

New Thoughts on Old Things - Chapter One

Solomon said “There is no new thing under the sun, is there anything whereof it may be said, see this is new?” What a far-reaching statement and an equally far-reaching challenge. How are we to respond in the 21st century being surrounded by so many “new things” that Solomon had not the faintest idea? With all due respect, and considerable reverence for Solomon’s wisdom, and yet with a current awareness of a multitude of undeniable “new things,” I believe we must just surmise that Solomon was speaking from his immediate perspective regarding man’s behavior, and his less-than-desirable effects. His conclusion was, “all is vanity.”

From Solomon’s immediate perspective and his experiments in trying to determine what was good and lasting and worthy of man’s attention, this is the way He saw it. I don’t believe it would be unfair to say that Solomon was in a fairly negative state of mind when he wrote those words. Looking at things (from only the immediate perspective) allows no leeway for ‘new realities’ or possibilities. This approach has kept so many in stagnant spiritual mentalities, which impedes our progress into new and exciting experiences with God. After all, it is written, that “In him we live, move and have our being.”

If this is true, and I believe it is, there is always the possibility of something new. Remember, it was God who said “I will do a new thing” and again, “Behold I make all things new.” New things require new thoughts, and he who has new thoughts can do new things. I feel it is extremely important that we remember that new thoughts are coming into our consciousness all the time. New thoughts create new things; we can have new thoughts about old things that help us to move forward into richer and more productive lives. Being willing to accept new thoughts without the fear of having violated some previous concept of truth is perhaps the greatest challenge for the spiritually inclined to overcome.

There is a tendency to stagnate on the old and recurring interpretations handed down through the ages so that it holds us back from accepting new realizations of the activity of God in our midst. But for the spiritually adventurous, who long for a faith without boundaries, to restate old things in the same terms is too constricting and limiting for their minds. This book is not a theological treatise, nor an attempt to engage in “higher criticism” or disparage previous interpretations. It is simply intended to suggest some other approaches to the truths we all hold in the highest regard.

It appears that knowing God in a conscious way, and having a personal awareness of His immediate activity in our lives, is of the utmost importance. But we have reduced this high and lofty concept to quoting various verses in ways suited to our theology or creed, and it crystallizes into our position and faith. If we quote it right and repeat it often we are considered a true Christian. If we vary from these declarations or receive “new light” of any kind, we are looked upon with great suspicion and sometimes accused of apostasy.

I believe the fundamental question is this, ‘Can we know God and yet have no particular scripture to fall back on or rely upon for our point of reference?’ I believe we can. And here lies the crux of the matter. Before scripture there was God and man, and before the various laws and commandments, some men knew God. It is this truth that stands. The

unfolding accounts in the scriptures are about men and their experiences with God.

Adam talked with God, Enoch walked with God; Noah was spoken to by God and we are told that God also revealed Himself to Abraham and made a covenant with him. The certainty of God's communication with these men and others was definitely established, leaving no doubt in their minds. There were no written references to rely upon, only a simple but unique consciousness of God and His absolute reality in their lives. This was their truth.

We must never lose sight of the true fundamentals of faith. The writer to the Hebrews said centuries later, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." It is out of this kind of faith that one has satisfying experiences with God, and these experiences with God are enough to assure us that God truly is. It is also interesting that the writer to the Hebrews is relying upon the previous accounts of men who experienced God long before the written records were compiled. He recalls at length the exploits and the miracles of their encounters with the Almighty. It appears that we can accept the principle that it is always God and Man, and then the record of the experiences that come forth from that communion.

Our quest should be to come into our own personal relationships with God and find comfort in those experiences we have instead of always referring to others and their relationship with God. There is a divine compass within each of us that guides us in our personal path of life. As one writer put it, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying this is the way, walk ye in it."

In writing this book, when I refer to a scriptural reference, instead of mentioning chapter and verse, I have simply put a statement in italic quotes so as not to give a sense of dissecting the Bible by pinpointing the statements with our system of usual documentation. It is interesting to note that Jesus and the New Testament writers, when speaking of a scriptural account, simply made reference to the event, person or experience they were referencing. They rarely mentioned a particular book of the Bible; apparently it did not matter at that time, for they freely made their points without loading the hearer down with a multitude of chapters and verses as we do today, yet they made their points very effectively.

In fact, most often Jesus would not refer to the scriptures; He would instead tell a parable to make His point. To those readers who want the exact references, you may easily refer to the Notes section at the back of the book. I want the book to be less tedious and hopefully easier to read and digest. Let me emphasize to the reader that I am not saying we should not become familiar with the scriptures for encouragement and faith. We certainly need to know the possibilities they speak of and the examples of those who had great experiences with God. What I am saying is we must have our own experiences with God, and that we must not place limits on what type or form those experiences may take.

Do I suggest that we should then broadcast our reassuring responses from God or the miracles we personally witness to the world? No, it would not always be prudent or necessary. But to know that we have had those experiences will keep us from a slavish dependence on trying to find some scripture to rely upon, because we should learn to rely

upon God Himself. In this way, we impose no limits on God to have to work in a particular way or according to a particular verse.

Someone once said, "God understands plain English," and I also might add, any other language we may speak. In the event some may think I am saying never pray or make an affirmation using a scriptural reference, I want to assure you I am not. What I am saying, is I believe God wants to hear us speak from our hearts, with the use of our own words, and the reason we need or seek His intervention.

The Bible is full of promises, and it is good to know at least some of these them. But we must remember, these promises did not come out of the air or appear on a neon sign in the heavens. They came into the minds of men who knew God in a very personal way and they in turn spoke and wrote concerning them. So again, it was God and man, and then impressions set forth for others to see. The meaning of these things took on various modifications based on the passage of time and a new consciousness of God among the people. Then came forth new interpretations and new applications of the old declarations, some of which we will touch upon in later chapters.

For a few moments let us start with Adam. It is fascinating to read the account of Adam's appearance upon the earth. We are told that "God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them." The scripture expands on this marvelous event by saying how He accomplished this. It says, "God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul." When I think of the significance of that astounding demonstration of God's power, I am in awe at the wonder of it. We live today and have come forth through conception, from a seed, development in the womb, birth, growth and into fullness of masculine or feminine maturity. This too is a wonder that should still send thrills throughout our being.

The psalmist said "Thou didst cover me in my mother's womb; I will give thanks unto thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." We have been able to determine the process, and track the emergence of a human being from a seed in a woman's womb, but we can't explain the mystery of it all. Just as we are still at a loss to explain how a great oak tree was once in minute detail, encoded inside an acorn waiting to unfold. Again, let us go back to Adam and the beginning of it all for the human race. God formed Adam of the dust of the ground. Scientists tell us that the composition of the human body can be traced to the elements of the ground. However, no one has ever been able to take those elements and from them create a human being.

When I think of my brain, my heart, my intestines, my bones, my veins, my lungs, my muscles, and the vast network of my internal physical organs, and the many nerves and various tissues that make me function, it humbles me. We are definitely 'wonders,' each and every one of us. But Adam was the first 'wonder' and more awesome in his 'creation' than even we in our 'generation,' for it all began with Him. As I said before, we are conceived, formed, and then we are born into the world. We are helpless, dependent, and with a very limited consciousness. The cycles of growth and development begin, and we learn to associate things, distinguish differences, recognize people, and eventually, say our first words. As we accumulate more words, we develop the capacity to analyze,

reason, compare and draw conclusions. We move from grade to grade in school and finally reach maturity. It is an exciting and grand experience, but can never match the experience of being 'created' as Adam was. I say this because God created Adam as a full-grown, fully-developed, and fully-intelligent being, able to speak without having learned a language, able to reason and draw conclusions without having ever gone to school, and most importantly, able to recognize and know God instantly and in an immediate sense with no prior religious preparation. What a marvel that is.

We are told that after God formed man of the dust of the ground, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. Before 'the in-breathing,' there was no life in the formed body that God had shaped with all its intricacies. We read that it was the very breath of God breathed into man that brought him to life. Without that initial inflow of life that came from God's very breath, man would have only been a lifeless mannequin. It is this fact that relates man to God more specifically and directly.

It is this in-breathing of God that brought the image of God into man. Without a soul or spirit within him, man is lifeless. When we die it is obvious that the body lying there is no longer animated or functional, because the spirit has returned to God who gave it. The significance of all this is that the first man, from whom all other men came, in a true sense was made perfect. He recognized God, could intelligently converse with God and had the capacity to use critical observation and imagination. We are told that God brought the animals to him; both the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air and Adam gave names unto them all. Quite a formidable task, but remember he was created perfect.

We must never forget that out of Adam emerged the human race that continues to this day. Adam first, then Eve out of him, then us out of them. Consider for a moment we came out of our parents, our children came out of us and their children will come out of them. This is also a marvel—that enough life was breathed into Adam's being that it continues through us to the end of time. Now you may think, all this is well and good and somewhat awe inspiring, but why so much about Adam? Well, if we are going to talk about God and man we may as well start at the beginning. We are trying to establish more clearly that a relationship with God and the consciousness of Him is not really a matter of religious training or scriptural knowledge, but was from the beginning a natural and logical result of man being created in the image of God. We are said to be "the offspring of God." Since this is true, it seems natural that He from whom we have come would want to talk to us, commune with us, let us get to know Him, and even more so, know Him, since we are like unto God.

We are told God communed often with Adam; His voice and presence was known to Adam. It is stated that regarding the man and woman, "They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." It is implied that this was something that they were accustomed to. We don't know all the visitations and conversations that Adam and God had, but we know there were enough of them to indicate it was a very natural thing at that time. We know the story of the serpent and the failure of Adam and Eve in the Garden that led to their expulsion. But we must remember that it was not over between God and man, or of God's desire to make Him known to men and to show them His power and goodness. Let us keep this in mind as we look into a trail of divine activity in others' lives, as we see old things in new ways.

As the record continues we see the birth of Cain and Abel and the distinctions between them. Abel appears as a sincere and somewhat of a humble spirit. Cain is seen as arrogant and angry. And we also see that God was very much in their consciousness, for there is a running conversation between the Lord and Cain regarding his offering not being as pleasing to God as his brother Abel's. We are to assume that the way of sacrifice had been laid down and Cain chose to disregard it. God reasoned with Cain about his anger and resistance and told him that if he did right he would be accepted, letting him know that He was not playing favorites. The emphasis on Cain's anger toward his brother and his ultimate murder of him is also recorded for our benefit. This is where the infamous statement, "Am I my brother's keeper?" was made by Cain in response to God's question, "Where is thy brother?"

Lest we miss the significance of what was going on, remember not only were Adam and Eve conscious of God and apparently still experienced His presence, but Cain also knew God's presence and voice. The continued knowledge and presence of God appears again with Enoch, who is said to have "walked with God." The relationship was so strong that the above phrase seemed to best describe their communion. In fact, it appears God so enjoyed Enoch's presence that we are told, "He was not." He suddenly disappeared into thin air. The passage says, "God took him," for straight into the higher realm he went without dying. I am sure most of us are not anxious for that kind of a transition, but we would at some point like to leave this life and be in the heavenly atmosphere. I touch on this passage to show that the revelation of God's presence to men never stopped, but steadily continued to those who were spiritually inclined. There are countless passages that tell us of God's love for men and His desire to share Himself and His power with them. I have chosen to highlight some of the people who knew God in no uncertain terms, so that we all might be encouraged to reach for our own consciousness of God.

I have stayed pretty much with experiences of men before the law and the writings of the prophets to emphasize the fact that experience with God did come, and still can come, without any indoctrination or adherence to a religious dogma or creed. I believe there is much valid and true experience with God by many who have no formal attachment or membership in any particular church. They may not use the same terms or quote a multitude of scriptures, but their encounters with God and the genuineness of their faith has brought forth great things