

# GOSPEL GUIDE

UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU READEST?  
HOW CAN I, EXCEPT SOME MAN SHOULD GUIDE ME? (ACTS 8:30,31)

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## Why Believe in the God of the Bible?

**IN REGARD TO THIS QUESTION** one may occupy one of three positions. He may be a believer in the one God. He may be an atheist, a disbeliever in any god. He may be a heathen, a believer in many gods.

### **An Examination of Heathenism**

The very fact that it has to do with many gods makes it both confusing and divisive. It is obstructive even to material progress, for it is evident that the most backward nations in the world are heathen in their religion. It is further obstructive to moral and spiritual progress, for too often the heathen religions are designed more for the satisfying of the fleshly appetites than for moral and spiritual growth.

Heathenism is unintelligent. Isaiah shows how stupid it is by telling about how a man uses a tree. "He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: and the residue thereof he ma-

keth a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god" (Isaiah 44:16,17). His god is the product of his own hand, the residue of a tree which he has also used for building, for warming, and for cooking. The object of his worship, and to which he looks for deliverance, is inferior to himself for he is its maker.

Heathenism offers no superior philosophy of life. It gives no satisfactory explanation of the existence of the universe, nor the origin, purpose, and destiny of man.

### **An Examination of Atheism**

Atheism claims that there is no God, but cannot prove its claim. To prove that there is no God the athe-

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## WHY BELIEVE?

ist would have to be omniscient; that is, he would have to know all things in heaven and on earth; for if he failed to know one thing, the one thing that he failed to know might be the existence of God. He would have to be omni-present, for if he were not in every place, the place where he might not be might be the place where God is.

Atheism assumes the eternal existence of matter. Its beginning point of the universe is Unintelligence, instead of Intelligence. It assumes that life came from dead matter without outside stimuli. This is absolutely contrary to fact today. Men can take the substance of a grain of corn, put it together, and make it look like a grain of corn, but there is no life in it. Atheism argues that the universe exists by chance. Could a 2009 automobile exist by chance? Why did it not develop itself during the first millenniums of time? Why wait until engineers began its development a relatively few years ago? It would be more logical to believe that a

fine watch, radio, or television set, came into existence by chance than to believe that the vast universe, with all of its complexities, is here in its mathematical precision by chance.

Atheism offers no constructive philosophy of life, no moral code, no spiritual guidance, no hope, no balm for the broken heart, no handkerchief for the tear-dimmed eye. Just before the debate that Campbell had with Owen, Mr. Owen visited Campbell, at Bethany, to arrange the discussion. One evening when the two were strolling together over the farm, they came to the family cemetery, and Mr. Owen paused and said, "There is one advantage I have over the Christian. I am not afraid to die; and if some few items of my business were settled, I would be perfectly willing to die at any moment." Mr. Campbell replied: "You say you have no fear in death; have you any hope in death?" After a solemn pause Mr. Owen answered, "No." "Then," continued Mr. Campbell, pointing to an ox standing in the shade, whisking off the flies, "you are on the level with that brute. He has fed till he is satisfied, and there he stands in the shade, and has neither fear nor hope in death." Mr. Owen made no effort to meet the argument.

### **Belief in the One True God**

There are many reasons for believing in the one true God. It is far more reasonable to believe in the existence of an eternal, intelligent, all powerful God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth than to believe that they started from un-intelligent, lifeless matter, and by

chance became the vast, complex universe that even today is beyond the knowledge of man. The universe must be the work of supreme intelligence, for there is no other reasonable way to account for its existence. The Encyclopedia Americana in substance gives the following staggering information about the sun, the center of our solar system, and yet we are told there must be countless other systems. It is known that the earth at its distance from the sun can intercept but 112,000, 000,000 of the amount of energy the sun is continually radiating in all directions into space. This means that the sun must actually be radiating energy at the rate of 70,000 horsepower for each square yard of the solar surface. Temperatures of the sun's interior have been postulated at 20 to 40 million degrees absolute. It has been found that the energy released is sufficient to maintain the sun's temperature at its present value for some 35 billion years even though the sun loses weight in the process at the rate of over 4,000,000 tons a second. The sun is more than a million times the volume of the earth, but on the other hand there are stars a million times the volume of the sun. Indeed, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." (Psalm 10:1).

As the physical universe must be the work of supreme intelligence, so must be the Bible, the word of God. Its composition shows it to be the work of God. It was written by between thirty-six and forty different writers, over a period of approximately 1600 years, mainly in

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two different languages, and from three continents. Many of these writers never saw the others, and yet when all sixty-six books of the Bible are brought together, there is one central theme running from beginning to end—the fall of man and God’s eternal purpose and plan to save him from sin and its terrible consequences. Though many of the writers were widely separated by time and space, there are no contradictions. All of the books make their contribution and fit together in absolute harmony. No man-made book has ever been—or could ever be—brought together under such

circumstances, and result in such harmony and unity.

The fulfilled promises and prophecies of the Bible prove it to be the work of the true, all-wise, and all-powerful God. Events of history were accurately written long before the events actually occurred. Both biblical and secular history show that prophecy after prophecy was fulfilled just as God’s word said that it would be.

The noblest men of the earth have believed in the God of the Bible and have earnestly endeavored to live by its great principles. The very thought of God gives us an inspiration that can be derived from no other source. Giving us the

greatest goal for which to strive, Jesus said, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Faith in God gave true purpose to the life of Abraham, “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11: 10).

Man may occupy one of three positions. He may believe in God. He may be a heathen. He may be an atheist. You will be much better off in this world, and in the world to come, if you believe in the God of the Bible, and show it by complete obedience to the gospel of his Son (Romans 1:16). — BN

## A Most Unusual Trip

**IN THE FIRST FIVE VERSES** of the twelfth chapter of Second Corinthians I read of a most unusual trip. The apostle Paul claimed to have been taken to paradise *and then returned*. It is not so unusual that one was taken to paradise, but it is most unusual to hear of one that went and then returned. Several things are worthy of observation as related to this trip.

### Who Took the Trip?

In our introductory remarks we said that Paul took this trip. But is that so? Undoubtedly, it is. In verse 5 he said: “Of such a one will I glory: Yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.” In the next two verses he reasons in such a fashion which has little or no meaning if this one taking the trip was not Paul himself.

### When Did He Take this Trip?

When did he take this trip? He said that it was above fourteen years ago. Barnes, Shepherd, and others say that this epistle was written about 57 A. D. If so, this journey was made about 43 A.D. or before. This would place this event near to the time Paul and Barnabas went forth on the first missionary tour. If this properly places the time, then

it is highly probable that this event took place at a time when he needed such assurance most.

### How Did He Take this Journey?

Paul did not know just how he took this journey. He could not even tell whether he went with his body or without his body. (Verses 2,3.) Nevertheless, it was a reality—a fact, either way. Furthermore, it was a miracle whether he was in the body or not in the body.

But how was he taken? The Bible says he was “caught up.” That is all we know about it. However, this is not strange language to Bible readers. You will, no doubt, recall how Philip left the eunuch. “And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away

## **“HE SEEMED TO BE JOKING”**

Seeing the rich pasture land of the Jordan valley, Lot pitched his toward Sodom (Genesis 13:12). Later he and his family were in the wicked city. The Lord let Lot know that because of its depravity the city would be destroyed, and to hasten to get his family out. “So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, “Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city! But to his sons-in-law *he seemed to be joking*” ((Genesis 19:14). The LORD was not joking. The city was completely destroyed, including all of Lot’s family who considered the warning a joke.

Great numbers of people of our time are like those of Lot’s time of millenniums ago. They look upon God’s warnings as a joke. In their destruction, however, the inhabitants of Sodom learned too late that God’s word is not a joke. He means what He says. When the Judge of all mankind says, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41), it will not be a joke.

## **UNUSUAL TRIP**

Philip that the eunuch saw him no more... “(Acts 8:39). The “how” of his being caught up was God’s doings and was no more of a task for him than it was for any other miracle.

### **Where Did He Go?**

Where did he go? Where was Paul taken when he was caught up? He said that he was caught up to the third heaven. One sect of Jewish scholars, the Rabbins, taught there were seven heavens. However, generally, the Jews used the term “heaven” to refer to three things. According to them, the first heaven was the clouds. The second was the firmament. The third was the abode of the divine. In commenting on this, Lenski says: “The first heaven is that of the clouds, the second that of the far firmament of the sky and the stars, the third is the actual abode of God, of the angels, and of the departed saints in glory.”

In addition to the term, third heaven, our text tells us that this one went to “paradise.” Thus the two terms are used interchangeably here. The term “paradise” is found here and in Luke 23:43 and in Revelation 2:7. The word has actually gone through several meanings. However, in Revelation 2:7 we read: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Thus the “third heaven” or “paradise” must refer to the dwelling place of God. This is where Paul went.

### **Why this Trip?**

Why was Paul taken on this trip? We cannot tell for sure. Evidently,

there was good reason and it was not meant for us to know. It was for Paul’s benefit in some way. Paul had kept silent about it for above fourteen years. Surely he would have told about it before this if it had to do with Christians. The reason he told about it when he did was not to make known things concerning the trip but to show to those false teachers at Corinth, together with those there who might be influenced by them, that he not only suffered as an apostle but he was not a whit behind the other apostles in visions and revelations (2 Corinthians 12:1).

Paul not only did not tell why he took the trip but also made it known that he was forbidden to tell what he heard (2 Corinthians 12:4). This was a most unusual trip.

### **What Did He Hear?**

What did Paul hear? He said that he heard unspeakable words. That which he heard he was not to repeat. Is this not strange? The founder of the Seventh Day Adventist Church claimed she went to heaven and returned with a message. Paul could not tell what he heard. Mrs. White was free to tell about her trip. On page 26 of the book, “The Early Writings of Mrs. White,” we find this: “In the holiest I saw an ark. . . in the ark was the golden pot of manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of stone which folded together like a book. Jesus opened them and I saw the ten commandments written on them with the finger of God... the holy sabbath looked glorious—a halo of glory was all around it. I saw that the sabbath was not nailed to

## UNUSUAL TRIP

the cross.” Apparently Mrs. White was given pre-eminence above the apostle. He could not speak about his trip. She could.

### Lessons for Us

From this scene there are several lessons which are worthy of our consideration. Let us look at some of them.

1. *There is such a place called heaven.* No matter what we can or cannot see from this account, we can see that there is such a place called heaven. It actually exists. Paul went there and came back and gives us assurance that there is such a place. Paul went there. We can go there, also. We are told in the

Word how we can go. This makes an investigation of “What must I do to be saved?” most important.

2. *There is a conscious existence when we leave the body.* Paul did not know whether he left the body or not. The fact that he did not know shows that it would have been possible for him to be out of the body on this trip. After death there is some kind of conscious existence. Read Luke 16:19-31 in this connection. If one wonders about Ecclesiastes 9:4-6, please remember that because the dead know nothing under the sun does not necessarily mean that they are not conscious in another realm which is not under the sun.

3. *God arranged this trip for Paul.* He had his own reasons for taking him. It is God who has ar-

ranged for us to take a trip to the same place. It is by his grace that people are saved and not because of their merit. However, God who arranges all of this, has laid down certain requirements for the traveler to comply with. God is not going to take all to heaven. The majority will miss it (Matthew 7:13,14). The difference is determined by whether or not we hear and follow his requirements.

4. *We do not need the unspeakable words.* We have speakable words which were written that we might understand the things we need to know (Ephesians 3:3). The gospel of speakable words was given to save us from our sins and completely furnish us unto all good works. — Curtis E. Flatt

# Why Not Be Just A Christian?

**GENERALLY, WHEN YOU ASK** one whether he is a Christian, he responds, “I’m a Baptist,” or “I’m a Methodist,” or “I’m a Catholic,” etc. Or, if in answer to the question, they simply answer, “Yes,” then the person who asked the question will respond, “What kind?” or, “What denomination?” The answer to this response is usually, “I’m a Baptist Christian,” or “I’m a Methodist Christian”:or “I’m a Catholic Christian.”

Now, first of all, where IN ALL THE WORD OF GOD can you read of such? Where in the SCRIPTURES is there a suggestion that there should be different BRANDS of “Christians”? Such terms, in addition to the fact that they are not to be found

in the Bible, are signs of DIVISION, which is condemned in such passages as 1 Corinthians 1:10f and Ephesians 4:1-6, and at the same time such shows a lack of willingness on the part of men to comply with the prayer of Christ for UNITY, as is record-

ed in John 17:20, 21. All who wish to please the Lord CAN be Christians, and Christians ONLY. Every person who complies with the Lord’s plan of salvation becomes a Christian, and JUST a Christian. Jesus said (John 8:31), “if ye continue IN MY WORD, then are ye my DISCIPLES IN-DEED.” To be a DISCIPLE is to be a CHRISTIAN. But. to be a disciple, one must abide within the WORDS OF CHRIST—he must do NOTHING for which he does not have the AUTHORITY OF CHRIST.

To become a “New Creature” is to become JUST A CHRISTIAN. The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that “if any man

**“WHY ARE YOU WAITING?” (Acts 22:16)**

Why would Ananias ask Saul of Tarsus this question? Because God had a mighty work for him to do. “The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard” (22:14,15). What marked Saul’s acceptance of God’s call, and the beginning of his spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire? His baptism “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16).

Many could be asked this question today. “Why are you waiting to obey the gospel?—“the power of God to salvation” (Romans 1:16).

Some could say, “I never heard of the gospel.” Others, “I never considered any need of the gospel.” Others, “I have in mind to obey the gospel, but not now.” Many perhaps have never given any thought to the punishment awaiting those who do not obey the gospel, God’s power to save.

Are you waiting? Why?

**JUST A CHRISTIAN?**

be IN CHRIST he is anew creature.” Thus, when one is Scripturally baptized he becomes just a Christian. When one ceases to be a servant of sin and becomes a servant of righteousness, by the same process he becomes JUST A CHRISTIAN. Those to whom the book of Romans was written had done that, when they “obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to them.” And we see that the “form of doctrine” to which they had become obedient was the DEATH, BURIAL and RESURRECTION of Christ (Romans 6:1-18). They had DIED to sin; they had been BURIED with Christ in baptism; then they had been RESURRECTED, or “raised” from the watery grave of baptism, to “walk in newness of life.” They thus became JUST Christians; not this or that denomination of a Christian! They were not Baptists, Methodists, or Catholics, or any other BRAND of Christians, but JUST CHRISTIANS. YOU can be the same today, by doing what they did...Obey, from the heart, the gospel of Christ:

1. BELIEVE IN CHRIST: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

2. REPENT of your sins: “Repent and be baptized everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:38).

3. CONFESS CHRIST: “If thou shalt confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9,10).

4. Be BAPTIZED: “Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins ...” (Acts 22:16). In this manner you become JUST A CHRISTIAN, because in this you become His “disciple indeed,” in that you “continue in (His) word,” and as we have noticed, He says that this makes you HIS DISCIPLE.

Why not do this, TODAY: become a CHRISTIAN, and JUST A CHRISTIAN. If we may be of assistance to you in doing this, please command us.

— Charles G. Maples

**ROMANS 6:17–18** BUT THANKS BE TO GOD THAT THOUGH YOU WERE SLAVES OF SIN, YOU BECAME OBEDIENT FROM THE HEART TO THAT FORM OF TEACHING TO WHICH YOU WERE COMMITTED, AND HAVING BEEN FREED FROM SIN, YOU BECAME SLAVES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

# Factors in the Eunuch's Salvation

**MANY TIMES WHEN WE STUDY** the salvation of the eunuch from Ethiopia, we simply retrace the same steps that we have taken in previous studies of this same passage. There is nothing bad about this kind of study, for repetition is the best method for learning some things. It is good to study again and again the kind of man he was, Philip's preaching to him, what it means to preach Jesus, the obedience required of the eunuch, and other such topics related to the event as told in Acts 8: 26-39.

At the same time, however, it will profit us tremendously to examine the same passage from a rather general point of view to determine those major factors that compose the narrative of Luke. This survey type of study, in fact, is beneficial in connection with any passage. Survey study lends itself to a passage, a book, or the entire Bible before we plan to engage in a detailed study and after we have completed the detailed study.

## Scope of God's Love

If we read the story of the eunuch against the background of the earlier part of the eighth chapter, we are impressed that the Lord called Philip from a highly productive labor in the city of Samaria. It is certainly in order to wonder why. Earlier verses indicate that "the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake" (v. 6) and that "there was great joy in that city" (v. 8). It

seems to the human mind that Philip's work was at its peak: the masses were turning to the Lord. A great meeting was in progress! In the midst of this large ingathering of souls, an angel instructed Philip to go to a deserted area along the road from Jerusalem to Gaza where the population was sparse. Why? While we know that the harvest of souls in Samaria was pleasing to God, let us never forget that God is also interested in the individual. He is concerned about the one sheep who goes astray. Christ was concerned about the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. (John 4). The Lord loves the multitudes in the sense that they are composed of individuals. While the love of God is broad enough to encompass all of humanity, it is narrow enough to confine itself to and concern itself with one person. We can then see the love of God as it was leading to the salvation of one man in the desert. This is the causal factor in his salvation.

## Providence of God

As one reads the narrative again to discern another factor in the eunuch's salvation, he is moved to think about the providence of God. In connection with this thought, we see another major factor—the providing factor. God provided for the salvation of this man who had been to Jerusalem to worship by dispatching Philip the preacher to meet the sinner. The distance from Samaria to the closest point on the road the eunuch was traveling was about forty miles. We see then that Philip had to leave Samaria before the eunuch left Jerusalem for his return journey. The providence of God is again demonstrated in the eunuch's reading a passage that lent itself to the very subject the eunuch needed to hear. In preaching the gospel to the treasurer, the Lord was also providing a means of conveying the gospel of Christ to a land where, according to the record, it had not gone. The saved in Samaria could further the work of salvation, and the eunuch was God's choice to carry the good news to Ethiopia. Possibly this explains the importance of Philip's leaving Samaria to preach to one man.

## Proper Use of Old Testament

The salvation that is revealed in the New Testament does not come by miracle. Although God's providence led to this man's forgiveness, something else was necessary. (Providence is not a synonym of the miraculous.) The eunuch had to be

## SELF EXALTATION

One who does good deeds to be seen of men may be pleased with himself, but he has not pleased God. Exaltation belongs to God, not to man. "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

What kind of man pleases God? Not one who is pleased to tell God what a good fellow he is. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

## FACTORS IN SALVATION

taught—here we see the teaching factor in his salvation. As he made his journey, he read from Isaiah 53 concerning Christ. Philip's text was Isaiah 53 and his subject was Jesus. He made good use of the Old Testament in his teaching. Instead of trying to bind the covenant of Moses on the eunuch as law, Philip used it to bring him unto Christ.

### Response of an Honest Heart

When a responsible person has learned the will of God, he needs to obey it. The man who does the will of God can enter the kingdom (Matthew 7: 21). The person who continues in the perfect law of liberty is blessed in his deed (James 1:25). The Romans were made free from sin when they obeyed from the heart the form of teaching delivered to them (Romans 6:17). The difference in Acts 2:37 and 41 and Acts 7: 51 was one of response. One group obeyed the gospel while the other rejected it. Salvation is not possible when the obedience factor is missing.

### Joy of Salvation

The eunuch's joy was undoubtedly just as great as that in Samaria in the earlier part of the chapter. This is the same joy as that mentioned in 1 Peter 1:8—"unspeakable and full of glory." A Christian can rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2). He can rejoice always (Philippians 4:4), even in his tribulations (James 1:2; Romans 5:3). There can be no greater joy than that which comes from knowing and doing the will of God. This is truly the blessing factor of salvation.

In summary we see that God's love led to salvation, His provisions arrange for it, His Word instructs concerning it, obedience appropriates it, and joy is the blessing or benefit attached to it.

The man who would rejoice in all of life's ways must learn God's will and follow the leading of His word from an honest heart. This is the true spirit of New Testament Christianity.

— Bobby Graham

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