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Repentance

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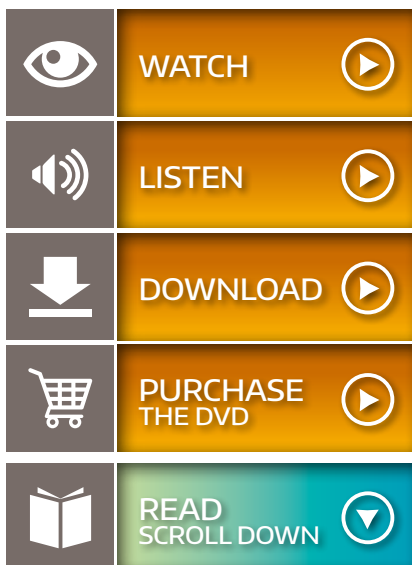
This booklet is based on a talk. Originating as it does from the spoken word, its style will be found by many readers to be somewhat different from my usual written style. It is hoped that this will not detract from the substance of the biblical teaching found here.

As always, I ask the reader to compare everything I say or write with what is written in the Bible and, if at any point a conflict is found, always to rely upon the clear teaching of scripture.

David Pawson

EXPLAINING Repentance

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EXPLAINING
Repentance

DAVID PAWSON

ANCHOR

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Foreward

I cannot recall when I last heard the topic of Repentance preached in Church, or at any Christian Conference for that matter. It would certainly be more than 40 years ago!

If, as Paul preaches, it is the first step in the correct birthing process of becoming a Christian, why is there so little mention of it today?

We appear to live in a world where all that matters is ‘God is love’, and if we ‘believe in Jesus’ all will be well.

Many people asked David to pray for revival in their church, their communities, and the Nation. I lost count of the number of times someone would say to David “what this nation needs is a revival!”

David was quite pointed in refusing to pray for revival stating “before revival comes there has to be Repentance”.

Let us pray for this Nation, our Church and our Government that the Lord will convict souls of their sin and their need to repent.

Steve

EXPLAINING Repentance

The first step in becoming a Christian - Repentance

The very first step of entering the kingdom of God has always been: Repent. The tragedy is, so many people are becoming Christians today without repenting, that God is having to tell *Christians* to repent in this country. He shouldn't need to be telling Christians to repent; the Church should be telling the world to repent. Instead, if you're hearing from God you know that He's telling the Church - Christians in Britain - to repent and catch up on what they should have done years ago. So that's the first step. But what does it mean to repent?

Regret is not Repentance

Most people, I'm afraid, think it's a matter of feelings, of tears, of feeling sorry for what you've done. But that may not be repentance, it may be simply Regret. A lot of people have feelings of regret about how they'd lived. I'd be surprised if there was anyone who didn't regret some of the decisions they've made in life. And feelings of regret are about what you've done to yourself, what you've done with your own life, and your own decisions.

Remorse is not Repentance

Then, there are other people who have deep feelings of what we call remorse; and remorse is what you feel about what you've done to others.

I remember meeting a man suffering from venereal disease as the result of his way of life, and he had passed on this venereal disease to his daughter. He was filled with remorse when he saw what he'd done to someone else. He had deep feelings of remorse about it, but that's not repentance.

What is true Repentance?

Repentance has this unique feature: that repentance is what you feel you have done to God. Now, that's quite different from Regret and Remorse. Suddenly you realize, "It's God I have hurt most" like the prodigal son realized it wasn't just his father he'd hurt. He said, "Father I have sinned against you, and against *heaven*." And as soon as that heaven dimension comes in, and you realize it's God you hurt most, and you realize it's *God's* laws you broke, it's *God's* love you refused, it's *God's* anger you've provoked, it's *God's* judgment you deserve, it's *God's* mercy you need - as soon as this God dimension enters in, it becomes what Paul calls, "the godly sorrow that leads to repentance." Regret and Remorse do not necessarily lead to repentance. Cain regretted bitterly what he'd done to Abel, but he never repented of it, never put it right, never confessed it. He just regretted the punishment he was now experiencing. Well that's a sort of simple introduction.

The Three Stages of Repentance – Thought, Word and Deed

I now want to tell you that repentance involves three things. So we're looking now at repentance. And in the New Testament repentance passes through three stages: very simply - Thought, Word, and Deed. Therefore, repentance takes time, and the trouble is, when you're trying to lead someone to Christ in five minutes, at the end of a meeting, while the bus is waiting for them, you can't take them through repentance properly. So, we just make them say

a sinner's prayer, "Lord Jesus I'm sorry for all my sins; I invite you into my life. Amen." That is not repentance. In fact, I doubt if you can repent in general. You probably know the general confession that is used in Anglican churches every Sunday, "I have left undone the things that I ought to have done, and I've done those things I ought not to have done, and there is no health in us." Always starts miserable sinners, doesn't it? Which produces an awful lot of miserable congregations. We *should* be happy saints, not miserable sinners. But a general confession when I hear it - and my wife and I are often in Anglican churches now, one in our village - I look at the congregation when they are confessing their sins, and I wonder, "Are you thinking of *anything* you've done or *anything* you've not done, or are you just signing a blank cheque?"

Repentance is of Particular Sins

You see I'm going to show you that repentance is always repentance of particular sins. You can't repent of general sins. You can only repent of this, and this, and this. That involves these three steps. It involves first of all *changing your mind* about particular things, and thinking God's way about them. And when you do this you come to two conclusions. First, God is a much better person than I thought He was. And second, I'm a much worse person than I thought I was. Usually, it's the other way on. When an unbeliever thinks about God, he thinks God is unfair and he's fair, that he's better than God. Have you noticed that? The number of people who say, "Why does God do this? Why does God allow that? Why should God..." They're saying, "I know better than God, and if I were running the universe I could do it better than He's doing it." That's what they're saying, and they're really setting themselves as a better person than God is. They're saying, "He's making mistakes which

I wouldn't. He's treating people in a way I wouldn't. I'm, therefore, a better person than He is."

When you repent, your *thoughts* take a somersault. And when you catch a glimpse of His holiness and His purity, you begin to realize how mucky you are, and you have a much lower view of yourself. In fact, the higher your view of God, the lower your view of yourself. *Repentance is a change of mind.* The Greek word *metanoia* means to have second thoughts. *Meta* 'change' or 'after', and '*noia*' mind: to think again about the way you've been living. It begins when you change your mind, when you think God's way, and then you realize not only that your bad deeds are pretty horrible; amazingly, you begin to see that your good deeds are just as offensive to God.

It comes as a shock to many people when they realize in their mind that the best things they've ever done are not good enough for God; and that our righteousness has to be repented of as well as our sin. That our good deeds as well as our bad deeds need to be put away. Now what a revolution that is. Most people think repentance covers the bad things you've done, but in the Bible it covers the good things you've done as well. Let me give you two texts from the Bible, which are a bit blunt for a Christian congregation, but the Bible is a blunt book. It's, unfortunately, been tidied up in English for polite congregations, but in the Hebrew and Greek it's a very earthy book.

Isaiah said this - and this is one the ladies will understand - Isaiah said, "Our righteousness to God is like a menstrual cloth, a disposable napkin." That's how you feel about your righteousness once you think God's way.

Here's one for the men. Paul says in Philippians 3, "When I consider the commandments I kept" - not those I broke - and he kept nine out of ten of the Ten Commandments, he said, "When I consider the ones I kept, I count them dung."

He says, I feel like a little boy who has emptied his bowels into a potty, and is holding it up and saying, 'look what I've done.' He uses a very down to earth Greek word for human excreta for which there's a well-known Anglo-Saxon equivalent. And that's the Bible. In other words, you realize that your righteousness is as far short of God's standard as your bad deeds. And you leave the lot behind you and you say, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to your cross I cling." That's to come to the truth about yourself.

I love that story about an old preacher in the slave plantations in the deep South of America. He was preaching on the prodigal son and he said, "He took off his jacket and he threw it away, he took off his shirt and he threw that away, he took off his vest and he threw that away, and then brothers, he just came to himself." To come to yourself means finally, to strip away all the covering and get to the real truth of your condition. The interesting thing is, the closer you get to God the worse you feel; the more you understand how good He is, the more you realize how bad you are. Realizing that, thinking that way, is the first major step, but that's not the end of repentance.

The second step is the *word* of repentance, and that means *first* to confess sins. Protestants, in reaction to the Catholic practice of confession, have neglected confession. If you'd gone to John the Baptist, and asked for baptism he would have said, "Then before you go into the water, make a public confession of your sins." They insisted on that. You look up how many times in the New Testament it says, "Confess your sins to one another." Do you know I've found it's therapeutic if I'm counselling an enquirer to get them to name the sins they want forgiven. That does two good things for them. It first of all helps them to be accountable for specific things. Somebody comes to me and says, "I'd like to be a Christian." "Oh you'd like your sins forgiven?" "Yes." "You'd like to be

saved from your sins?” “Yes.” “Then you tell me what sins you want to be saved from.” I find *that’s* when repentance begins.

Somehow naming it gets it out into the light. My heart always leaps when somebody says to me in those situations, “I’ve never told anyone this before.” I thought, there’s a release coming in a moment. It’s coming into the light; it’s getting out. Even just *saying* it somehow does something about it and it’s specific then. “Lord, it’s this, and it’s this, and it’s this.” There is no confession of general sin in the New Testament; there are only confessions of “sins” plural—a list.

It also helps – confession - to make a person responsible. When you confess sins you can’t make excuses. You can’t say, “Well it wasn’t my fault.” Because confession is to say, “It *was* my fault, *I chose* that way.” Let me say something that could be misunderstood. There’s an awful lot of inner healing around now, and I find Christians would rather have inner healing than forgiveness because forgiveness demands repentance. It’s so easy to blame someone else for my hang-ups and to say, “Well it was my parents, and what they did to me. It was what happened to me as a child”; and to say, “I need healing. I don’t need forgiveness, I need healing.”

But listen, we are *not* the result of what’s been done to us. We are the result of *what we’ve done* about what’s been done to us. It’s the choices of reaction that we have made that have made us what we are. If I’m bitter it’s because I’ve chosen to resent what was done to me, rather than forgive it. In fact, I really believe that more people are in need of repentance than inner healing, though there’s still a place for that where the Holy Spirit can go back and sort out a problem from early years. But the basic need of mankind is not for inner healing, but for repentance that makes it possible for God to forgive. Of saying, “I am what I am now because *I chose* at crucial points of my life a way that leads to this character.” We are all the result of our *choice*.

And to treat someone as responsible for what they've done is to treat them with the dignity of a human being—they are not a pavlovian dog. You are saying to someone, “You are a human being; you have the will to choose; you have chosen.” I've heard men in court, in the dock plead, “Well I got into bad company, your Honour.” Never have I heard a man say, “I chose that company” - just “I got into bad company.” But we *choose* our friends. We choose the company we keep. We choose the ambitions we have. We choose, we choose. And confession is saying, “I made the wrong choice, and I'm responsible.”

That's the beginning of lifting a person to the dignity of a responsible human being. And to get them to spell it out in words is very important. If we confess our *sins* - not our *sin* - if we confess our sins, which means name them one by one, just as you do your blessings, then He is faithful and just to forgive each one our sins, and His blood goes on keeping us clean - beautiful promise.

As well as confession, that's one part of the words of forgiveness, it is also important in certain sins to get a person to renounce that thing. To say in words before God, “I'm finished with it. I will not go back to it.” To renounce! Do you know, in early baptism they were always asked to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, and say publicly I have nothing more to do with those false masters—to renounce.

Proving Repentance

Now comes the hard part of repentance, which is *deeds*. Here's a part of repentance that many people don't realize; this is what takes time. Repentance begins with thought, it then comes out in words, but it must then come out in deeds. I give you two texts. John the Baptist, if somebody came and said, “I want to be baptized” said this, “Produce fruit worthy of repentance, and then I'll baptize you.” They said, “Well what do you

mean?” “Well,” he said, “If you have too many clothes, go and give some away. If you’re fiddling your finance, go and get the books straight. If you’re bullying someone because of your power, stop doing it.” And then, here’s one for today, “Be content with your wages.” Where are the preachers in Britain preaching that today, preaching it to the teachers, preaching it to the nurses? Where are the preachers preaching that? We’re not preaching it because we’re not preaching repentance. But boy, there’s a practical repentance, “Be content with your wages.” How many people who are baptized in your church do you ask, “Are you content with your wages?” We laugh nervously because we know perfectly well we’re just getting them to repeat a general confession in the sinner’s prayer. We’re not pinning it down to reality.

Now Paul said this, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” But what was the heavenly vision he was not disobedient to? I wonder if you know. If you read the verse it says this, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but I preached repentance to the Gentiles, that they should turn - or convert - to God, *and prove their repentance* by their deeds.” And Paul’s ministry was a ministry of getting people to prove their repentance by their deeds. I believe we should stop baptizing people on profession of faith, and baptize them on proof of repentance. Now just let that sink in.

Putting the Past Right

Zacchaeus - when Jesus came to have lunch with Zacchaeus, the little man up the tree in more ways than one - Jesus came to his house and Zacchaeus over lunch said, ‘Jesus I’ve been defrauding people, but from now on, I’m going to be straight and I’m going to keep my books honest.’ He didn’t say that. He said, “I’m going to go to everyone I’ve defrauded, and pay them back with interest, fourfold.” And Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house.”

Repentance is putting the past right. You can't put all sins right, but there are some the Lord will show you can be put right. I preached in Canberra in the houses of Parliament to members of both houses in Australia. And after the time together, which was pretty hot – Boy! They know how to heckle a speaker there - and it was hot. But after a time one of their most prominent politicians, as he left the room, whispered to me, “I'm going home to rewrite my income tax returns.” My heart leapt. There were no tears, but there was repentance. He had thought God's way. He put it into words, and he was going home to rewrite his income tax. That's where the rubber hits the road, as they say. That's repentance, *deeds* of repentance - doing something about it; putting the past right, bringing it to a proper conclusion; cutting the umbilical cord that ties you to Satan's kingdom, tying it off so that you're free of it.

It may involve a negative thing, like destroying something. In fact, last time I was in Ashford I had to advise someone to go home and burn his Freemason's apron, which he did. And we need sometimes to do that. In Ephesus they burned thousands of pounds' worth of occult books. You read Acts 19—this is all part of the deeds of repentance. And this has been so neglected in our preaching that no wonder the Lord is having to tell Christians to go back, and repent, and put things right. But when they do, there's a tremendous relief.

I was preaching in Aberdeen for three nights in the central theatre there. After the second night a girl came up to me, she was very upset, she was blotchy faced, she was crying, she was shaking, and she said, “Oh Mr. Pawson you're frustrating me!” She said, “I want to be a Christian. I've tried to be a Christian. I've gone forward at every evangelistic meeting in Aberdeen for eighteen months including the Luis Palau crusade.” And she said, “Nothing has changed. Nothing has happened. I've signed cards, I've been counselled, I've been

to classes, nothing has happened. I'm beginning to doubt if there's anything in it, but I still want to be a Christian."

What do you do with a girl like that? I looked her in the eye. I said, "Who are you living with?" She said, "I live with a young man." I said, "Are you married to him?" "No." "Are you living as if you were married?" "Yes." "Why aren't you married?" "Well he doesn't believe in it, he says it's just a legal bit of paper. As long as we love each other that's all that matters." I said, "Well you've got a very difficult decision to make. I wish I could make it for you, but I can't. You've got to make it. You've got to decide which man you want to live with—that young man or Jesus." And then she really got angry. She said, "No one else told me I had to do that!" I said, "But you've told me you're getting nowhere with any of the others." I said, "Jesus won't join in an arrangement like that. You've got to decide."

Now if this was a preacher's story I would tell you that she fell on her knees, confessed, and was gloriously saved. But I'm afraid it's not a preacher's story, it's the truth, and so I'd better tell you the truth. She ran out of that theatre sobbing her heart out, and I have thought of that girl again, and again, and again. I know how Jesus felt about the rich young ruler who wouldn't give up his money. Do you know what the problem was? Everybody who had counselled that girl had told her to believe in Jesus; they hadn't started by saying repent. You see? And so she was stuck. And so often that's the problem; we've started at step number two. Jesus and John the Baptist and Peter on the day of Pentecost all started with the word repent.

Helping Someone to Repent

Now at the very practical level to help someone to repent, you need to help them to do three things. The first thing we need to help them to do is to be serious because repenting is

a serious business. It can't be taken lightly; I'm nearly going to repeat the words of the marriage service now. Ought not to be undertaken lightly or lightheartedly, or whatever the words are. I can't remember them now. I knew I said them. Well now how do we help someone to be serious? I very much doubt if they will be serious unless something of fear is in the relationship. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And we need to help people into the right kind of fear to be serious.

Perished People

I think you can best do that by pointing out where their present way of life will lead them. The word I've found most helpful in helping people to realize that is the word "perish." I've said, "Do you realize what it is to perish?" Now that word in English means exactly the same as it does in the Greek. If you have a perished hot water bottle, what do you have? Is it still a hot water bottle? Well, it looks like one, doesn't it? It can't hold water, but is it still a hot water bottle? When a hot water bottle is perished - or a tyre - it can't be used for the purpose for which it was made. It still looks like one, may feel like one, but it can't be used as one.

A perished human being still looks like a human being, feels like a human being, but can't be used as a human being. What do you do with something that's perished? You throw it away or you burn it in the incinerator. Hell is God's incinerator for perished people. They don't cease to be people; they are just no more use to Him. I think that's the most terrible destiny that a human being could ever have—to become utterly useless. Unemployment redundancy is enough to destroy your self-respect, but to know that you have ceased to be of any further use to God or to anyone else, that's what perished means. And God so loved us that He didn't want us to perish. That's what Hell is; it's a place

where you are no use to yourself, to others, or to God, and you spend the rest of your existence with people who are no use to you, or to themselves, or to God. I can think of nothing more terrible than that, but that's the end product of living without God. The fear of becoming utterly redundant in God's universe, that's the fear of the Lord. Jesus, you know, said something about nuclear disarmament. Did you know that? He said, "Don't fear those who can kill your body, rather fear Him who can destroy body and soul in Hell." Perished people.

The second thing we need to do for people, to help them to repent, is to help them to be specific—to confess sins, plural; to name them, to get down to the nitty gritty. If you say to someone, "Do you want to be saved from your sins?" "Oh yes." "Well which sins do you want to be saved from?" "Oh, all of them." "Well which one shall we start with?" It's too easy for people to say, "Oh yes I'm a sinner, everybody is, everybody's sinned. I'm a sinner." "In what way have *you* sinned then?" We need to help people to be specific. So how can we do that? There are three ways. The first way is a guided conversation in which you steer them. Now you must keep their confidence, they must feel that you will keep their confidence, but just to steer them. "Then what is your besetting sin? What's the one you'd most like to be free of? Because Jesus wants to set you free from it. What's the one that you most hate yourself for?" A guided conversation can become specific.

The second way is to give them a detailed list. A friend of mine actually has prepared such a list of all kinds of things that people get involved in, and before he counsels someone he gives them a sheet of paper and says, "Go through this list. Have you been involved in any of these occult things, or any of these perverted habits?" They go through and they tick them, and then he's able to counsel them. That's a very practical way

of doing it. The New Testament contains about thirty lists, and between them they cover one hundred and twenty sins which God counts sin. And sometimes it's helpful to have a detailed list, and get them to go through it, and tick off.

A third way - and this is a way that's available to the counsellor who's moving in the Holy Spirit - is an immediate revelation. Sometimes I have asked the Holy Spirit to show the person I'm counselling what the root problem is, what the taproot is. At other times I've asked Him to show *me* what the root problem is, and then surprise the person by asking them about it. The Holy Spirit wants to reveal the taproots. Let me give you an illustration: I've found that behind every homosexual man that I've counselled is a sad history of a father and mother who exchanged roles. And the mother became the dominant authority figure, and the father the comfort figure. That is why so much homosexuality is being produced, why the roles are being confused, and it's the children and grandchildren who suffer from confusion.

I was counselling a dear boy, a public school boy; a lovely boy, lovely Christian, but he was just crippled with this temptation, which he gave way to regularly. I really felt for him. I said, "When did this begin?" "Oh," he said, "at boarding school." Now boys' boarding schools have a lot to answer for, believe me, but I said, "No the Holy Spirit is telling me it began long before that." And he said, "No, I can't remember it beginning before boarding school." I said, "But the Holy Spirit tells me it's before that. So tell me about your parents."

Sad case of a wife who'd been through three husbands; a dominant woman who just changed partners when she wanted to and he was the product of the third husband. The wife had taken the authority role in the home—she had dominated. The result was that when he wanted comfort, he'd climb into bed with his father not his mother, and did not realize that

the father was not getting comfort from the mother, and was getting it from the son. The whole thing emerged, and it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to reveal this so that we could really get down to the root problem of it. See now, these are the three ways to get down to specifics: a guided conversation, a detailed list, and an immediate revelation.

Be Sensible

And finally - and this must be in one minute - to be sensible. That is necessary in two ways. First, to be sensible as far as the emotions of repentance are concerned. Sometimes people have an exaggerated sense of guilt over the wrong thing - their feelings have deceived them. It's possible, for example, for men to feel more guilty about masturbation, which is not mentioned in the Bible, than murder. So, we need to help them to be sensible in emotions, and not let their feelings get things out of proportion. Psychological guilt is not moral guilt, and it's moral guilt that Jesus cures. Not what *we feel* guilty about, but what *we are* guilty of. The other way we need to be sensible is in the *actions of repentance*. You can't go back and put everything right, so we need to help them to be sensible about what they do.

One friend of mine went to the police and confessed to a crime he'd committed. Taken to court, he was given the lightest possible sentence of two months; went into prison; preached Jesus in prison. The prisoners called him the Bishop. So when he came out, he confessed to another crime and got back into another prison and preached the gospel there. And he proudly told me, "I'm the only evangelist in Britain entirely financed by Her Majesty the Queen."

Now that was within the realm of common sense. He could have gone overboard on it. We need to help people to be sensible about what can be put right and what can't. But in this way we have helped them to repent.



ABOUT DAVID PAWSON

A speaker and author with uncompromising faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures, David brings clarity and a message of urgency to Christians to uncover hidden treasures in God's Word.

Born in England in 1930, David began his career with a degree in Agriculture from Durham University. When God intervened and called him to become a Minister, he completed an MA in Theology at Cambridge University and served as a Chaplain in the Royal Air Force for three years. He moved on to pastor several churches, including the Millmead Centre in Guildford, which became a model for many UK church leaders. In 1979, the Lord led him into an international ministry. His current itinerant ministry is predominantly to church leaders. David and his wife Enid currently reside in the county of Hampshire in the UK.

Over the years, he has written a large number of books, booklets, and daily reading notes. His extensive and very accessible overviews of the books of the Bible have been published and recorded in *Unlocking the Bible*. Millions of copies of his teachings have been distributed in more than 120 countries, providing a solid biblical foundation.

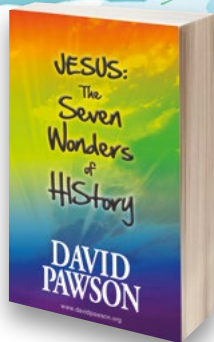
He is reputed to be the "most influential Western preacher in China" through the broadcast of his best-selling *Unlocking the Bible* series into every Chinese province by Good TV. In the UK, David's teachings are often broadcast on Revelation TV.

Countless believers worldwide have also benefited from his generous decision in 2011 to make available his extensive audio video teaching library free of charge at www.davidpawson.org and we have recently uploaded all of David's video to a dedicated channel on www.youtube.com



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JESUS: THE SEVEN WONDERS OF HISTORY

This book is the result of a lifetime of telling 'the greatest story ever told' around the world. David re-told it to many hundreds of young people in Kansas City, USA, who heard it with uninhibited enthusiasm, 'tweeting' on the internet about 'this cute old English gentleman' even while he was speaking.

Taking the middle section of the Apostles' Creed as a framework, David explains the fundamental facts about Jesus on which the Christian faith is based in a fresh and stimulating way. Both old and new Christians will benefit from this 'back to basics' call and find themselves falling in love with their Lord all over again.



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5. His Ascension
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7. His Judgement



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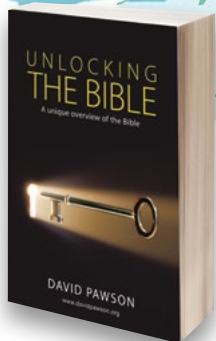
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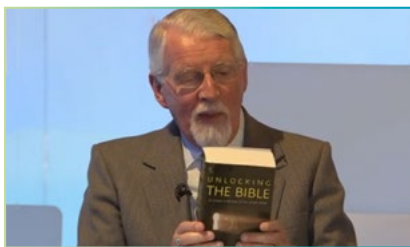
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