



# December 2023

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- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren

# WHATEVER THINGS

are true  
are noble  
are just  
are pure  
are lovely  
are of good report

PHILIPPIANS  
4:8

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –  
**meditate on these things.**

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at [christistheway.com](http://christistheway.com).

## If a Man Dies, Shall He Live Again?

*"For there is hope for a tree,  
If it is cut down, that it will sprout again,  
And that its tender shoots will not cease.  
Though its root may grow old in the earth,  
And its stump may die in the ground,  
Yet at the scent of water it will bud  
And bring forth branches like a plant.  
But man dies and is laid away;  
Indeed he breathes his last  
And where is he?  
As water disappears from the sea,  
And a river becomes parched and dries up,  
So man lies down and does not rise.  
Till the heavens are no more,  
They will not awake  
Nor be roused from their sleep."  
Oh, that You would hide me in the grave,  
That You would conceal me until Your wrath is past,  
That You would appoint me a set time, and remember me!  
If a man dies, shall he live again?  
All the days of my hard service I will wait,  
Till my change comes.*

*You shall call, and I will answer You;  
You shall desire the work of Your hands” (Job 14:7-15).*

“The question of life beyond death has been an unsolved puzzle of man from the beginning, only Jesus had the answer” (Homer Hailey, A Commentary on Job. 133).

*“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).*

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## **What Kind of Church Do You Want?**

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

In our lovely, little community we have a church dedicated to being brand new. We have another that exists for cowboys - and wanna be cowboys, and another for bikers. All the major brands of human tradition are represented - with their sectarian names identifying each tradition. We have the older models, imported from Europe, and the newer, made in America brands. We have some with catchy names. Surely you ought to find one that pleases you.

But doesn't that miss the whole point of being religious? Are we seeking to please ourselves or God? “For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

If the Son of God always pleased His Father and did His will rather than pleasing Himself and following His own desires (John 8:29), even though it meant going to the cross (Matthew 26:39,42,44), should we be seeking to please ourselves or our Father?

Are you happy with your church? But is God? May I humbly suggest that you should look for a church that is determined to please God regardless of whether or not men are pleased? Shouldn't the question be “What kind of church does God want?”

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## **What If He Said He was a Bear?**

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

In recent news the University of Wyoming Sorority Sisters sued to prevent a male who claims to be a woman from joining their group. They objected to his being naked in their dressing rooms. Their appeal has been rejected by the Wyoming U.S. District Judge Alan Johnson.

And this is not unique, as such happenings are taking place in many places in our nation. Question: Does one claiming to be something that he obviously is not actually change him? What if he claimed he was a bear? Would he then be able to go to court and have his identity on his birth certificate changed? You and I both know that wouldn't happen. But when a male now claims he is a female, oh, that's OK.

We saw confusion in the fairly recent nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court. In the hearing before her confirmation, Senator Marsha Blackburn asked Jackson to define “woman.” Jackson replied, “It's not easy. I'm not a biologist.” Well, la di da! I'm not a biologist, either, but I sure know a woman when I see one.

It's obvious that Jackson catered to the liberal mindset that seeks to change creation and nature. I remember reading in an ancient document the following, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27).

Dear Readers, and especially Parents, you need to be involved in your children's schools, especially public schools, from kindergarten through college. More and more schools are allowing males to claim they are females and are given access to girl's restrooms and locker rooms. Some courts have stood firm in denying such access, but quite a few are allowing this, with some refusing to intervene. For what purpose does a male want to appear naked in a girl's facility?

Would you suppose that the boy in the girl's dressing area hopes to see girls in their nakedness? And does he want them to see his nakedness? Surely not for some good purpose. Note what God said concerning seeing the nakedness of one to whom one is not married.

*"If there is a man who takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, so that he sees her nakedness and she see his nakedness, it is a disgrace; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the sons of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he bears his guilt" (Leviticus 20:17).*

In a recent case in California, the court ruled in favor of parents who sued the school, as a teacher had allowed an 11-year-old girl to change her identity and be called a boy. The teacher even called the girl by a boy's name. The teacher said nothing to the parents. The girl decided she wasn't a boy after all and was content to be a girl.

But in another court ruling: CHICAGO (AP) — An Indiana school district did not violate a former music teacher's rights by pushing him to resign after the man refused to use transgender students' names and gender pronouns, a federal appeals court said in an order released Friday.

And so it goes on in the downward slide of our nation. Parents need to be involved in their children's school activities and take action when these things happen.

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## **And Such Were Some Of You**

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Not too long ago I saw an internet article make the point from 1 Corinthians 6:11 ("and such were some of you") that adulterous marriages were made legitimate by the couple becoming Christians. The reasoning is that since they were no longer adulterers, the marriage must have changed to being holy by God at their baptism. But that is the exact opposite of the truth. The reason they were no longer adulterers in 1 Corinthians 6:11 is because they had repented (leading up to their baptism — Acts 2:38, 3:19) and quit committing adultery. To say I am sorry for my adultery but stay in an adulterous marriage (keep on committing adultery with a second wife) would be no better than a homosexual saying he is sorry but staying in a gay marriage.

And let's see how this internet article's reasoning would work with some of the other sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: A man who shacks up with a woman is committing fornication with her. According to this reasoning, he could become a Christian, be forgiven, and all the while keep living outside marriage with his woman. An idolater could keep worshiping idols as long as he became a Christian. The sin would be made legitimate at conversion. A thief could keep on stealing as long as he became a Christian (was sanctified, forgiven). A drunkard could keep on getting drunk once he was saved (washed). And so on.

Keep in mind the following two illustrations: Herod and Herodias were in an unscriptural marriage (under their covenant) and John demanded they terminate their marriage (Mark 6:17-18); am I right? You'll find another parallel in Ezra 10:10-11.

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## **The Excuses Offered by Saul**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

King Saul offered at least five excuses to Samuel for his failure to obey the Lord in the destruction of the Amalekites. They may have seemed very plausible to him, yet the Lord rejected each one of them. Have you ever offered an excuse for not doing what God plainly told you to do in His word? Do you think He accepted such and will just overlook it? Or will He hold you responsible for such a failure? Let us consider the excuses offered by Saul and how Jehovah responded through Samuel.

When Samuel went out to meet Saul, the first excuse offered was "I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:13). The prophet's response, "What then is the bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear" (1 Samuel 15:14). The king was told by God to completely destroy the Amalekites, which included the ox, sheep, camel and donkey (1 Samuel 15:3). Was this command hard to understand? Or did Saul simply want to do it his way? After all he was the king of a great nation. Yet it is the Creator of the world who gave instruction of what He wanted done. Very easy to comprehend.

Then Saul tried to justify bringing back the sheep and oxen, charging the people with this sin. "And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15:15). It seems to me he wants to blame others for bringing back the sheep and oxen, "they," yet he wants credit for utterly destroying the rest, "we." When one disobeys God the only person to blame is themselves. This has been a problem with mankind from the beginning of time when Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent (Gen. 3:12-13). Saul was the one at fault.

Samuel asked the king, "Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:19). Once again, he tried to justify his failure by offering another excuse. "And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites" (1 Samuel 15:20). To utterly destroy something is to completely eradicate it. The words "utterly destroy" is defined as "It indicates complete and utter destruction" (**The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament**. 379). Saul was more concerned about doing his will rather than doing what the Lord had commanded.

His next effort to justify his action was that "the people took of the plunder" (1 Samuel 15:21). This is very similar to what he said in verse 15. When waging war against another nation there were the spoils to be taken by those who had been victorious. The king said it was the people who took the plunder, but Samuel said, "Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?" (1 Samuel 15:19) This was something it seems he wanted regardless of what Jehovah had commanded him. Makes you wonder if Saul had not been confronted by the prophet if they would have offered it to the Lord? Regardless, this was not what they were told to do. Look what Samuel asks, "So Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

He gave his final excuse, after confessing he had sinned, saying, "because I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24). Yet he was the one who had the power to put to death anyone who refused to listen to his orders. There is no indication this man feared the people, which led to his disobedience to God's commandments. Samuel described him as rebellious and stubborn and because of this he was rejected from being king (1 Samuel 15:23,26).

Far too many people try to justify their disobedience by offering excuses. One may claim they have obeyed the commands of God, while living in rebellion to Christ's law. What about those who refuse to be baptized in water for remission of sins? Or those who will not assemble with the saints, etc.? There are those who blame others for their failures. Some will obey only a part of the law while rejecting a portion of it which requires giving up a sinful lifestyle or giving themselves totally to the Lord's service. It is never our will but the Lord's which we must submit to. We must fear God and not man. The Lord did not accept Saul's excuses, and neither will He accept ours. Jehovah requires obedience on our part, not excuses.

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# The LORD Appears to Isaac & Jacob

## CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

### THE LORD APPEARS TO ISAAC

The Hebrew word *har* (ra'ah) rendered "appeared," means to gaze upon, show, or behold. As we noted last month, the LORD appeared to Abraham - that is, he had seen the LORD. And yet, since "...no one has seen God (the Father) at any time..." (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12; cf. John 6:46), we must conclude that it was not the Father, but the Son who spoke to and appeared to him. So it was with Isaac.

The first appearance to Isaac is recorded in Genesis 26:2. It simply says that God appeared to him, telling him to dwell in the land which was promised to his father, and would belong to his descendants. After much difficulty with Abimelech and the Philistines, Isaac acknowledged that the LORD had provided room for them in the land. That night, we're told:

*...the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham, do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake.' So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.*

(Genesis 26:24-25)

Neither text gives much detail, except to say that the LORD appeared to Isaac. Nonetheless, these are appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ.

### JACOB'S LADDER

As Jacob travelled toward Haran, he stopped at Luz. There, he had a dream. In his dream, he saw a ladder between the earth and heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. The LORD stood above the ladder, introduced Himself to Jacob, and shared the same promise with him that had been given to Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 28:12-13). Jacob called the place Bethel, literally, "house of God."

Was it the pre-incarnate Christ who was at the top of the ladder? The text is not clear, but in John 1, Jesus indicated to Nathanael that while He was upon the earth, He was the ladder which Jacob had seen. Notice:

*Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!' Nathanael said to Him, 'How do You know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' He said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.' (John 1:47-51)*

### ANOTHER DREAM FOR JACOB

After spending 20 years in Haran, the LORD came to Jacob in a dream. Jacob, as he spoke with his wives about it said:

*...the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.'*

(Genesis 31:11)

It is interesting that as Jacob referred to the One who appeared to him, he knew that it was "the angel of God" (a.k.a., the Angel of the LORD). We have noted previously that the Angel of the LORD is the Messiah, the pre-incarnate Christ.

He identified Himself to Jacob as the One who had appeared to him at Luz (a.k.a. Bethel), "I am the God of Bethel..." (Genesis 31:13).

## JACOB WRESTLES THE LORD

As Jacob returned to his own land with his family, having sent them all ahead, he was left alone. Initially, we are told that he wrestled with a "Man" until daybreak. Jacob knew who it was that he was wrestling with, for he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" (Genesis 32:26) and so the response came:

*Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.* (Genesis 32:28)

Jacob called the name of that place Peniel, stating, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Genesis 32:30). He was not mistaken, he had seen God - it was the pre-incarnate Christ. .

## ONE FINAL APPEARANCE

After Simeon and Levi killed all the males in the city of Shechem and plundered their goods, Jacob feared for his household. At this point, God spoke to Jacob, telling him to go to Bethel, and was to "...make an altar there to God, who appeared to you" (Genesis 35:1).

When he arrived at Bethel, he built an altar "...because there God appeared to him..." (Genesis 35:7).

Once more, God appeared to Jacob and blessed him (Genesis 35:9). He reaffirmed the name change, no longer was he Jacob, but now would be called Israel. The promises were stated to Jacob,

*I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.* (Genesis 35:11-12)

Since we're told that "God went up from him to the place where He talked with him" (Genesis 35:13), it should be understood that God had come down (ie appeared) to him.

## TAKE AWAY POINTS

- The Lord Jesus appeared to Isaac two times which are recorded in Scripture.
- To Jacob, the pre-incarnate Christ appeared at least four times. Jacob acknowledged that he had seen God. Indeed, he did - it was the Christ.
- Though we find it stated throughout Joseph's life that God was with him, it is never recorded that God appeared to him.

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## Presuming to Help God

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Sarah is numbered in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews eleven among those who were saved by faith, lived by faith, and died in faith (Hebrews 11:11-12). But, as in many among us, that faith was late developing.

She had always been barren (Genesis 11:30). But God had promised her husband Abraham an heir from his own body (Genesis 15:4).

When Sarah was sixty-five she gave up hope of having a child herself and gave her handmaid Hagar to Abraham to have a son through her for Sarah to adopt (Genesis 16:1-3). Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham, but Ishmael was not the promised heir (Genesis 17:18-21).

All this attempt to help God fulfill his promise did was demonstrate a lack of faith and generate trouble (Genesis 16:4-16; 21:9-14). Of Ishmael the Lord foretold, "He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him" (Genesis 16:12). Ishmael's descendants settled "from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria," i.e., the Northern Arabian Peninsula. Ishmael is "commonly regarded by both Jews and Arabs as the progenitor of the Arabs"

(Britannica.com; cf. Quran. 19:54). How well do Arabs and Jews get along? Why is the very existence of the modern state of Israel under constant threat? When we presume to help God by acting without His authority, it demonstrates lack of faith, it doesn't work, and it simply causes trouble.

In 1859 brethren from across America met in Cincinnati, Ohio to form the American Christian Missionary Society to more efficiently evangelize, although there is no authority for a human organization to be attached to the church of the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 John 9-11). Local congregations sacrificed their autonomy (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-2), the evangelistic work, a mission to Palestine, was a miserable failure, and this along with instrumental music, brought about the division between the church of Christ and the Christian Church in America.

Brethren in the 1860s thought congregational singing needed help from a mechanical instrument, although the Lord never authorized instrumental music in New Testament worship (cf. Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16-17). So brethren in Midway, Kentucky brought a melodion into the worship and divided the church there. Eventually division developed between brethren throughout America over instrumental music in worship. Today's Christian Church and Disciples of Christ denomination resulted. It didn't work, it showed a lack of faith, and it just caused trouble.

The division among brethren in the 1950s and '60s followed a parallel pattern. We'll have to discuss this later.

In the same way, many brethren think the gospel is not powerful enough to save the lost (cf. Romans 1:16), so they introduce unauthorized benevolence programs and entertainment to allure sinners (cf. John 6:26-27). If we allure them with hamburgers, the wealthy denominations will offer them steak! We have one supremely powerful tool no denomination has, the gospel, "the power of God to salvation" (Romans 1:16). Carnal appeals don't work, show a lack of faith, and just cause trouble.

Sarah learned to just take God at His word (Hebrews 11:11-12; cf. Genesis 18:9-15), experienced the joy of bearing the promised son in her old age (Genesis 21:1-7), and was saved by faith (Hebrews 11:11-12). If we will just take God at His word and follow His pattern (2 Timothy 1:13), we will have the joy of salvation by faith (Ephesians 2:8; 2 Corinthians 1:24).



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