, and the rest are blinded by God Himself (Matt. 13:11 & 17; Matt. 20:16; Matt. 22:14). These are New Testament scriptures which are ignored, denied and contradicted by the idols of our hearts.

Paul

"Who will have ALL MEN TO BE saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4).

"God is the Savior of ALL MEN, specially [because they are the FIRST FRUITS, not the only fruits] of those that believe" (I Tim. 4:10).

What does Paul teach will become of you if you have evil works? "Every man's work shall be made manifest" for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try EVERY MANS WORK OF WHAT SORT IT IS" (I Cor. 3:13).

Peter tells us not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial that "IS TO TRY YOU... For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of GOD..." (I Peter 4:12 & 17). These scriptures tell us the purpose of 'fire'. So let's go back to I Cor. 3 and let Paul finish his thought. "If any mans work abide which he hath

built thereon [on the foundation of Christ] he shall receive a reward" (I Cor. 3:14). Now this is commonly taught but the next verse isn't. What does Paul teach will happen to those who do not produce good works?: "If any man's work shall be burned he shall suffer loss: BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE" (I Cor. 3:15).

What Paul is saying is that anything that cannot endure the fire (gold, silver and precious stones) will be burned up (wood, hay, stubble I Cor. 3:12).

This theme is repeated in Heb. 6:8 "But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."

The Great White Throne Judgment and the Lake of Fire

So there is no way to avoid the fire that guards the 'tree of life', Christ. The only way to get to Him is through burning out of us everything that offends God.

There are two times when this will be done. There are two judgments: "For the time IS COME that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" (I Pet 4:17, 18).

What is the end of those "that obey not the gospel of God" and where do the "ungodly and the sinner appear?" When is the "fulness of the Gentiles" accomplished? (Rom. 11:25). (See the Law of Moses Versus the Law of the Spirit article on web page listed below, [PDF](#) version pages 20 and 92.)

They appear at the next judgment. They appear at the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev. 20:11. And what happens there? Do the scriptures really teach us that the wicked dead, those whose works were "wood, hay and stubble", "nigh unto cursing whose end is to be burned"; "death and hell were cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14); are these scriptures telling us that all these wicked dead will either be tormented in *literal* fire for all eternity or else be literally burned up and be dead for all eternity? **No**, of course it doesn't. It is only an 'idol of the heart' false doctrine that makes our loving Father out to be so heartless.

This is not a black throne judgment, it is the **white** throne judgment. And what do the scriptures teach us judgment is?: "When we are judged we are chastened of the Lord..." (I Cor. 11:32), not killed forever or tortured forever.

There, now we know the purpose of judgment. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 6:12) because "judgment must BEGIN [NOT END] at the house of God" (I Pet 4:17).

Now if judgment "BEGINS with the house of God" and "we are chastened of the Lord" why would we think the second judgment would do anything else? What do the scriptures teach will be the outcome of God's judgments?: "When thy judgments are in the EARTH [the great white throne judgment; the chastening that befits a white throne] THE INHABITANTS OF THE WORLD will learn righteousness" (ISA 26:9).

So at the end, in the end of the book of Revelation, the story is the same as at the end of the book of Genesis: "God meant it [evil] unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this [white throne judgment] day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20). The parallel to this scripture in the New Testament is "And God shall

wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

You may ask, How can you possibly say "much people are saved alive" when we were just told they were cast into the Lake of Fire which "is the second death".

The answer is that you cannot separate verse 14 from verse 15. The "whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire" of verse 15 is for the destruction of "death and hell" in verse 14. The second death is the death or destruction of 'death' itself. We know this is so because we now know that judgment is chastening (I Cor. 11:32), and verse 13 of Rev. 20 tell us "they were judged every man according to his works". "There is nor more death" is only five verses below this statement. So long as even one person is dead, death has not been destroyed.

Now Paul's statements in I Cor. 3:15 "if any man's [sinful] works shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY [the lake of] FIRE," makes perfect sense.

Now it makes sense for Paul to tell the Corinthians "... deliver such an one [the Corinthians' fornicator] unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh [death] THAT THE SPIRIT MIGHT BE SAVED IN THE [great white throne judgment] DAY OF THE LORD JESUS" (I Cor. 5:5).

Joseph's brothers were in total 'outer darkness', weeping and gnashing their teeth until Joseph revealed himself to them.

Part 19 - The 'Fire' of the Lake of Fire

"I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood [hay and stubble], and it [Gods word] shall devour them" (Jer. 5:14). It is a tormenting experience to have the spirit of God to burn out all of our sins and shortcomings, but it is not an eternal experience. It is the goal and purpose of the lake of fire. The lake of fire is a chastening and scourging experience.

There, that is the fire that devours the wood, the hay and the stubble which are all the evil deeds of all mankind of all time. It is the Word of God. And the Word of God is Christ (John 1:1), the "One Seed" of Gal. 3:16. Therefore the 'fire' that 'devours the wood' is also those who are in the One Seed, those who are in Christ. Do you doubt this? Read Isa. 33:14 & 15: "... Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

The answer is not what any of the churches teach; not the eternal death crowd, and not the eternal torment crowd.

Both camps refuse to give up the idols of their heart, 'their' stumbling blocks of iniquity (Ezk. 14:7).

The answer is not Satan and his angels nor the wicked dead. The answer is "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly..."(Isa. 33:15). The lake of fire IS those who are in Christ for we will be like him (I John 3:2) and He "is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), which will purge all wickedness including "the devil and his angels (Mat. 25:41).

Part 20 - 'Eternal' Is Not a Scriptural Word

Both the 'eternal death' and 'eternal torment' camps refuse to admit that the Hebrew word '*olawm*' and the Greek word '*aion*' simply mean a period of time, long or short, with a definite beginning and a definite end.

These words, the Hebrew word *olawm* and the Greek word *aion*, are the words that God sent an evil spirit to have translated with 18 different English words and phrases to hide their meaning.

"What will be the sign of the coming and the END of the *aion*" proves this word has nothing to do with eternity. It does have something to do with a period of time that 'ENDS with the 'coming' of Christ.'

The fact that our calling "was given us in Christ Jesus before times *aionios*" proves once again that this word has nothing to do with the English word 'eternity' because our calling was "*pro chronos aionios*", "before times eonian" (II Tim. 1:9 and Titus 1:2).

Were we called 'before' eternity? No. Will eternity end when Christ returns? No. Does *aion* have anything to do with eternity? A thousand times, No! The word eternity by its very definition does not have a beginning or an ending.

"The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for the *aions* of the *aions*" (Rev. 14:11), not for eternities of the eternities.

This white throne judgment and the lake of fire is simply a later, less desirable judgment, but it is still A CHASTENING (I Cor. 11:32) to burn up the wood, hay and stubble works of the wicked dead. Nevertheless, he himself shall be saved yet though as by fire" (I Cor. 3:15), THE LAKE OF FIRE. "... some having put away [a good conscience] concerning faith have made shipwreck. Of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander: whom I have delivered unto Satan, THAT THEY MAY LEARN NOT TO BLASPHEME" (I Tim 1:20).

How will Satan teach Hymeneus and Alexander not to blaspheme? The same way he taught David not to number the people.

If "the potter has mercy (Rm. 9:18) and gives Hymeneus and Alexander a spirit of repentance, they may return to God as David did. If 'the potter hardeneth' (Rom. 9:18) they will die in their sins as Esau and Pharaoh and King Saul and Ahab did. They will be resurrected at the great white throne judgment. 'Their works will be burned and they will suffer loss, BUT THEY THEMSELVES SHALL BE SAVED, YET THOUGH AS BY THE LAKE OF FIRE' (I Cor. 3:15).

Part 21 - The Consummation and The All In All

It is in the lake of fire that the eons are apparently brought to their consummation. This appears to be so because Paul tells us: "For AS in Adam ALL die So in Christ shall ALL be made alive. BUT EVERY MAN IN HIS OWN ORDER: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. THEN

COMETH THE END [Gk. 'telos' #5056- conclusion or termination], when he [Christ] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he [Christ] shall have put down ALL rule and authority and power. For he [Christ] must reign, till he [Christ] hath put all things under his [Christ's] feet. THE LAST ENEMY THAT SHALL BE DESTROYED IS DEATH" (I Cor. 15:22 - 26).

The end, the set goal, of the eons comes when Christ delivers up the kingdom to the Father. Christ does not deliver up the kingdom to the Father until ALL enemies are under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. This is accomplished when " death and hell [are] cast into the lake of fire, delivered to the righteous judges of this world and of heaven" (I Cor. 6:2 & 3). We know this is so because this is all the dead of all times. This is the final judgment, the white throne judgment, of the whole of mankind of all time, excluding only those who have been of the "house of God" and have already been chastened, judged, scourged and purified while in the flesh (I Pet. 4:17 & Heb. 12:6).

So who will judge this world? Remember according to I Cor. 11:32 judgment is defined as chastening. Who has the Father predestined to chasten, scourge and purify this world?: "DO YE NOT KNOW THE SAINTS SHALL JUDGE THE WORLD" (I Cor. 6:2).

Where are these saints? Where do the scriptures themselves, not the doctrines of the whole deceived Christian world, but the word of God itself tell us the saints dwell?: "Who among us shall dwell with the DEVOURING FIRE? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burning? HE THAT WALKETH RIGHTEOUSLY, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hand from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil" (Isa. 33:14 & 15). These are they who will judge the dead of this world. That is "the Lord and His Christ" (Acts 2:36 & 4:25-28).

Those of Isa. 33:14 & 15 are the 'One Seed' of Gal. 3:16 because they are in Christ and are therefore "His Christ" "the seed of Abraham" of Gal. 3:29.

These are not "Agar... answer[ing] to Jerusalem that now is and is in **bondage** with her children" (Gal. 4:25). No, these are "Jerusalem which is above [which] is **freed**, which is the mother of US ALL" (Gal. 4:25). These are those who "as Isaac was, are the CHILDREN OF PROMISE" (Vs. 28).

Jerusalem that now is, is in bondage with her children and will be brought to God when Sodom is brought to God (Eze. 16:55). The time setting of Eze. 37, the valley of dry bones when "the whole house of Israel" is redeemed, is given in Eze. 16:55. If one ignores Eze. 16:55, places Eze. 37 at the beginning of the millennium, and it is like Esau giving away ones birthright to the outward Jew. You would be denying the truth revealed to us by Paul who tells us that those in the flesh who say they are Jews are NOT (Rom. 2: 28 & 29). The whole Christian world has bought into this corrupted lie. John says all who believe this lie, are following the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9). The "He that walketh righteously" of Isa. 33:15 are those who are "now being freed from sin" (Rom. 6:18 & 22 CV). They are the "house of God" who are now being judged (I Pet. 4:17). They are the "chaste virgin", "espoused to one husband... to Christ" (II Cor. 11:2) and as such they are "the bride, the lambs wife" of Rev. 21:9. They are "that great city the holy Jerusalem", of verse 10.

These, because they are in Christ, are the manchild "brought forth by the woman of Rev. 12:5 who, since the days of Abel, has been the target of the "great red Dragon".

What it all boils down to is: "As thou (God the Father) hast sent me (Christ) into the world, even SO have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). And "...as he is so are we in this world" (I John 4:17).

Those in the "One Seed" are "as He is...in this world." Was He hated? We will be hated. Was he persecuted and put on the cross? We too, must present our bodies a living sacrifice (Rm. 12:1), we must die to the flesh and bring forth much, much fruit (John 12:24 and I Cor. 15:36 & 37).

These are the overcomers of Rev. 2 & 3. These are those "good and bad" who will come from the "highways and hedges" and will by the spirit of God be "compelled" to come to the wedding.

Those "devoured" by the "great red dragon" such as Adam, Esau, Pharaoh, Abimelech, King Saul, Ahab, etc. are far more numerous than those who are chastened and shown Gods mercy. The reason given for this does not deny that people make choices of every kind every day. Rather it is through these very choices, caused by the powers of Principalities in the heavens, that "all things are" work[ed] after the counsel of HIS OWN WILL (Eph. 1:11 and every example given in this paper)

The Greek word for will here is '*thelemo*' Strong's #2307 and is defined as "desire, pleasure, will".

But in the event that some are stubborn to this 'will', let us turn to Isa. 46:10 & 11: "...My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure." It is ALL of God (II Cor. 5:18 "ALL OUR WORKS IN US "[ARE] "wrought" by the Lord (Isa. 26:12).

The only reason most people refuse to come to the wedding supper is because "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 20:16 & 22:14).

This scripture tells us that those who excused themselves to perform what amounts to good works of their own righteousness, far exceeded the number of those who were finally seated as guests at the "marriage" of the 'king's son' (Matt. 22:2).

This also explains why we have a lake of fire instead of an ocean or sea of fire. Those that 'do righteously' of Isa 33:15 are the same as the 'few' of Mt. 20:16 & 22:14). These are not the only fruits of those in Adam, but are a "kind of first fruits of His creatures" (James 1:18).

These first fruits have been dragged to God by his spirit because Israel "according to the flesh" has excused herself from attending the wedding of the king's son.

Very few people notice that Paul says "he is not a Jew which is one outwardly." The true Jew is the only Jew. "... He is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter" (Rom. 2:28).

Paul tells us that God is the potter, and He makes vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. Both come from the hand of the same unerring Potter.

If the Potter makes a vessel to dishonor "marred", it is because He intended it to be dishonorable. In Jeremiah 18 we are told that the first Israel, the Israel "according to the flesh", "was marred in the hand of the potter: so He made it again ANOTHER VESSEL as it seemed good to the potter to make it. (Jer. 18:4). It is "another vessel", another Israel, one which "walks according to this rule..." "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but [what does avail much is] a new [converted "free from sin"] creature." This is the "Israel of God" (Gal. 4:15 & 16).

The fact that Jeremiah goes on to tell Israel to repent and turn back to God, in no way denies that God knew exactly what they would do. If God does not know what we will do, then how can He "declare the end from the beginning?" The fact that David says "...thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness neither shall evil dwell with thee" (Psa. 5:4) in no way denies that God creates evil and sends evil spirits to accomplish HIS PURPOSE.

God knew Israel would not repent. He knew they would reject and slay their savior. He knew that the Gentiles would "obtain mercy through their unbelief" (Rom. 11:30). Most Christians see and acknowledge verse 28 ("as touching election they are beloved for the Father's sake"), but God has given them eyes that

cannot see verse 31: "Even so have these [Israel] also now not believed [for what reason?] THAT THROUGH OUR MERCY THEY ALSO MAY OBTAIN MERCY."

We, the inward Jews, are the channel through which the outward Jews will be brought to God. Eze. 16:55 tells us this will happen when Sodom is resurrected. I Cor. 15:22; I Tim. 2:4 & 4:10 & II Pet. 3:9 and a host of other scriptures show that all in Adam are included in verse 32 of Rom. 11: "For God hath concluded them ALL in unbelief [For what reason? Why sin and evil?] that He [through us, vs. 31] might HAVE MERCY UPON ALL."

Here is Paul's conclusion on the subject of free will: "For the creature was made subject to vanity, NOT WILLINGLY [not by our 'free will'], but by reason of HIM who hath subjected the same in hope" (Rom. 8:20).

If we are saved by 'grace through faith and that not of yourselves' then it appears that there is no room whatsoever for the flesh [self] to glory. It is all of God. This is the lesson of God planting the tree of the knowledge of good AND EVIL. Both good and evil have the same root. ALL IS OF GOD. This is the lesson of the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's brothers thought they were 'of their own free will' selling Joseph into Egypt. But was that the way it really was? Was this really their idea or were powers and principalities in the heavens really the originators of this whole segment of man's history? "So now it was NOT YOU that sent me hither [to Egypt], BUT GOD" (Gen. 45:8). "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but GOD meant it [the evil] unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

THAT is the purpose for evil. God means it unto good to save much people alive.

The lake of fire is a lake of mercy, the climactic work of grace, just as surely as it is through the mercy of God (Rom. 9:18) that He chastens and scourges us (Heb. 12:6). Paul concludes Rm. 11 "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him and it shall be recompensed unto him again? FOR OF HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND TO HIM ARE ALL THINGS: to whom be glory forever. Amen."