

## **Bible Special 06-11-07a**

This is Tuesday, the 7th of November, 2006, Election Day. A day for Americans to cast their vote, influence the outcome of world history in a small way. We continue tonight our study in the area of Christianity.

Why we believe the Bible, why we are Christians and not Buddhists. And specifically, recently, we have delved into the origin and nature of the major Christian denominations. So let's take a moment as we continue that investigation to go before the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing on our assembly.

Father, we are so grateful for your grace and the fact that we are able to receive it because of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for his example, his faithful stewardship and ministry on our behalf as he sits beside you, awaiting the day when he will return to receive us unto himself. We know that the time between now and then is a time for preparation, a time of opportunity, a time for growth and gaining insight and understanding of who we are and why we are here, where we are going and what your eternal plan and purpose is.

We pray that as we study the essentials and the distinctives of our faith, that God the Holy Spirit will use this information to strengthen us, to steady us, and to give us momentum in the time that remains to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you have been following along, having surveyed world religions, we came to Christianity, we saw its origins in Jerusalem and Judea with the day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the suspension of the age of Israel and the mystery doctrines. And this sounds really strange. Sometimes if you put yourself in the position of an outside person, someone who is not a Christian, hasn't been in church, never went to Sunday school, they just come in and you say, well, our church began with the mystery doctrines.

It sounds like some kind of spooky thing that happened in some dark cave someplace. The reason these are called mystery is that's what the Apostle Paul called them in Greek, *mysterion*. And it doesn't mean like a murder mystery or something to be solved.

It means something that was formerly not revealed and now is revealed. And it is a fact and something important to understand that much of the truth, much of God's plan and purpose and the way God's plan and purpose is implemented for Christians is not found directly taught in the Old Testament. It is taught in a shadow form.

It is taught in a preview form. And in reality, we are experiencing something that was originally planned for Israel. We'll think of it in sort of human terms.

God knew this was going to happen all along. But God had his Old Testament people, his Old Testament believers. And he said, I'm going to work with you in a certain way for a certain period of time so that you will come to understand what it is like to be without me.

Now, I don't want to drift too far away from our study of denominations, but this is really important. To understand what Christianity is, what makes it tick, why God is working with us as a church and not making us be a nation of Israel tromping around in the wilderness trying to find Canaan. Why is that? What's going on in human history? Why was there 4,000 years of a different way of doing things up until Christ? And since Christ, we've had the way that we understand it with the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the New Testament truths that we have in front of us.

Why did God do that? Do you have any idea? I know some of you do. Before man came along, before Adam was created, before God prepared the earth for habitation by plants, animals, and mankind, there was another civilization. That civilization still exists.

It's in another place. It's in another kind of time from us. It's before us.

It's prehistoric in that sense. The individuals were created by God. They make up that civilization.

We call them angels. We don't really have a good term for them. Angel is the Greek word for messenger, angelos.

Well, they're not all messengers. Some of them serve as messengers. And because those are the ones that we've come in contact with, that's what we call them.

But it kind of reminds me of Columbus and the early explorers coming to America and landing on an island and meeting somebody and saying, oh, well, they're the Indians, because they thought they had landed at India. And they said, oh, look, people from India. They're Indians.

Well, American Indians. Why would we call them? We're nowhere near India. But it was kind of a mistaken assumption from the early explorers thinking they had found representatives of the continent of India when, in fact, that was a very small sample of the Native American population.

And so it's sort of a misnomer. In the same way, the Bible and we generally talk about this other civilization of sentient, thinking, deciding beings that God created. We call them angels.

But it's a little bit of a misnomer because they're not all messengers. We just know them because those are the ones we've met, are the ones who God has sent to be messengers, and they're recorded in Scripture. But this civilization was going along.

They saw God. God saw them. God dwelt among them.

He had his throne. He had an executive officer there. He had a guardian of his throne so that everybody didn't just come mobbing in and bugging him about things.

They would go to this guardian and say, Can I go in and see God? I've got an issue. I've got something I'd like to settle. I mean, they had all kinds of things we can't even dream of in terms

of their civilization.

They weren't just like a wall painting. They weren't like a mobile of little flat brass angels that just turns around a baby's crib. They had a civilization and a culture just like us.

It's beyond us. We know very little about it. But one of the distinctives, this is the important thing.

What should you have in your mind so far? Civilization before mankind. Lots of them. All dwelling and operating.

And they're with God. They see God all the time. They know God.

There's no issue of faith. It's not like, do you believe there's a God? Well, he's sitting right over there. How can you not believe in him? So, it's not a matter of having to believe and account without having seen something.

That's what faith is. Substance of things hoped for. Evidence of things not seen.

Faith is not an issue for this angelic civilization. But, some of them started taking for granted all of the blessings that come from God's presence. God is here.

God guides. God provides. God blesses.

God's presence energizes and sustains and gives life to everything. Well, they never knew anything but that. They never could imagine anything different than that.

So, when some of the angels, led by Satan, who was the guardian of God's throne room, they said, we really want to do something different. We're chafing under God's rulership. We'd like to go our own way.

It's kind of like the Americans chafing under King George. Sometimes people just get sick of a government for whatever reason, legitimate or illegitimate. Children become teenagers.

Teenagers say, I'm tired of living with Mom and Dad and their rules and their restrictions and telling me what to do and frowning at me. I want to leave. I want to be on my own.

I want to do something by myself. This is not inherently sinful. Sometimes it's a natural result of growth.

But, in the case of the angelic civilization, this was sinful because it was a repudiation of God. Satan said, I'm tired of God. I don't want God to be my authority anymore.

And you have the five I wills. When you read Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, Satan says, I will ascend. I will raise my throne.

I will be like the Most High. I can be a mini-God for a smaller subset of the angels. We don't

need God, and I reject God.

I don't want to serve Him anymore. I want to do my own thing. Well, one of the reasons that this idea could kind of catch hold, ultimately, with one-third of that civilization, one out of every three angels, said, hey, that sounds like something new.

I don't know how many angelic eons had passed before this idea came up. I don't know how long, in human terms, that was. But they said, okay, let's do that.

God said, fine, if you want to go, go. And they left. And Satan was cast out because of his heart being lifted up and because of this sinful attitude that he developed toward God.

God didn't bolt him to the wall and say you're going to stay here and you're going to be ruled by Me and you're going to like it. He said, go. Be gone.

But if you're leaving and disconnecting yourself from Me, bad things are going to happen. Satan said, well, I don't think so. And a third of the angels said, I don't think so.

And they left. So, here's my whole point. The first major idea for tonight is this.

Think about a civilization where God dwells with them and among them. And they don't know what it's like to be without God. And God says, well, the penalty for separating yourself from Me is going to be eternal separation.

I will send you to the lake of fire. And they said, lake of fire? That seems pretty harsh for us just wanting to do our own thing. Why do we have to be destroyed from your presence and so on? And God said, look, I'm going to explain this, not just for you third, who it's going to kind of be a moot point because you're going to be out of the picture anyway, but I'm going to explain this so that the two thirds who have remained faithful will understand.

And there won't be some future point where another bunch of them say, well, hey, why don't we split up from God and do something different? So God basically said, watch this. He prepares the world. He creates an inferior kind of creation.

Just like a scientist would say, you want to know what happens when you breathe in germs and you get pneumonia and die? Watch this lab rat. And so you put the lab rat in a controlled environment. And you squirt some germs in there and he breathes them in and he gets pneumonia and he coughs around and staggers and keels over and falls feet in the air.

And you say, see there? That's what happens when you breathe those germs. I don't mean to sound demeaning to the human race. I am part of it.

But essentially, this is part of what God is doing. It's not the whole thing, but it's a part of what God is doing in the human race. He said, look, I'm going to create these people and I'm not going to leave it like it is up here in heaven where we've had this angelic civilization.

I'm going to put a tree right there and I'm going to force them to make a decision about that tree. I'm going to tell them they can't eat of it. And I know pretty well, being God, that they're going to fail and they're going to eat of that tree.

And the penalty for that is going to be separation for me, just like what you third of the angels are about to suffer. And now, we're going to let these people try what you're talking about. They don't have your powers.

They don't have your transcendental, trans-dimensional power. There may be reasons why God didn't want to do this demonstration with angels, because they are incredibly powerful. They have access and abilities far beyond anything we can imagine.

We are the inferior. We've been made lower than the angels, Scripture says. But God said, look, I'm going to put this test case together.

Watch what happens when creatures try to live apart from Me. And this is the fallen human race. And Satan, God said, Satan, you can go down and help them.

You put your ideas into practice. Let's see how well your rulership is going to go. Why do you think Satan is called several times in the Bible, the ruler of this world, the ruler of this age? Nobody rules unless God gives them authority.

How did Satan become the ruler of the world? How did Satan become ruler of this age? God gave him that authority. God said, Satan, take it. The ball is yours.

Run with it. See if you can score a touchdown. Give it your best shot.

We'll all watch. The angels encircle human history as if in a stadium and are watching what happens here. This is why every human life counts.

Every set of decisions, every path through life counts. People say, well, I'm not important. I'm not Billy Graham.

Nobody's ever going to write a book about me. I'm not on TV. I'm not a documentary.

It doesn't matter what I do. Yes, it does. There are billions of angels learning billions of lessons from billions of human lives.

We are like the universe's biggest Bible. You think, well, the Bible's just got a few people in it like Daniel and Joseph and Moses. Listen, for the angels, you and I are a part of their Bible.

They are learning about God and about whether what He says is true or not by looking at us. And you can say, well, if you had a choice of being in the Bible, would you rather be King David or would you rather be King Saul? Would you rather be Abel or would you rather be King? Would you rather be Joshua or would you rather be Korah or Dathan or Abiram? Would you rather be someone that reflects the glory of God in their life or do you want to be a negative

example of discipline and misery and loss? Well, we make those decisions day by day. That's why we're here.

So, angelic civilization starts with God present. The human race, as soon as Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden and the angel is posted there guarding the gate saying, you cannot come in, doing the very same thing Satan used to do in the throne room of God to some angels, sorry, you're whining, complaining, ninny, and you can't come in. Well, the access to the presence of God was cut off.

That presence of God was symbolized by the tree of life. The tree of life is a place of meeting with God. God is light and that light is the life of men, told us in John chapter 1. So, now, human history is a record of man trying to live without God.

And you see what happens at the Tower of Babel. You see what happens before the flood. You see what happens in Egypt.

You see what happens with the nations. And then God says, now, I'm going to put my presence with one small group of people. And I'll show you that even, because the angels might start arguing, well, you know, it's the environment.

It's that bad environment down there. It's that earth. It's being so puny and small and limited in their powers.

That's why they're all coming unraveled. And God says, alright, I'll tell you what. I'll put my presence with just a limited number of people down there.

And I'll show you what a difference it makes. And so God puts His presence with Israel. And He's counting on the people of Israel to show what a difference the presence of God can make.

And He goes down there in a pillar of fire, in a pillar of cloud, and the people can't trust Him for more than a couple of minutes before they're ready to run back to Egypt. And God says, well, there are a few. Look at My servant Moses.

Look at My servant Job. Look at My servant Daniel. Look at My servant David.

Yes, they make mistakes, but they value My presence. They recognize that life comes from Me. And this is what God is doing all down through history.

Now, let's think about the Bible. You've got Old Testament, the 4,000 years from Adam to Christ. And this is a record of how God's presence externally, God dwelling in the tabernacle, God dwelling in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, God speaking from the mountain and giving His commandments, isn't enough.

God is proximate. He's close by. But it's not enough.

Those 4,000 years from Adam to Christ are a schoolmaster. It's a tutor to tell us, it's the same

thing it tells the angels. You can't live a meaningful life apart from God's presence.

You have to be in contact with Him. It's like a branch trying to live and bear fruit when it's got a one inch gap between the branch and the tree. The nourishment and the vitality can't bridge that gap.

It's got to be in the vine. It's got to be in the trunk. So that's what the Old Testament age foreshadows.

And there are pictures saying, when I make a new covenant with the house of Israel, I will pour my Spirit out on their flesh. They won't have a need for this external kind of thing because it will be within them. I'll write my law on the fleshy tables of their hearts, not outside on a piece of rock.

They won't need a prophet out here yelling at them to come back to God. There will be the Holy Spirit inside them prophesying. Jesus came to bring that about.

Jesus came to Israel 2,000 years ago saying the time is at hand. The kingdom is here. This is when God is going to be Emmanuel.

God with us. That's why Jesus came. That's the Christmas story.

Emmanuel. See what a dismal thing it is to try to live when God is... Even if He's there, He's not connected. We're not connected.

There's still a separation caused by unresolved sin, caused by various things. And God allowed that to take place. Paul talks about it in Romans.

The law gives us the knowledge of sin. The law talks about what life could be, what it ought to be. And as we fail to live up to it, we see that we don't have that divine spark, that divine connection that's necessary to really live that out.

So Jesus came. Well, Israel, in typical fashion, just like with the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire, couldn't recognize the imminent presence of God in Christ. And just like that first generation out of Exodus, they missed it.

And Jesus said, you know what? This kingdom is going to be taken from you and given to another nation, quote unquote, a kingdom of priests, body and bride of Christ, who will bear the fruits of it. And it's been given to us. We are the people who have God with us.

We have the indwelling, and the filling, and the sealing, and the gifting, and the regenerating baptism of the Holy Spirit. God is with us. God dwells in us.

We are sealed unto the day of redemption. And we can enjoy an ever increasing fullness of God's presence. Jesus said, if you have my words and keep them, you're the guy that loves me.

I will come to you. I and my Father will make our home with you. Many little children have memorized Revelation 3.20. Jesus says, it's in red in Revelation, Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. I will come in to him, and we will have a fellowship meal together. There's no promise like that in the Old Testament.

Whereas the Old Testament say, God is knocking at your door, and if you'll open it, God will come in and sit down with you, and have intimate, personal fellowship with you. It's not there. That's the wonderful thing that we have in this age.

That's what happened at the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended like tongues of fire on the heads of the assembled believers. It started with Jewish Christians, and it spread outward, because even those Jewish Christians had the same problem as the Exodus generation. They just couldn't catch it.

They couldn't get it. And the Jerusalem church basically died on the vine, and God allowed the legions of Titus to come in and destroy Jerusalem in 70 A.D. They had one generation, 40 years, just as long as the first generation out of Egypt wandered in the wilderness. That's how long that first generation of Jewish Christians had to get their feet into the door of the New Testament church.

And they basically failed miserably. They waned away. There's barely a trace of, in fact, a lot of atheists and people like to argue that there really wasn't any Jerusalem church.

There really wasn't any Jewish response to the Gospel. You know why? Because it was so pathetic and it dwindled and scattered so quickly. By the time Peter is in his later life writing letters, you know who he's writing to? He doesn't say to all of my dear friends by the dozens and the scores and the hundreds in Jerusalem.

He says, I'm writing to all you scattered out Jewish Christians in Galatia and Cappadocia and off in the boonies, because that's why God took the kingdom from Israel, from the Jews, and has given it to those who will bear the fruit. And that's us. It's available to Gentiles.

You don't have to be descended from Abraham. You don't have to be in Israel or under the law of Moses. Now, it's righteousness by faith.

This is what happened in the church. This is the great grand design of human history. This is why Christianity gives us a great view not just of our life and not just of human history, but of the eternal history.

Why is there a universe? Why are there things going on in the invisible realm that we can't seem to get at? Why is there obvious signs of design in nature, but we can't find the designer? We can't detect him. We can't sense him with our radio telescopes. We can't bounce a laser beam off of him.

We can't weigh him. We can't siphon him into a Petri dish somewhere and grow a culture and see what his DNA is like. Why can't we find the designer? We think way too much of ourselves.

We think, well, we're probably among the most intelligent things that have ever drawn a breath, and anything else that we can conceive of isn't going to be a whole lot smarter than we are. God is so vast. I sometimes think that this entire universe with our Milky Way galaxy, our solar system, our planet, all the billions of people that are on it are probably like one of those glass paperweights that has the snowflakes inside and you shake it.

I think this entire universe, the whole Big Bang thing, is just a little glass paperweight on God's desk. And the angels, in essence, have come in and they've said, you know, we really kind of wonder about that whole thing Satan proposed. And God said, watch this.

And he just shook it a little bit. He said, watch how these things settle out. And we think we're so big and so grand and so knowing in our science, we are much lower than the angels.

But Jesus Christ emptied himself and became like us and lived our life and showed us the difference it can make to have a connection to God. That's what Christianity really is. So I don't want us to get too lost in these denominational distinctions and what is a Buddhist and so on.

This is why our faith is a living faith. This is the truth of the universe. This is why humans are conscious and aware and able to sense.

That there's something going on beyond getting a job and making money and watching some TV. There's a meaning and a purpose to life. And God is going to raise us out of... When it talks about standing again, being raised and resurrected, it's not just like, well, I was in the grave and now look, I'm back on the earth.

We are going to be pulled from this tiny little existence in this tiny little universe and be brought up to the realm where God and the angels dwell. It is going to be the biggest escalator ride anybody has ever taken. It's exciting.

It's something to really look forward to. But that's what got launched on the day of Pentecost. And for a thousand years, people were just trying to figure out.

So this is the age of the Holy Spirit. This is the age where Jesus is now away and we learn about Him by faith through the Holy Spirit and we are our own priests. We can obtain and internalize the power of God.

What does Romans 1.16 say? I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Why? It is the power of God. When you're looking at deliverance, when you're looking at salvation, that Word of God is alive and powerful.

You can memorize geometric theorems. You can memorize Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. You can memorize the soliloquy from Hamlet.

To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether it is noble or not, you can memorize that. It doesn't have power.

When you memorize the Word of God, when the Word of God gets in our soul, it is life changing. It can change attitudes. It can change perceptions.

It can change emotions. It strengthens us for good and it weakens our evil nature. That's the radiation-like power of God's Word.

It's unlike anything else in life. That's what Christianity is. That's what our faith is.

It's a lot more than just which holy book should you read. This is something that has come from God's eternal realms, come from the realms of the angels and has been communicated and left for us. Those of us, and many of you know this yourself, when you internalize God, His Word and His presence, it makes a difference.

It changes things that nothing else in this life can change. Well, you remember the history. Church starts at Pentecost.

It's a new and living way. It's never been seen in 4,000 previous years. And so they're figuring it out.

And they're saying, wait a minute, you heretics who say Jesus isn't the Son of God or He didn't have a real body or He was a figment of somebody's imagination, you're wrong. That's not Christianity. And they got Christianity narrowed down and boxed in and figured out what it was.

All the way down to when? When's the great schism? 10 what? Don't fail me now. When's the great schism? 1054. 1054 A.D. 1054 A.D. The great schism.

What happens? You've got two big pieces of the church. Roman Catholicism and Eastern, the Orthodox crowd. You come down 400 more years.

What's the next big divide? The Reformation. What is that year? You need to know this. 1521.

1521. Wittenberg door. 95 Theses.

Martin Luther. That cracks the church wide open. And people come streaming out into the light of freedom in God's word.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to back up just a little bit from the Reformation in 1521 and we're going to see the roots of a lot of our modern Protestant denominations being formed in the previous 200 years. Let's pause here and take our break.