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# The Unity of the Spirit

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Dear Fellow-believers,

The Gospel of John describes an event in which our Lord Jesus Christ had an unusual and dramatic discourse with a Samaritan woman. The truth that Christ relates to the woman sets out God's heart to his people concerning the subject of true worship:

*"Jesus declared, 'Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship him in spirit and truth' "* (John 4:21-24 NIV).

This account sets out several important and, even, revolutionary truths to the people of that time concerning the nature of true worship. These truths, in turn, have become the basis for true Christian worship in the new covenant era in which we live today. They include the following:

1. God is spirit.
2. Therefore, there is no building (temple, church, or shrine, etc.) or place (a holy mountain, Jerusalem, etc.) where a person must worship.
3. Instead, God our Father seeks people to worship him in "spirit and truth" wherever they may be in the world.

Now it is not surprising that these truths were revolutionary to the Jewish and Samaritan people of Christ's day. Both of these peoples had religious centers of worship in specific locations. Though the Old Testament certainly foreshadowed and even foretold the coming of a time in which God's people would worship God with the spirit from the heart; nevertheless, much of first century Judaism centered its religious life around the temple in Jerusalem and all of the Jewish ritual associated with it – some of it indeed biblical, but some of it simply built on the many traditions of men that had been built up over the centuries.

Christ, however, spoke of a radical departure from all of these practices of worship. God was not ultimately seeking outward ritual and sacrifice, but instead, inward spiritual renewal with lives lived in worshipful service to him from the heart. As the prophets of the Old Testament had stated time after time, God looks on the heart and outward ritual apart from inward humility and love for him were meaningless. The events, however, which replaced the old way of worship with a new way of worship were the redemptive life, death and resurrection of Christ along with his giving of the gift of holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. From the point on – as recorded in Acts 2 – the new covenant era began and it became possible for all who believed in Christ to receive God's Spirit and thus worship God "in spirit and truth." Several New Testament sections of scripture make explicit this truth that is actually implicit throughout the New Testament from the Book of Acts onward. For example, look at how Stephen put the matter in the context of the Old Testament prophets:

*“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:*

*‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? Says the Lord.*

*Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?’” (Acts 7:48-50).*

Though in the Old Testament, Israel rightly worshipped God in the Temple as God had commanded them, this was never God’s ultimate desire. He always looked forward to the day when all of his people – both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ – would be able to make up a new people of God and worship him by the Spirit of God. The apostle Paul makes this crystal clear in his Letter to the Philippians:

*“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).*

From Paul’s perspective, all barriers between Jew and Gentile had been broken down. In addition, all barriers between God and man had been broken down in the one and only place possible – in Christ!

*“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [Jew and Gentile] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to those who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Eph. 2:13-18).*

Through Christ, both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ have access to God the Father by one Spirit. It is that Spirit - first poured out on the day of Pentecost - that unites us all in Christ as the true circumcision, or true new covenant people of God.

The great majority of religions in the world today have holy places such as temples, shrines, etc. which are centers of worship for their adherents. In truth, such religious systems almost always promote a religious system based on outward ritualistic works that lead to bondage rather than to the true God. Unfortunately, it is also true that the great majority of Christian believers from a wide variety of different denominational traditions throughout the world also do not – at least in practice - yet recognize this liberating truth of worshiping God “in spirit and truth.” For though Christians may certainly worship God in buildings set apart for that purpose, the New Testament sets no requirement to do so and the original first century churches met primarily in their own homes. The New Testament also makes it crystal clear that it is the new covenant people of God who are the true “house of God” and the “temple of God” – not a particular building or place. Therefore, anywhere God’s people meet in which their assembly can be conducted in an orderly and reverent manner to the mutual edification of all fulfills the only New Testament requirements for public worship (I Cor. 14).

But perhaps even more important, the New Testament makes it clear that each individual believer can, and should, worship God “in spirit and truth” wherever they may be and in whatever activity they may be engaged in during their day-to-day lives. For worship in the new covenant era is not a matter of ritual, or martyrdom, but rather a way of *life* in which we “serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom. 7:6). For the new covenant “is not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives *life*” (II Cor. 3:6). In grateful acknowledgement, let us take heed to the words of the apostle Paul:

*“Therefore, I urge your, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies [selves] as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. Then you will be able to test and approve God’s will – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Rom. 12:1-2).*

*Richie Temple*

## The Attributes of God

By  
Chuck LaMattina

A kindergarten teacher told her student to draw a picture of something that was important to them. One little boy named Johnny began to work hard at his drawing. When the other students had finished and turned in their pictures, Johnny was still hard at work. So the teacher walked over to the boy, put her hand on his shoulder and asked, "Johnny, what are you drawing?" The young artist didn't look up, he just kept working with great determination and said, "God." "But Johnny," said the teacher, "no one knows what God looks like." Johnny answered, "They will when I finish this picture!"

This cute story brings up a good question. What is God really like? Agnostics and skeptics tell us that we cannot know if God exists, let alone what He is like. According to them if God exists He has hidden Himself from our sight and therefore we must remain in the dark about who He is and what He is like. The Bible on the other hand boldly states that God is—He exists. And we can know a great deal about Him.

In the gospel of Mark, chapter 12, Jesus Christ is asked a question about the first and greatest commandment. Let's listen in.

*"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together...asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is; "Here, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:28-30 NKJV)*

This command is a life consuming command! We are to love God totally, completely, with all that we are. But how can you truly love God like this unless you know who He is and what He does. Thankfully we are not left in the dark about God. The light of Scripture tells us that God has revealed Himself to us in three ways:

1. God has made Himself known in a general way through creation.

2. He has revealed His nature and character to us in the Bible.

3. God has given us a special revelation of Himself through His Son Jesus Christ.

### Creation Makes Known God

We will begin to examine the fact that creation makes known the existence of God by looking at Psalm 19.

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." (Psalm 19:1-4)*

The witness of the universe shows forth clearly and consistently, there is a Creator, there is a God. When you look up into the starry night sky or when you look at a sunrise on the ocean or the beauty of a forest a question comes to mind, "Where did all of this come from?" Psalm 19 tells us that every day and every night all over the world creation proclaims the glory of God its Creator. One of the great early scientists, Sir Isaac Newton, had this to say about creation,

*"The most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets could only proceed from the counsel and domain of an intelligent and powerful being."<sup>1</sup>*

Newton was correct! In fact modern science began as a result of seeing order in creation and realizing that this complex order could not happen by chance. There had to be a Creator. And since there was a divine design and order to creation it could be studied and understood. The New Testament reveals the same truth as Psalm 19, creation makes known a Creator.

*"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may*

<sup>1</sup> This quotation and the following two are from a book titled, The Creation Hypothesis, (Intervarsity Press. Pp. 270-293).

*be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being seen by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, And their foolish hearts were darkened". (Romans 1:18-21) [my emphasis]*

Verse 20, tells us that creation makes known two invisible attributes of God, His eternal power and His Godhead. To those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, and a humble heart creation proclaims there is a Creator and He is awesome in intelligence and power. But these verses from Romans also tell us that there are people who just cannot see this or who refuse to see it. They suppress the truth. They are fools who say in their hearts that there is no God (Psalm 14:1). And they teach that all of creation, even human life, came into existence by mere chance and progressed through the process of evolution.

And yet when push comes to shove many scientists who want to deny the existence of God readily admit the absurdity of their position. In fact two famous scientists of recent years, Francis Crick, who discovered DNA and Carl Sagan the famous cosmologist, have estimated that the difficulty of humans evolving by chance alone is 1 in 10 to the negative 2 billionth. Now I can't wrap my mind around that statement but I get the next one easily. Sir Fred Hoyle, the founder of the Cambridge Institute for Theoretical Astronomy, said,

*"The chance that higher life might have emerged [though evolution] is comparable with the chance that a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the material therein."*

Therefore, in reality, it takes a bigger leap of blind faith to believe that creation began by chance than it does to believe in the Creator! Every day the wonder and beauty of creation declares that there is a God and that He is powerful and glorious.

### The Bible Reveals God's Nature and Character

Besides nature the Bible reveals God to us, specifically His nature and character. The Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah proclaims something wonderful about God to us.

*"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable."(Isaiah 40:28)*

The first thing that we learn about God from this verse is that He is everlasting. He is eternal. He has existed before all time and He will exist forever. When life is shaky, when changes in life come like a whirlwind, our all powerful, all knowing God is the same. He never loses heart. He never wearies. His understanding is infinite and unsearchable. But He does not stay above the fray of life. He is involved and strengthens His people.

*He gives power to the weak and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:29-31)*

What a glorious truth we learn here about God. The everlasting God, the Creator, the Almighty gives His people power and strength. Those who wait<sup>2</sup> on the Lord find their lives renewed and borne up like on eagle's wings! God also has a perfect knowledge of us.

*O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.*

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for "wait" literally means to twist or to intertwine. Just as single strands of rope braided together become stronger when united so the believer is made stronger as he wrap his faith around the all powerful God.

*You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.*

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it.*

*Where can I go from Your Spirit?*

*Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell,<sup>3</sup> behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light upon me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. (Psalm 139:1-12)*

God knows our every thought. He understands the deep motives, fears, concerns and hurts of our hearts. There also is no place where God is not. If I fear that I am left all alone I am not for God is with me. If I am surrounded by people God is still there by my side. If I am in outer space or in the depth of the earth the Almighty is near. There is never, ever a time when God cannot hold me and lead me. What a comforting truth to hold in our hearts.

*I will extol You, my God, O King; And I will bless Your name forever and ever Every day I will bless You, And I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another,*

*And shall declare Your mighty acts. I will mediate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, And I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, And shall sing of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.*

*All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, And Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, And talk of Your power, To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, And the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

*The LORD upholds all who fall, And raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and save them. The LORD preserves all who love Him, But all the wicked he will destroy. (Psalm 145:1-20)*

This Psalm is a song praising God's great majesty and love. Here we learn that God is not just good but full of goodness. His blessings to His people are never given with a restrained hand. God is righteous always doing the right thing at the right time. His generosity towards us is never skimpy, it is super sized. The Lord is full of compassion. He understands our frailties and our needs. God is slow to anger leaving us room to repent. The Lord God is good to all and His tender mercy, His loving kindness, is over all His works. Our God is a great King and His dominion endures throughout every generation. He cares enough to uphold and lift up all who fall. He is near to all who call upon Him in truth. And He will utterly destroy all the wicked.

This knowledge of God's awesome majesty and goodness is lacking in many people who call themselves Christians. This is one reason why our faith is often so feeble, Our worship weak and our impact on the world so diminished. Our knowledge of what God is like is too small, too limited. But believers in a big, gracious, righteous and loving God live big, love big, they serve without reserve, they give generously, and they are bold in their witness for Christ. The prophet Daniel said, "the

<sup>3</sup>The Hebrew word for "hell" is *sheol* and means the grave.

people who know their God shall be strong and carry out *great exploits* (Daniel 11:32).” We also learn from the Bible that God is holy.

*Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods?*

*Who is like You, glorious in holiness,*

*Fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Exodus 15:11)*

In this song of Moses’ we learn that God is glorious in holiness. Did you know that God is called holy more often than He is referred to as good, powerful, loving or anything else? God’s holiness refers to His moral perfection. He is the sum total of all that is morally good and pure and beautiful. The core of His character is spotless and flawless. There is no microscopic trace of evil in Him at all. Here is how the apostle John portrays God’s holiness.

*This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)*

There is no error or falsehood in God. His agenda is not hidden. His promise of salvation is not deceptive. His love is not hypocritical. And His judgments on the wicked will be absolute and full of justice. The apostle James wrote,

*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:16, 17)*

God is holy and pure and this never changes. He is never fickle or unsure. He never says one thing but means another. His blessings are always good and perfect and given at the right time. And because God is holy, full of light and unchanging, His moral laws are pure and righteous and in force yesterday, today and tomorrow. The Bible also informs us that *God is sovereign*.

*Remember the former things of old, for I am God*

*and there is no other; I am God, and there is none*

*like Me, declaring the end from the beginning,*

*and from ancient times things that are not yet done,*

*saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all*

*My pleasure.’ (Isaiah 46:9, 10)*

*And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever. For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from*

*generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?” (Daniel 4:34, 35)*

God’s sovereignty can be defined as the free exercise of His will. God is supreme over all and is Lord Almighty in fact as well as in name. When God declares His purposes and His plans He carries them out. When He makes a promise He fulfills it.

In the gospel of John we have a promise made by Christ concerning the believer being secure in the hand of God.

*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they*

*follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall*

*never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of*

*My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me,*

*is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them*

*out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.*

*(John 10:27-30)*

Here is a comforting promise that all who believe in Christ for salvation are secure in that salvation, safe in the Father's hand. But how do we know that this promise is true? What gives us the assurance that no one will be able to snatch us out of God's hand? The answer is our solid knowledge of the power and sovereignty of God!

Some people think that our world is like a great stage play produced by God. As the curtain goes up all is lovely to behold. The characters are wonderful and beautiful. The set design is fantastic. And all goes well until the leading man steps on the leading lady's dress. She then trips over a chair and knocks over a lamp. He falls into a table which crashes into the stage set which brings the whole thing crashing down. And all the while God is running around back stage frantically trying to get the show back on track. But nothing is further from the truth. God has not lost control. And there should be no truth more encouraging and comforting to us than the fact of God's sovereignty. It means that God rules and overrules in the affairs of our world. He is Master over creation. His plan of salvation will be fulfilled. He will make good on His Word!

### **We Have a Special Revelation of God in Jesus Christ**

Finally, besides creation and the Scriptures, we have a special revelation of God given to us in and through His Son Jesus Christ.

*No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (John 1:18)*

*Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?"*

*The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on My*

*own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does*

*the works. (John 14:8-10)*

All that Jesus said and all that he did unveiled to us the heart of God. In his sinless life Jesus portrayed God's holiness. In his teachings and his miracles Christ displayed the wisdom and power of God. And in his sacrificial death on the cross the Lord proved that God loves us individually, passionately and infinitely. When we see Jesus Christ we see into the heart of God. The one and only true God. God is someone that you can know. And in knowing Him we find life, everlasting life.

[Chuck LaMattina is president of Grace Ministry USA]

### **"To Whom Will You Compare Me?"**

This fall I showed the 1981 Academy Award winning movie "Chariots of Fire" to my 20<sup>th</sup> Century World History Class. One of the most moving scenes is when Eric Liddell the great Scottish runner quoted from Psalm 40. These words are inspiring every time they are spoken or read:

*"To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.*

*Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created these?*

*He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name.*

*Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing...*

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.*

*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.*

*Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;*

*But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.*

*They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

*(Isaiah 40:25-31 NIV).*

## The Book of Micah

By Joe Flory  
Pittsboro, NC

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” writes the author of Hebrews in the opening line of his letter, according to The NIV Study Bible. And that is just what a prophet does: he or she speaks directly to a specific person or group of people and shares God’s message with them. Micah of Moresheth is one of these prophets. He lived in Judah in a time when the majority of God’s chosen people were steeped in sin, were being led astray by power-abusing rulers, judges, and false prophets, and were threatened by a powerful Assyrian empire. Micah repeatedly warned the people of the impending doom that awaited them if they would not turn from their disobedience toward God, but also assured them of the ever-present hope of peace for God’s people in the future.

Prophecy is one mode of communication by God to his people. The generally accepted idea of prophecy involves predicting the future. Telling a nation what the future holds for them if they do not change their ways, a nation that claims to worship Yahweh but unashamedly disobeys His commands, can show the fruits of prophecy through the repentance of those to whom it is directed. King Hezekiah, the king of Jerusalem from 715-686 B.C. is a clear example of this (Jeremiah 26.19). Upon hearing Micah speak of Jerusalem’s coming destruction, he turned to the Lord, and according to the New Bible Commentary, it turned out that only Jerusalem survived in all of Judah during the Assyrian invasions between 721 and 701 B.C.

With a logical study of the Old Testament, as pointed out by LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush in their book, Old Testament Survey, one can see how prophecy is primarily intended for the people of the nation at the time of the prophet through whom God is speaking, and that predicting the future is just one way of getting through to people. It isn’t just a condemnation of a group of people or a crystal ball to the future, it is a revealing of a clearer picture of God’s plan and purpose, “a window that God has opened for his people” so that they can better recognize God’s will, and in turn more effectively live for him (LaSor 230). A healthier understanding

of prophecy itself can be attained when it is seen as “God’s message to the present in the light of the ongoing redemptive mission” (LaSor 229). Applying this perspective when reading or hearing prophecy can expose God’s love for his people.

I’m pretty sure that not a single one of the prophets with written accounts in the Bible had it on their minds that someone in the 21<sup>st</sup> century A.D. would be reading their prophecies and trying to understand them. Therefore, it is our job to try and better understand what *was* on their minds by gaining a general knowledge of the historical setting and people during a particular prophet’s time. Micah was a man from Moresheth Gath, a village in Judah approximately twenty-two miles southwest of Jerusalem and known today as Tell el-Judeidah (New Bible 822). It is believed that he prophesied between 750 and 686 B.C. during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. During this time, the Assyrian Empire was invading and annexing Israel. The Assyrians were cruel and tyrannical, and according to David J. Zucker in his book Israel’s Prophets, “Fear of their inhuman torture of those who opposed them was a conscious part of Assyria’s foreign and military policy”.

Micah wrote mostly relating to the impending doom of Israel, but attached to that is the hope that lies in God’s forgiveness. He also attempts to shed light on the dark lives of power-hungry rulers, judges, and false prophets. Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. The two prophets both share a similar passage in each of their books in the Old Testament concerning peace that is to come (cf. Isa 2.2-4, Mic 4.1-3). Micah is also mentioned in the book of Jeremiah, and even though they never met, as Jeremiah lived a century or so after Micah, a certain sense of unity is apparent amongst the true prophets (Jer 26.18). In addition to Jeremiah in the Old Testament, Jesus Christ in the first century A.D. quotes a passage from Micah and revealed to his twelve disciples its meaning (Matt 10.35-40).

Micah begins his book by outright stating that “the word of the Lord” came to him and that he had a vision from God, a common statement among prophets (Mic 1.1, Isa 1.1). To further show his authenticity, purpose, and confidence in his position as a prophet he later claims he is “filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and



might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin” (Mic 3.8-9). A bold statement that backs up his bold prophesies. He goes on to warn Israel of the Lord’s coming due to their transgressions and sins against Him (1.3-5). Micah, forewarning towns in the area of his hometown of potential ruin, uses the meanings of their names against them in a clever play on words. “In Beth Ophrah roll in the dust” he cautions the town whose name in Hebrew means house of dust (1.10).

Chapter two begins Micah’s intentions to expose those who abuse the power that is given to them. Raised in a small village himself, Micah speaks out for the poor and lower class citizens who are affected by greedy landowners and the like (2.1-2). False prophets are first explained and rebuked in verses 6-11. A vivid picture of the wretchedness of unjust rulers is painted in chapter three, and again the corruption of false prophets is apparent and their motives laid bare: “if one feeds them, they proclaim ‘peace’; if he does not, they prepare to wage war against him” (3.5). Micah immediately contrasts these false prophets with himself, who is filled “with the Spirit of the Lord” (3.8).

The boldness and evidence of the Spirit comes through in Micah’s fearlessness of going against the grain in claiming that Israel’s rulers “distort all that is right” and that “her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money” (3.9-11). Blind to their own hypocrisy, they ignore their disobedience to God’s commandments and claim the excuse that God is among them and that no tragedy will come to them. After more warnings, God delivers a message of hope and a forecast of a time of peace, the last days, when “they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (4.3). Thus begins his prophesies concerning the end times and the Messiah.

Chapter six is a beautiful portrayal of a courtroom scene depicting the Lord charging Israel with unjustly wronging Him. As the Lord cries “What have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me”, Israel proposes to give burnt offerings and other traditional sacrifices that can be given without true repentance, but Micah lets them know that “He has showed you [Israel], what is good...to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (6.1-8).

Chapter 7 ends the book of Micah in three distinct parts. Micah first describes the hopelessness and betrayal that ultimately comes from trusting in man, and then he shares his view: “But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me” (7.7). The second section warns Israel’s enemies not to delight in Israel’s temporary slump because it is just that, temporary. The final conclusion is an encouraging reminder of the depths of God’s mercy and compassion. It is a closing remark aimed at pushing Israel to rely on their faith in the God that has promised them deliverance.

It was a pleasure to read the Book of Micah. Though I don’t pretend to understand all of his prophesies, I appreciate the beauty of the way they were written and the constant reminder to God’s people to keep hold of their trust in Yahweh and to value that above all else.

#### Works Cited

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“The principal purpose of the OT rites and ceremonies was to enable men to ‘draw near’ to God. They cleansed the body and thus removed the ceremonial defilement which prevented access, but they did not cleanse the heart or take away sins. They were therefore symbols of the cleansing which God himself immediately effected apart from this ritual; but more than symbols, they were also the means God used to encourage the humble and give confidence to the repentant to approach him, by indicating the gracious will to forgive and receive such... God’s intention was that both ritual and repentance should be united, the former giving vital expression to the latter, and the latter giving meaning to the former” [J.D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, pp. 16-17].

## Notes & Quotes on the Bible

### True Worship: in Spirit and Truth

At this time of year in the Christmas season we should all refocus our minds on the purpose for which God sent his Son. It is not enough to remember that Christmas is supposed to be the celebration of the birth of Christ; instead, we should remember that his birth has no meaning apart from the purpose it accomplished within God's plan of salvation. Paul's Letter to the Galatians sets out for us a summary of that plan and we see the fullness of its great truth by comparing two very good recent translations, the *English Standard Version* (ESV) which is more word for word and the *Today's New International Version* (TNIV) which is more thought for thought:

*"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."* (Gal. 4:4-7 ESV).

*"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'" So you are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since you are his children, he has made you also heirs"* (Gal. 4:4-7 TNIV).

The purpose of God in sending his Son into the world was to redeem mankind – from the bondage of sin made manifest under the law - so that we could become his children. As his children who now have the Spirit of his Son in our hearts we no longer worship God only in special places and at special times of the week or year. Instead, we can now worship God each day "in spirit and truth" thus

fulfilling that which God our Father has always desired (John 4:24ff).

It has often been said that everybody worships something and from a biblical perspective this is certainly true. The list of possibilities is almost endless and those who claim to worship no god at all are only deceiving themselves. They are always giving their devotion to something whether it be to their own selfish desires, to a worldly cause or to material possessions. The Bible's point of view, however, from Genesis to Revelation reflects the simple truth stated by Jesus in response to the Devil's temptation to have Jesus worship him:

*"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."* (Matt. 4:10 ESV).

Much of the Bible, of course, deals with a constant struggle to encourage mankind to love and worship the one true God over against other gods. In the Bible this was usually a contrast between biblical monotheism (belief in the one true God) and pagan polytheism (belief in the many gods of the nations surrounding Israel). The nation of Israel was unique in its belief in, and devotion to, what it believed to be the one true God. This set it apart as a nation whose beliefs, laws and way of life were to be almost totally at variance with the nations with whom it came in contact. These other nations included, among others, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. The stark differences in Israel's monotheism and pagan polytheism were clear for all to see at that time and are clear for us to see today as we study history.

However, the Bible makes clear that believers today are to offer a new form of worship that even goes beyond the Old Testament modes of worship that were obligatory for the children of Israel. The Old Testament sacrifices, festivals and ceremonies were simply a shadow of a great reality to come. This is clear throughout the New Testament and it is beautifully stated in Paul's Letter to the Colossians:

*"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat, or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality,*

*however, is found in Christ.” (Colossians 2:16-17 NIV and TNIV).*

The new Christian perspective on worship in the new covenant era is reflected throughout the New Testament Letters. It was introduced by Christ himself, became known as the “law of Christ” and is specifically set forth in Paul’s Letter to the Romans chapter 12. It is a form of worship that involves a person’s whole life in response to God’s mercy and our new life in Christ as brothers and sisters in God’s family. Compare the ESV, NIV and TNIV:

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, **which is your spiritual worship.** Do not be conformed to this world [age], but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom. 12:1-2 ESV)*

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – **this is your spiritual act of worship.** Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world [age], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1-2 NIV).*

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – **this is true worship.** Do not conform to the pattern of this world [age], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1-2 TNIV).*

The first thing that should be noted is that the word translated “world” in all three versions is the Greek word *aion* which means “age”. This word contrasts this “present evil age” with the “age to come” of God’s coming kingdom. I will now allow the late NT scholar F. F. Bruce to explain the significance of this “spiritual” or “true” worship of the new covenant era:

“In view of all that God has accomplished for his people in Christ, how should his people live? They should present themselves to God as a “living sacrifice”, consecrated to him. The animal sacrifices of an earlier day have been rendered forever obsolete by Christ’s self-offering, but there is always room for the worship rendered by obedient hearts... The noun is *latreia* [worship], used already of in 9:4 of the ‘worship’ ordained for the Israelites. The adjective is *logikos* ... which may mean either ‘reasonable’ ... or ‘spiritual’. Here ‘spiritual worship’ is probably set in contrast with the externalities of Israel’s temple cult. .... This ‘world’ or ‘age’ [*aion*, as in I Cor. 1:20. 2:6, 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4] is distinguished from the age to come (cf. Eph. 1:21). While it is called ‘the present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4), whose ‘god’ blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4), yet it is possible for people living temporally in this age to conduct themselves as heirs of the age to come, the age of renewal and resurrection. On them ‘the end of the ages has come’ (I Cor. 10:11); for them, because they are a ‘new creation’ in Christ, ‘the old has passed away, behold, the new has come’ (2 Cor. 5:17). It is by the power of the indwelling Spirit, the pledge of their inheritance in the world to come, that they can resist the tendency to live according to the standards of ‘this world’.” (F. F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Revised Edition, Romans*, pp. 212-214).

It has always been God’s desire for his people to worship, serve and obey him “in spirit and truth” - from the heart - either in, or beyond, the externalities of religious ritual. Try as one might, however, man was “powerless” to do this under the Old Testament law in a consistent manner because of man’s bondage to sin. What has finally made this possible is Christ’s sacrificial offering and the Spirit of the living God which now lives in us as his people. It was for this magnificent purpose that “God sent his Son.”

*Richie Temple*