

Theological Conference 2009
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1. Finding Truth Without Knowing Hebrew or Greek

I came to understand the exceeding great and precious promises in God's Word without knowing Hebrew or Greek. I began simply with a King James Version of the Bible. Let me begin by telling you that I was a young man, eleven years old, with a million questions which I didn't mind asking. When I read "**remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth,**" I thought that meant *me*. I can recall enthusiastic study and prayer as a young Christian. I would run out of fingers holding my place as I studied into the wee hours of the morning. My Sunday school class at Calvary Advent Christian Church in Whitnel, North Carolina presented me with a Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible, much like a Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. I had been accustomed to using the concordance in the back of my Bible but this Young's was awesome. As I think about it now, it was like having a concordance on steroids. I was fifteen when I received it. This is a story of my search for *truth* through study and prayers in the night, looking up into the stars as I talked with God. I am only sharing with you what happened in my life.

2. Questions???

Following my conversion at age eleven, I wanted to know truth and I had a number of questions. Will I go to heaven when I die? What if I go to hell—will I burn forever and ever? Where will heaven be? What is death? Is death a friend? What is a soul? Can a soul die? Do people who die know anything after death? Was Jesus born or was he God the Son Incarnated? Did Jesus live before he was born? Is Jesus God? Does the Bible teach the trinity? Did Jesus die or only appear to be dead? Is the Holy Spirit a person? What is the Holy Spirit? Does it matter what I believe so long as I am sincere? Is Jesus coming back to the earth and if so why? Why does there need to be a resurrection of the dead? These were the questions I pondered as a very young man.

3. A Biblical Definition for Death

I was too young to have lost very many family members or friends to death but I somehow wanted to understand the concept. Radio speakers, literature and friends counseled me that death, simply put, was to be separated from God. That didn't make sense. If I was a Christian and died I wouldn't be separated from God. I would be with him. If I was not a Christian I would be in hell fire but even there how can anyone, anywhere, be separated from God? There had to be a better, more Biblical answer. There had to be a simple, Biblical definition for death. The best I could find was "**In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.**" 2 Kings 20:1. How simple and yet how profound. Simply put, to die is not to live. In other words, when you're dead you're not alive and when you're alive you're not dead. I don't know about you but that hit me like a rock. Everywhere, people are trying to come up with a simple definition for death and there in 2 Kings and Isaiah 38:1 it is.

4. All Go Unto One Place?

As a young Christian I simply wanted to know where people *went* when they died. There is no better answer to that query than is found in Ecclesiastes 3:19-20. "**For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth**

the other; yea, they have all one [life] breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again”. I didn’t have to know Hebrew to understand that. It was simple to me to wade through thee and the thou as well as befalleth, dieth and shalt. It really wasn’t that hard. I found that statement to be verified by what God told Adam: **“Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.”** Genesis 3:19. That answered one question and filled in other blanks. *If at death I go to the same place as the beast of the field: if I like the beast am made from the dust and return to the dust: it stands to reason that I do not go to heaven when I die.* Another point I gleaned was, *If I don’t go to heaven when I die—then I won’t go to hell fire either.* Simply put, **“He has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world”.** Acts 17:31 Every day is not a day of judgment, since people die every day. I was also reminded of more of Solomon’s wisdom about death in Ecclesiastes 9:5 **“The dead know not anything”.** His writings also described the grave in simple terms that I found easy to comprehend. **“There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”** Eccl. 9:10. Solomon must have been talking about the *real man*. Who else would he have been talking about? I had heard about souls dancing about on the head of a pin as well as about immaterial souls. But I could not wrap my mind around those concepts. They didn’t make sense.

5. Did Jesus Leave David Out?

Another thing I was told as a young Christian was that when Jesus ascended to heaven, he took with him all the Old Testament saints, from Adam to John the Baptist. Could that be true in the light of Peter’s statement on Pentecost: **“For David has not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool.”** Acts 2:34-35. I reasoned, *If that be true and Jesus did take the Old Testament saints with him when he ascended to heaven, he must have left David out: David a man after God’s own heart.* Acts 13:22. That didn’t make sense at all. Oh well, I was becoming less and less orthodox in my thinking.

Another thing I discovered about Old Testament saints has to do with receiving the fulfillment of God’s promises. After mentioning a number of people of faith the writer of Hebrews said, **“These all died in faith, not having received the promises.”** Heb. 11:13. If all those notable saints of old died without receiving the promises of God, they could not possibly now be in heaven. I found that Stephen said of Abraham and the promise God made to him, he received *“Not even enough to set his foot on”.* Acts 7:5. All these simple statements helped me find what I believed to be *truth*. I believed the words of James, who wrote, **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”** James 1:5.

6. How Many Days Did They Live?

One more simple statement I ran across in my search for answers to my questions was, **“All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.”** **“All the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died.”** **“All the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years: and he died.”** **“All the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years: and he died”.** **“All the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years: and he died.”** **“All the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.”** Genesis 5. The question that came to my mind was, *“When the scriptures say all the days does it mean all or not?”* If all the days that Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Jared, and Methuselah lived are

recorded here, did they live on after that? If they did, that was not all the days that they lived, was it? If they lived after they died then that was not all the days that they lived. After all I remember the definition of death which I had already found, **For thou shalt die, and not live.**" 2 Kings 20:1. To die is not to live.

7. Moses is Dead

Jesus said to Satan, **"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."** Matthew 4:4. Among the questions I had and the answers I found was something that came straight out of the mouth of God, so to speak. At times someone who had lost a loved one in death would be asked, *"Where is your mom; or where is your dad; or sister or brother?"* More often than not I would hear a reply, *"She or he is in heaven"*. Regarding his servant Moses, God said, **"The LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead."** Joshua 1:1-2. If anyone knew where Moses was, God would. He did not say that Moses was in heaven or that he was somewhere else. God simply said, "He's dead". Oh, that's too simple. Do you really think so? Shouldn't it be that simple? Should it be so complicated as to require a degree in theology to understand? I was young at the time but to borrow a phrase, *I refused to check my brains at the door of the church*. If God says a man is dead, there is only one thing for me to do and that is to believe it. **"Let God be true, but every man a liar"**. Romans 3:4. If I say, *Oh no God: He is really not dead. He is alive in heaven in your presence*, I sound a bit like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, **"And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die"**. Genesis 3:4. God had said to Adam that if he ate of the forbidden fruit he would die. The serpent tried to correct God's words by deceiving our first parents into believing they would not surely die.

8. What Is A Soul?

Many of those I communicated with thought they knew what my problem was. They felt that I did not have a proper understanding of the soul. Their idea of a soul was a person's *immaterial entity* which slipped out of the body at the moment of death. I was told more than once that the soul could not die, it was immortal by nature. The body turns back to dust. The soul, the immaterial and immortal part of man was the *real man*, I was told. My friends reasoned that I would never get death, heaven, or hell straight until I got the soul sorted out. Something bothered me though. If blind people have a soul within them that sees, knows, and thinks; why could their soul not see for them. Was their soul blind too?

As I looked in the Bible I found that **"He (Jesus) poured out his soul unto death."** Isaiah 53:12. I also found that the **"soul that sins shall die"**. Ezekiel 18:4,20. So it didn't require rocket science to realize that a soul can die. I discovered that a soul has lips; can be guilty; can confess that he has sinned; can bring a trespass offering to the Lord; and can commit a trespass and sin through ignorance. Leviticus 5. I was so excited when I read Joshua 11:11. It cleared up so much. **"They smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe"**. My question was, *"Did God create a body and put a soul into it" or did He "Create man in his own image, breath into his nostrils the breath of life and this creature formed from the dust become a living soul"*? Genesis 2:7.

9. Immortal by Nature?

Another thing that bothered me was the idea that we are inherently immortal. We can't die. We're going to live forever somewhere, either in heaven or hell. I had the understanding that

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16. If the soul, the *real man*, is immortal and cannot die: why did Jesus have to give his life? Did God give his Son needlessly? According to Jesus, without this sacrifice we would perish. It was the only way for us to have eternal life. That explains why **“The gift of God is eternal life”**. Romans 6:23. In other words, unless God gives us eternal life, we’re going to die or perish.

10. Never Dying

There was another simple truth that was staring me in the face. Why did God drive Adam from the Garden of Eden? **“Lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden”**. Genesis 3:22-23. Lest Adam put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever. Had God not barred Adam from the tree of life, he would have eaten of it and lived forever. I remembered that **“All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.”** It became so clear to me that from the beginning it has not been God’s plan for people to live forever in sin. The only way for mankind to live forever is through believing in the one who God gave for our redemption, Jesus Christ. How can anyone live forever unless God gives him eternal life? Eternal life is the gift of God. It was very confusing to think that sinners would suffer forever in hell fire. How can a sinner suffer forever unless and until he is given eternal life so he can live forever to suffer? In my world people suffer and die. They may suffer for years, but eventually they die. To extend that suffering to forever without giving the power to live forever, just did not make sense. It was not logical. It’s just not that simple some said; but in my mind at least, it should be. Two things rang true in my mind. On the one hand the gift of God is eternal life; while on the other hand, **the wages of sin is death**. Romans 6:23. The wages of sin is not eternal life in hell, it is death. If one never dies, he has never received his wages.

11. Free Samples

I recall hearing a radio speaker say as he talked about his church, *“We preach hell and it is hot.”* As I pondered that statement I found it difficult to understand just what it meant. From his further comments I understood him to be talking about a never ending hell where people are tortured for ever. People in my area of the country liked to use the words *burn for ever and ever*. They feel it important to scare those outside the church with this idea as well as keep those inside the church in line through this type of scare tactic. In my simple way of looking at things, I found at least four examples of the future destiny of those outside of Christ, none of which supported the idea of being tortured for ever. The first example was Sodom and Gomorrah. **“Turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.”** 2 Peter 2:6. The result of that judgment was ashes, which is what is left after something is burned up. Another example I found was a day to come which will burn like an oven and will burn up the stubble, (the proud and all who do wickedly) and leave neither root nor branch of it. Again the end result will be ashes. Malachi 4. David, I found, used the example of lamb’s fat. **“The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away”**. Psalms 37:20. Again the result of this consummation will be smoke. John the Baptist warned that the one coming after him would, **“Burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”**. Matthew 3:12. Most of my friends saw the unquenchable fire but failed to see the burned up chaff.

12. No More Pain

The most compelling of all the information I gleaned as I searched for truth about how God ultimately deals with sin and the sinner, I found in Revelation 21:4. **“There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”** For as long as there is death, sorrow, crying or pain, this passage will lack fulfillment. As long as there are people being tortured in hell there will be death, sorrow, crying and pain. It was impossible to reconcile, at least in my mind, this promise of doing away completely with death, sorrow, crying and pain, and a burning, torturing hell which torments for ever and ever. Again I came back to Paul’s warning, **“The wages of sin is death,”** Romans 6:23, and as I had already learned, to die is not to live.

13. Heaven

I once heard a story, actually it was a joke, about a preacher who went into a bar to find and make a convert. He came up to a fellow at the bar and attempted to strike up a conversation with him. **“Do you want to go to heaven,”** he asked? *No! The man replied, rather impatiently.* **“Are you sure you don’t want to go to heaven,”** again he badgered? Beginning to get a bit irritated the gentleman said, **“NO!”** Not to be dissuaded the preacher asked one more time. **“Are you sure you don’t want to go to heaven when you die?”** With a smile on his face the bar patron replied, *“Oh yes, I thought you were getting up a load to go now.”* Most of our friends we meet from day to day would probably empathize with the bar patron. As someone once said, *“Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.”* Heaven was the predominant final resting place of the saints to most of my friends. The idea of going to heaven at death is so prevalent that it is caught as much as it is taught. When I was a kid that was all I knew. I didn’t know anything else. All the cartoons made that plain. That was all I had heard until I started attending the church where I was baptized and began reading the Bible.

14. Blessed are the Meek

That understanding of heaven however, didn’t seem too difficult for me to move past as I searched for truth. Jesus made it easy for me. **“Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth,”** he said. Matt. 5:5. To my surprise, I found that Jesus was simply quoting from Psalms 37:11. There David also said that the righteous would **“inherit the land and dwell therein forever.”** Verse 29. The disciples, noting how John the Baptist had taught his followers to pray, also noticed how much importance Jesus placed on prayer as they traveled together. Being so impressed they asked Jesus to also teach them to pray. It was a short model prayer he taught but, among other things, Jesus taught them to pray for the kingdom to come. Matt. 6:10. In my desire to know more about that Kingdom, I discovered that his was not a kingdom you go to but was a kingdom to come. It was the same kingdom, under the whole heaven which would be given to the saints in Daniel 7:27. Yes, a kingdom under heaven not in it. I would go on to discover that the city with streets of pure gold, so many talked and sung about going to when they die, will actually come down from God out of heaven. Revelation 21:2. I had no reason to believe it would not come down to the earth. After all, it is New Jerusalem.

15. To Abraham and to His Seed

From the scripture I was introduced to a land promise which God made to Abraham, **“All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.”** Genesis 13:15. Stephen

said Abraham did not receive enough of that land promise to set his foot on, Acts 7:5, “**yet he (God) promised that he would give it to him (Abraham) for a possession.**” Abraham has not yet received the fulfillment of the land promise and will not until he is raised from the dead and together with his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob will sit down with those who come from the east and the west in the kingdom which Jesus taught us to pray “**to come**”. Matthew 8:11. This land promise, the gospel of the coming kingdom, and the meek’s inheritance of the earth all helped me see just what God’s plans for his people are. I discovered that His plan did not include a home beyond the blue when I die. Isaiah wrote about a new earth where they would build houses. Isaiah 65:17,22. Peter wrote about a new earth wherein righteousness will dwell. 2 Peter 3:13. John wrote about a new earth and a Holy City, New Jerusalem which would come down from God out of heaven. Revelation 21:1. God was gracious to share all this wonderful information with me as a very young Christian. I knew them as the “**promises made unto the fathers**”. Romans 15:8. They became mine as I became a Christian. Galatians 3:29.

16. I Wanted to Know the Only True God

Holy, Holy, Holy... God in three persons... blessed trinity? I distinctly recall singing that in a Baptist church where I attended Bible School one summer. Actually it was while attending Bible School that week that I learned the books of the Bible in order. I remember seeing a large banner on the wall with what I think was the Apostle’s Creed in ever so large letters. The church where I later attended and was baptized did not sing that song. I recall there was a lot of talk about *one God*. Sermons and Bible classes included information regarding *Jesus being God’s son and not God*. Church leaders did not talk about the *incarnation*, at least in a positive way, nor did they teach that he pre-existed his birth. I could see that I would have to study about that.

17. I Couldn’t Find Trinity Anywhere in the Bible

Paul’s admonition to Timothy seemed to impress me as I recall. “**There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.**” I Timothy 2:5. It seemed to me to be simple and very strait forward, but I pressed on in my studies. Jesus’ conversation with the scribe in Mark 12:28-34 seemed to be something I had been looking for. “**Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord... And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he... Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.**” There, I thought, would have been a perfect place for Jesus to have revealed that he was in fact God, but he didn’t. “**For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father.**” I Corinthians 8:5-6. It seemed to me Paul was saying, *there is a lot of talk out there about there being more than one god; there isn’t but one to us*. God’s personal proclamations in Isaiah screamed out to me. “**I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.**” Isaiah 45:5,14,18,22 and 46:9. I sorted through explanations such as, Oh, its one God but three persons all of which are one God. That seemed like double talk to me. Herbert W. Armstrong was talking on the radio about a *uni-plural* concept of God, a *God-family*. That seemed to me to be another way of missing the point of the Biblical *one*.

18. Were Any Pictures Taken?

God, I discovered, had provided pictures in the Bible for its students. Since there were no

cameras in those days, they were word pictures. Mark 16:19, painted a picture, **“He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.”** In my mind I could see God seated on a throne and someone sitting to his right. Only one of these two is identified as God. I remembered again God’s own declaration in Isaiah 45:5, **“I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.”** Stephen left a vivid picture in Acts 7:55-56. He **“looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”** He saw someone identified as God and someone else identified as the son of man standing at his right hand. Peter referred to **“Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God.”** I Peter 3:22. These references were quite convincing to someone who was trying to be a true Berean. They were identified in Acts 17:11 as those who **“received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”** That was who I wanted to be. I was quick to receive the word, but was just as quick to study so as to determine whether those things were actually so.

I had only to add one other simple statement made twice by John. **“No man hath seen God at any time.”** John 1:18 and I John 4:12. Thousands saw Jesus at his teaching sessions. Many, many more saw him during his life and ministry and 500 plus saw him at one time following his resurrection. I Corin. 15:6. In light of all that data, I found it very difficult to accept trinity teaching. When I factored in the absence of the word or even the concept of the trinity in the Bible, I was solidly convinced. The simple and plain teaching I found in my studies was that God the Father is God and Jesus the Messiah is his son. One last picture developed by the Lord Jesus as he prayed to God and is recorded by John 17:3, **“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”** The picture is of someone praying who identifies himself as Jesus Christ and identifies the one to whom he is praying as *the only true God*. The only true God did not include the person who was praying. I discovered one other disturbing fact. My friends would allow me to believe as I wished about a lot of things but not about the trinity. When I crossed the line of failing to accept the trinity, I was no longer invited to be their friend. I found that bitter to accept, but accept it I did.

19. How Can You live Before You Are Born?

In those days and probably still today there were a number of people who would not accept the trinity but would accept that Jesus pre-existed his birth. From the very start I found that thought actually repugnant. How do you live before you are born? It actually seemed to be very foolish to me at the time and still does. First of all Jesus is referred to as God’s son. A son, I reasoned, cannot be as old as his father. If Jesus was as old as his father he was not his son. Call him what you will but he could not be a son. Secondly, Jesus was *born*, according to the words of Matthew 1:18. **“The birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise.”** He was *begotten*. John 3:16. He was *made*. Galatians 4:4. He is a part of God’s *creation*. Colossians 1:15. He is the created Son of God. Luke 1:35. He is a *man*. **“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”** I Timothy 2:5. He could not have helped in creation because first of all he had not been born yet and secondly God said that He did that by Himself. **“I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself.”** Isaiah 44:24.

Finally, there was one point which kept nagging me, found in Luke 3:23, **“Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age.”** Now just how old was Jesus himself? Oh, but that’s too simple! Yes it is. But Paul warned, **“I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve**

through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” 2 Corin 11:3. The baby in the manger was none other that the Son of God, the son of Mary. **“Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.”** Luke 1:31-32. Not the highest, not as high as the highest, but the Son of the Highest which is exactly why Jesus himself said, **“My Father is greater than I.”**

20. One Final Thought

Having said all this, let me make it perfectly clear that I am so thankful to God for those of you who do know and do have a working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. Like many others I have for years ridden your coattails. I commend you for having the time, the financial means, and the incentive to dig down into the original ideas in the Bible by discovering more about the language and helping all of us to be better Bereans: to not only be truth seekers but to be truth finders. I commend you for your work. I commend you one and all for your desire to know the truth and to be set free from the shackles of false doctrine and misinformation and just plain ignorance. Like Paul, I thank my God on every remembrance of you. I leave you with this thought: **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”** James 1:5. God wants us to know about life and death: About heaven as well as hell: about both soul and body: about God and about his son. James seems to me to be saying that God will not scold us for not knowing, but he will for not wanting to know and asking for wisdom. He wants all men to come to the knowledge of the truth. **“God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”** I Timothy 2:4. It’s like Paul said to the Thessalonians, **“I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep.”** I Thess. 4:13. There is no good reason for people to be misinformed about dead people. There is plenty of information in the Bible to inform us about death and about life. I learned a long time ago how important it is to study the Bible and to pray. Now you know the beginning of *my story*.

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