
WORSHIPING GOD IN

SPIRIT AND TRUTH

A Magazine for Understanding God's Truth

“Do not put your trust in
princes, or in human
beings, because you will
not find any help in them.”

(Psalm 146:3; author's paraphrase)

October – December 2015

In This Issue

From the Pastor: A frank discussion about the degree to which you can have confidence in the things mortals promise you. This discussion is born out of the content of this election cycle – during which many promises will be made to the electorate. How much control do mortals actually have over their promises? You need to know how to avoid being deceived by well-intentioned politicians who can promise the moon with no power to deliver. Page 2

Making *Your* Life Matter: Why is it a problem when one group of people claims exclusive ownership of whose life matters? One Democratic presidential candidate was forced to bow to “political correctness” because he dared to include other groups in the ones who claim exclusive rights to the lives that matter. What does God say about this? Are there any basic “rules of life” that can make all lives matter? Are the rules that lead to success “racial” in nature? Page 7

The 2016 Holy Day Calendar: Some of the factors that are involved in the setting up of The Seventh Day Christian Assembly’s Holy Day Calendar are not considered by others in our tradition: (1) the various “rules of postponement” that have been used since Hillel II, (b) how to determine the astronomical starting point relative to the Spring Equinox, and (c) whether or not the intercalation of Adar II (leap year) seven times during a 19-year cycle has any effect on “postponements.” I have been made aware of the fact that the 2016 Holy Day Calendar is going to put the method we use to construct the calendar to a major test because we will be observing the Holy Days about 30 days before the others in our tradition. Learn why this conflict exists. Page 14

How We Construct Our Holy Day Calendar: This detailed explanation about how we construct our Holy Day Calendar not only helps you to understand the reasons for the difference between our calendar and those of other similar groups, it teaches you how to construct a Holy Day Calendar for any given year. It gives you the tools you need to “check up” on us. Page 15

The 2016 – 2020 Holy Day Calendars Page 19

Atonement and the Law: In Romans 3:31, the Apostle Paul asks the question about whether or not faith makes the Law void. Some say “Yes.” They base that answer partly on Colossians 2:14 by insisting that Paul’s statement means that the Law was “nailed to the cross” and cancelled. Others (generally the same people) insist that Hebrews 8:8, 13 support that claim by saying that Jesus Christ “will make a new covenant” and the mere mention of a “new covenant” means that the previous covenant and all that was involved in it has been abolished ... even the 10 Commandments. The objective of this study is to demonstrate how wrongheaded such theology is and how you can know God’s truth about the “new” covenant. Page 20



The Pastor

In this article, I want to discuss how much trust we should put in the things that other mortals promise to do for us when they run for an elected office. Of course, you should be able to apply the logic to any situation in life when one mortal commits his life and abilities to the welfare of others. There is a very good reason for posing the questions I pose and giving the answers that I give. The questions involve the matter of a mortal's ability to control the flow of events from promise to fulfillment. It also involves whether or not the one who makes the promise has the true *intention* of actually doing what s/he says. Both of these things make it all the more important for you to pay attention to David when he writes: "Do not put your trust in princes, or in human beings, because you will not find any help in them." Let's seriously consider the implications of David's advice.

Background to David's Comment

When you fully understand the first four verses of David's 146th Psalm, you get the great overview of the difference between the divine and the mortal (see also Isa. 55:8, 9). Notice verse 2 where David says: "While I live..." This comment presupposes that there will come a time when he, the princely mortal, will not live. Indeed, on the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter testified that "David ... is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). Why was this comment important?

It was Peter's objective to draw a distinction between the crucified Lord's experience with death and that which was experienced by David. Read Peter's analogy in Acts 2:22-36. This is an account of the sacrificial experience of the Lord about whom David wrote in Psalm 146. According to Peter, David was not prophesying his own experience with death in Psalm 16:8-11. The key point to Peter's analogy is Psalm 16:10: "You will not leave my body in the grave or allow it to break down and disintegrate" (author's paraphrase; see Gen. 3:19). David's mortal body had long since disintegrated; Jesus' mortal body did not even putrefy before God raised Him from the dead.

So, David reveals that it is God who has the power to act on the behalf of mortals ... and He does so for His own purposes and in His own time. Even though

David was a special king in the Lord God's sight, it gave him no special privilege to effect his own resurrection from the grave or to be protected from disintegration back to his dust. The point is that the mere mortal is greatly limited in what s/he can do to affect your life temporarily or permanently.

Notice in Psalm 146:4 that David says that both the princes and the ordinary mortal will breathe out their last breath, turn into their own personal pile of dust, and cease to have thoughts (which, naturally, drive their actions). He says in Psalm 30:9 that the dead cannot praise God in the grave. Ecclesiastes 9:10 is an echo of this same thought: In the grave, there is no such thing as work, schemes and plans, knowledge, or wisdom. That is the basis for Jesus Christ's parable about the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31: If living mortals refuse to pay attention to *Moses* and the *Prophets* (see Isa. 8:20, Matt. 5:17, and Acts 15:13-21), not even raising a mortal from the grave to be a divine messenger to them will affect the way they think and act.

David's message is both compelling and simple: Mortals are very limited in what they can do, regardless of how wise and wonderful and rich and powerful they might otherwise be. James points out the lesson very well when he says:

Face the facts all of you who declare that you will go to such-and-such a place to transact

some kind of business and make money at it! You have no idea about or control over what tomorrow will bring. What is your life but a little puff of smoke that appears for a moment and then disappears? You ought to say: If God wills it and allows us to live, we will do this or that (author's paraphrase).

So, what do you think this has to do with elections or anything else in which mortals lay out grandiose plans to make your life better? Can you really depend on them to deliver the "goods"?

The Reality of the Mortal's Limitations

In order to avoid waxing long in discussion, let's take a few selected examples of mortal limitations that can be generalized to the entire human population. Please pay attention to what is involved in each example so that you get the point more clearly. Let's strike a difference between the promise and the reality.

It is okay for the political candidate to preface his/her campaign platform with "If I get elected..." All this means is that there exists two possible outcomes: (1) S/he will get elected, or (2) S/he will not get elected. This statement hinges on the same proposition presented by James: "If God wills..." This is conditional and depends on circumstances beyond the politician's control. But, the "iffiness" of it assumes that a certain reality will be accomplished should that election go in that politician's favor.

The promise is that to which you should pay attention. "I will pass a law that..." You should be aware that the single individual might have influence in the legal process, but s/he cannot unilaterally pass any kind of law because so many others are part of the process, as is the question of constitutionality. The politician's "valid" excuse for not making good on the promise lies in the lack of cooperation by so many others. This is called a contingency (something that is based on time and chance, not reality). The mortal has little control over time and chance.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 says this:

... The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the man of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all (KJV; emphases added).

If time and chance happen to all of us, then we should use that knowledge when we contemplate putting our trust in princes and mortals. For all practical purposes, it is like playing the lottery. Contingencies are a huge problem. How could President George W. Bush ever have anticipated 9/11/01? How could Americans have anticipated many of the natural disasters that have occurred during just the past 25 years? The contingency makes things "iffy" at best ... and the candidate has little control over that.

Professional Politicians

The 2016 presidential race seems to have become a referendum on the competence and practices of the "professional" politicians. The overarching perception is that they either cannot or will not do what is necessary, good, and right for the entire nation because they are controlled by "big money": rich donors and very influential lobbyists. Money is not always the medium of exchange in the relationships. "Intangibles" can also enrich someone in ways that money cannot.

This practice makes about as much sense as the thought in the Earl Thomas Conley song "Somewhere between Right and Wrong" where he quotes an inebriated woman in a bar saying:

I can be had, but I can't be bought.
I can be bad, if I don't get caught.
I'd rather be loved, than left alone
And be here in the middle
Somewhere between right and wrong.

Whether or not you are "bought" or "caught" does not make void the lack of integrity of the act in which you are engaging. Being left in the middle somewhere between right and wrong because of a lack of love seems to be the product of acts of desperation, rather than acts of wisdom and integrity. Yet, it is patently obvious that many politicians pander themselves for some kind of advantage that boosts their own ego and/or agenda.

The term pander defines someone who acts as a go-between (a procurer or pimp) to enable others to satisfy their vices, desires, et cetera. The agendas of many professional politicians have to do with "you scratch my back, and I will scratch yours." This is often descriptive of the secret, smoke-filled, backroom meetings in which such bargains are made.

The Purpose of Political Pandering

Isaiah 1:5, 6, and 23 is one part of a long list of complaints the Lord God had against Israel and her leaders and how they shamelessly violated the covenant they had with Him to be her “husband” ... her provider and protector. Isn’t that part of the oath of office that politicians take; you know, essentially entering a covenant agreement to protect and serve?

Notice how Isaiah frames this prophecy with his proof—and how he includes the people in the problem:

Why should you be stricken anymore? You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment ... Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: everyone loves gifts, and follows after rewards: they do not judge the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come unto them.

The point is crucial to the welfare of a nation: The people cannot be content to be “had,” not “caught” for their bad behavior, and left to live “somewhere in the middle between right and wrong.” They cannot be left to live dispirited, weak, and timid lives in which they are buffeted and bruised at every turn and left improperly attended ... if attended at all (think of Veterans’ Affairs as one example out of many). The people must make better choices for their own lives, and the leaders must do what is right for all of the people ... not for just a select few who heap on them money and “intangibles.”

There are issues in our country that have festered for decades because of the “professional” politicians who have been “bought” and “had” while serving one feckless term after another because they have “friends” in what Garth Brooks calls “low places.” You must be smarter about the people to whom you give the reins of government. If you keep on electing the same feckless people and expecting different results, then there is something wrong with your reasoning. This kind of problem is more about the politician’s intentions and integrity than it is about his/her competence. *If you will not allow God to be the true leader of the nation, then you had better make smarter choices about whom you democratically elect to lead you!*

Now let’s discuss the purpose of political pandering. It is called panem et circenses (food and entertainment provided by government to calm and/or quieten unrest and/or discontent). Take note of all of the “goodies” any given politician offers for your vote. Ask yourself whether or not s/he can really control the outpouring of the goods and services s/he is offering. Toward what objective are they offered? Are you selfish enough to give away your one vote in order to get that “free stuff” from the government? Are there any “strings” attached or any possible unintended consequences that would result in less personal freedom? How will it affect your life in the long-run?

Take the issue of illegal aliens as an example. Would blanket amnesty really solve the problem? Has it done so when attempted in the past? If not, why not? Is this issue high on any given politician’s agenda because of the votes s/he would get from the affected demographic? Is the politician offering his/her “services” in supporting either blanket amnesty or mass deportation merely for the political advantage it would give him/her over his/her opponents? Will it encourage an increase in the number of illegal aliens?

The same could be true for issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, women’s rights, unions, et cetera ad nauseum. Bundle a bunch of these issues together, and you soon attract many different political “camps” that could give you a victory ... whether or not any of it really serves the best interests of all of the people.

Ask yourself this question: Is this panem et circenses really a stealthy way for government to subvert (overthrow, corrupt, destroy) the morals and/or freedoms of the populace? Much of the subversive actions of government take place over a long period of time. It is realized by the proponents of such actions that attempting such changes in one fell swoop move is too shocking; therefore, the victories must be small victories won over a long period of time. If the ultimate victory comes well after the lifetimes of the proponents, they are satisfied before that time to have played their role as a small “cog” in a big “wheel.” Such an approach to politics is in the nature of what is called “progressivism”—making “progress” in short increments over a long period of time.

During the progress of effecting the desired change, society is conditioned slowly and surely to either allow or accept the proposed change. “Change” agents are at work constantly bombarding the thought processes of

society to yield ground and accept the desired “change.” Ways and arguments are created to make them appear to be “rights” that have been denied—the denial of which is said to amount to oppression, prejudice, and backward thinking.

The “sexual revolution” is merely one among countless changes that amount to “progress” in society. What is not noticed in the process is the “shell game” by which changes are made simply because a series of changes of lesser importance has been successful. For example: After making numerous concessions to the “sexual revolution,” we now make concessions to the “drug culture” by wrapping it in the “benefit” of being able to tax it and eliminate the drug lords and illegal trafficking. We compare something like marijuana to an acceptable “drug” (like alcohol) and say that it is no different.

The proponents aver that we can tax it and support the growing needs of the political “football” known as *education*, fix our damaged and aging infrastructure, buy body cameras for our police forces, and a plethora of other things. The average member of society does not do his/her due diligence and research the issues very thoroughly but admits that the reasoning makes sense.

Read Proverbs 14:12 for a sense of this reasoning. If you do not admit that there are unintended consequences to the way these things are handled, then the “eye is never satisfied” (Ecc. 1:8). The unabated lust for power and control will lead to more and more clear and present dangers (see James 4:1-3).

With one small victory at a time, the mind is led by *stealth* to concede to other changes and demands. And the government “eats” its fill and gets fatter and fatter ... and needs more and more. In some circles, this is compared to the hog pen where the “trough” needs to stay full all the time for the demanding appetites.

In the end, the purpose of political pandering is to get as much as possible from as many as possible in order to satisfy the political agendas of the politicians so they can claim that they have kept their promises to their constituents. It boils down to a lack of appetite control.

When is enough *really* enough? How many “bridges to nowhere” do we have to build? Why can’t we settle on a model of education that is classic, enduring, and unfettered from the control of special interest groups? Why does the model have to change every four-to-five years and require re-training for our national education force? Why must the moral climate

have to be subjected to change with the times and the carnal cravings of certain elements of the population? What is so difficult about making one law that applies to everyone and sticking to it? Why can’t there be one, stable tax code that treats everyone the same? If our supposed *exceptionalism* is worth the breath it requires to say it, where is the implied genius that can solve these problems?

The True Source of the Problem

When the Lord God had put together a nation that was going to be His own exceptional nation, He bound them to Himself with a covenant (Ex. 19:1-8). That covenant was based on two primary laws that were expressed in what is known as “10 Words.” In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus Christ identified the two primary laws as being: (1) unconditional, abiding, and faithful love of God and (2) unconditional, faithful, and abiding love for your fellow man. Many today claim that you cannot legislate morality. In both cases, the Lord God did exactly that. Any time a government distinguishes a “right” behavior from a “wrong” behavior, it has legislated morality. What you *allow* as “right” and “wrong” behavior is another matter. What did the Lord God allow by His legislation?

There are four “laws” that He established to define “supreme love of God”: (1) He is to be the only God; (2) He is not to be represented by iconography of any kind and no one is allowed to worship any iconography that represents “God”; and (3) No one is allowed to use His name as a claim to be in holy covenant with Him while s/he pursues a lifestyle that contradicts the holiness that He represents. When a people put the ubiquitous term “God” on their currency as a representation of their compliance to these demands, they had best be the holy people that such a claim represents. Otherwise, they will have broken covenant with the God therein represented. (4) You are to remember and keep holy the specific day (the seventh) that He created as holy time—time to be used to worship Him and learn what true holiness is (see Gen. 2:1-3).

There are six “laws” that He established to define “love of neighbor as oneself”: (5) parents living honorable lives, and children giving them the honor and respect they deserve for setting the proper example of a life well lived; (6) giving life to others rather than taking life through murder; (7) avoiding *anything* that breaks covenant with the marriage vow; (8) never stealing anything in any way from God or your neigh-

bor; (9) never lying about or to your neighbor; and (10) never having an intense, lustful desire to acquire something that belongs to your neighbor: his home, wife, employees, work animals, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

If everyone lived by those 10 simple laws, think of what a radical change would come over our world. Think about how different the “politics” would be. However, what we find in our world is something totally different ... something that is identified in Hebrews 8 as the root cause of all of our problems. Here it is:

If that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. Because He *found fault with them* [the people], He says, “Behold, the days come, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”

Now read vv. 9, 10 to see what new component will be added to the “new” covenant. It appears that the laws will become part of the way they think and act ... the laws will be *spiritually* understood and obeyed. This new aspect takes all of the “iffiness” out of the results because the mind drives the actions (read Rom. 12:1, 2 along with Gal. 5:22-26).

Which politician presents ways by which all of the people can be more spiritually inclined and knowledgeable? Which politician presents a political platform that will enable a people to honor the holiness of God and, thereby, enrich their own lives by being holy as God is holy? It is very difficult to do when the *people* are all over the map about what is right and wrong, holy and unholy, legal and illegal.

It is very difficult when a people do not put God’s rules of conduct ahead of man’s selfishness and greed. It is very difficult when the actions of the people suggest that we have God “in a box” and He will bless us and protect us regardless of our divisive and unholy thoughts and deeds. Such an attitude of the people will ultimately bring upon the nation the same kind of disaster into which Israel and Judah fell and caused God to disassociate Himself from them!

You cannot have 32,000+ “Christian” denominations plus a wide range of other religions and expect God to be pleased that so many are “religious” (see Matt. 7:21-23; 24:4, 5; and John 4:23, 24). You cannot be impressed with politicians who gratuitously throw in references to the ubiquitous “God” to lure you to support their “shell games.” You cannot be impressed

that princes and mortal men have the ability, outside of the true God’s favor, to do anything that will deliver you from the problems we face in this very complicated and wicked world. If we focus our attention on things through the world’s “eye,” instead of God’s “eye,” we will be the losers in the end. We need to figure out how to do it God’s way.

Conclusion

It is time that we take a long, hard look at the limitations of politicians as they forecast their abilities to “save” us out of the messes that they, for the most part, have gotten us into. Their boasts of “I will do this or that” are like the description penned by Peter in 2 Peter 2:17-19 regarding false prophets:

These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest ... For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure [others] through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness ... While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: because of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage.

At which point do we begin to apply Matthew 24:4, 5 to them and admit that they are wannabe “Messiahs”? At which point do we begin realize that our collective fate is more tied to “If God wills...” than to “If I am elected...”? At which point do we realize that the fault of our messes lies at our own feet and God is disassociating Himself from us because He will not lend His holy name to our self-centered, evil ways?

If you want to understand this more thoroughly, read Jeremiah 7. Note all of the reasons for which He withdrew His name from Israel and Judah. Now listen to the implication that is silently voiced in the background: “*If I did this to my own covenant people, do not for one minute think that I will not do it to you.*”

We must realize that the demagogues (those who stir up people’s emotions to win them over to their side) and the demigods (those who make themselves appear as “gods”) are not our *saviors*. Ultimately, they are part of the chaff that the wind blows away. And ... the wind pretty much blows where it wants to (John 3:8). Listen to what the Spirit has to say. It is important to be influenced by God’s Holy Spirit in what you think and do (see John 14:26).

Making Your Life Matter

(“Life Lessons” for a More Successful Life)

During my years as an educator, I enjoyed the many opportunities I had to teach my students “life lessons” that were directly and indirectly applicable to the subject matter I taught. Whether you call them “laws of success” or “common sense rules to live by” or “how to make your life matter” is of little consequence. What is most consequential about “life lessons” is that they are not restricted by race, creed, gender, or social status. They are neutral with regard to whom they apply; they are neutral with regard to whom they benefit. There is no particular race, creed, gender, or social status that is marginalized and excluded because of any kind of “privilege” or the like ... or more capable than others in benefitting from them.

The objective of this study is to help you to understand that partisan rhetoric about whose lives matters most is, at its base, “hate speech” and “racism” because it is divisive and prejudiced. It serves no redeeming purpose beyond the narrow agenda of those who use it to artificially advance the importance of certain individuals over all others. If followed faithfully, these “life lessons” for a more successful life can help you get beyond all partisan rhetoric and narrow agendas of those who marginalize themselves by using them. If these “life lessons” are followed faithfully, then racism, gender bias, and social status tend to fade in importance. I am not suggesting that they will make you rich and/or famous, only that they will make your life matter more to yourself and others.

Introduction

Wandering aimlessly through life with no particular purpose is a recipe for failure. In short, if your life does not matter to you, then it likely will not matter to others ... unless they are the compassionate type who love their neighbors as much as they love themselves. How many of those do you personally know? How much influence do you think they could have over you if you hold fast to your belief that your life does not matter?

So many people despair of their own importance when they have no drive, no purpose for existing, no goals, and no hope of things ever changing. If you are caught in this existential trap, then you should pay close attention to what I am going to give to you because I believe that you are as important to life as I am.

I do not care about your race, creed, gender, or social status. What I have to give to you is timeless and applicable to everything that affects your personal importance and existence. Take a deep breath, get mentally focused, and allow yourself the luxury of believing that you can live a life that matters to yourself and others—what you can become and the quality of life that goes with it.

Understand this: These “life lessons” are only as good as your willingness to abide by them. They are not some “magical” formula or “fool’s panacea” that prevents you from having to struggle and put forth your own personal effort. Learn them fully and apply them generously to your life and circumstances.

One important question that you must seek to answer is this: For what are you living? If your answer is: “I want to be a...,” then you have told me only how you want to earn your living. It does not explain to me

what drives your thoughts and hopes and dreams for achieving your *reason* for existing. Is there some great purpose in this life and/or beyond that you want to fulfill by your existence? Why are you here and where do you hope to go beyond your present existence?

You must realize that the *fulfillment* of this *ultimate purpose* is dependent upon three things: (1) the *need* to fulfill it, (2) the *opportunities* and *means* available for you to do so, and (3) your personal *desire* to pursue that fulfillment with your life's energy and resources. With that understanding, you must then answer the next question: How do I get there from where I am at present?

After constructing four or five different lists of some of the most important "life lessons," I remembered a principle followed by some of the best-run companies in America: *Keep things simple*. With that in mind, I am going to refer you to the "Jesus Model" of simplicity and accentuate the two great lessons involved in it.

A *Priori*: The Self-Evident

Before we go there, let me give you a tidbit from the 1982 book by Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. titled *In Search of Excellence*:

... We poor mortals try valiantly, at times desperately, to inscribe meaning on the *tabula la rasa* [*tabula rasa*: a mind not affected by experiences, impressions, etc.] given to us at birth. As Bruno Bettelheim has observed ... "If we hope to live not just from moment to moment, but in true consciousness of our existence, then *our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives*" (New York: Warner Books; p. 75; emphases added).

One of the most self-evident things in making one's existence "matter" is that there has to be *meaning* to it. It is in *meaning* that we are able to find definition, significance, understanding, and sense. Those things enable us to comprehend why something or someone "matters." If we begin to comprehend some of the most basic *self-evident* things of "life," then it gives us a foundation on which we can build the definition, significance, importance, and sense of why we exist as individual players in "life." Let me give you a few examples of *a priori* so you can understand what

I am saying (please note how I define terms and give examples so I can expose *meaning* and why it *matters*).

When Thomas Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence, he included a most important piece of *a priori*: "We hold these truths to be *self-evident*..." He then lists examples of the laws of nature and of nature's God that entitle humans to equality, life, liberty, and happiness. Governments are to be instituted that will guarantee that such rights are secured and protected. If any government is destructive of those rights, that government must be abolished and a proper government installed in its place ... but not for frivolous and/or fleeting reasons. In other words, Jefferson said that logic and/or experience make self-evident (*a priori*) that there is a Supreme Being who has an interest in every individual life. Governments and individuals must be aware of that and give serious regard to its implementation and preservation. This is a foundation stone for why each individual life matters.

David, in Psalm 8:3-8, ponders this very serious question: Why does mankind matter to God? Of all the things that He created, He has paid special attention to *mankind* that is demonstrated by His having given mankind dominion over all of the works of God's hands. *Dominion* has to do with rulership and responsibility; it is a charge to keep things from going to wreck and ruin. There is no room for idleness when you have such great responsibility. Otherwise, *you* become the thing that is dominated and brought into bondage.

Paul adds commentary to this psalm in Hebrews 2:6-18 that shows that God has conferred upon mankind a great, ultimate potential: becoming part of the God family through Jesus Christ (compare to Eph. 1:1-14). He is so serious about accomplishing this goal that He even provided a means by which mankind's failures can be remedied so that he does not miss this great, ultimate potential.

Thus, David and Paul show why mankind *matters* to God. Therefore, we should be able to see that which is *self-evident* in that knowledge: mankind's life matters to God; so, each person should live in such a way that demonstrates that his/her life matters and has more than temporary meaning. Each person should fix his/her attention on the ultimate potential of his/her life and begin to fill the empty *tabula rasa* with definition, significance, importance, and sense relative to accomplishing that ultimate potential.

Here is another example of the *self-evident*. In Romans 1:19, 20, Paul says that the creation around us

makes it self-evident that God exists because it is a testimony of His great power and control over that creation. It should also be self-evident, therefore, that God created it as a habitation and an inheritance for mankind (see Isa. 45:18, Matt. 25:34, and Luke 12:32). If that habitation and inheritance has to do with eternity, then it must be self-evident that your individual life is not meant to be temporary—there is a life beyond this one for which your life is important to God. All that exists did not happen by blind, stupid chance or cosmic accident.

Mark 10:17-27 is a discussion of this very question: How do we get there from here? There are demands that God makes upon us, goals toward which we must set our minds to achieve, and a purpose in which to have a great personal interest. There are rules to follow and personal commitments to make. Such a great, ultimate potential will not be had by allowing or making ourselves bog down or run in circles. You cannot accept the ridge of the rut as your only horizon. You have to have a higher standard and grander vision for being able to meet the challenges involved. That, too, should be self-evident.

So, how do we simplify this into language that is easily understood? We really do not have to do that because Jesus has done it for us in two simple rules of personal conduct.

Rule #1: Love God Supremely

In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus is asked a question that opens a door of understanding about two simple rules of personal conduct. The question is based, at the least, on the 10 Commandments (v. 36), and it was presented as a “gotcha” question designed to provoke or confuse Jesus and/or His audience. You witness this quite frequently in political rallies and debates. You can understand this if you understand the widespread nature of God’s Law. Which one is the most important law above all others? Here you see Jesus simplifying His answer ... distilling the entire law of God down to one single, most-important principle.

You should understand that a single principle can be applied across a wide spectrum of circumstances. You should use this example as a model of how you should simplify the answer to why your life matters to God and, therefore, why it should matter to you. Here’s the answer Jesus gave:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

Notice the three elements that Jesus includes in this act of loving God above all else in life: heart, soul, and mind. At this point, you should also realize that He is speaking figuratively, not literally. Heart does not refer to your cardio-vascular system. But how important is that organ to your existence? This is a reference to the center of your emotions, personality, personal attributes and the like. Think of what you feel inwardly about the most important person in your life ... the joy and happiness you feel when they are with you and when they succeed at something. Think of the hurt or sadness or empathy you have when they are physically or emotionally hurt or damaged. That’s heart.

Soul is on a different level of your being than heart. This has nothing to do with the immortal soul that some claim humans are or have. It has to do with the moral and spiritual principles and values that move you to think and act in a particular way. It is more than the feelings and emotions you have; soul can actually influence those feelings and emotions. If you do not feel morally bound (soul) to assist someone stranded on the side of the road, then you probably will not have the sympathy (heart) to do so. You can see Paul’s discussion of this point in Romans 8:1-17.

Then there is the mind. This word is from the Greek term dianoia, which is defined as being the seat of your understanding and intelligence. Intelligence and understanding make up what is called your paradigm, which is the model on which you establish your view of the “world.” That paradigm drives the education of your intelligence ... which drives your thoughts and deeds and morals and values ... which drive the way you construct your view of the “world” around you relative to your view of yourself.

Note how Jesus simplifies this entire discussion: Set your heart, soul and mind on the things of God: what God wills, what God requires, and how God recompenses you for your willingness to do so. Put into your heart, soul, and mind the knowledge and understanding of God’s thoughts and ways. Why?

Isaiah 55:6-11 is very informative in this regard. First, there is a window of opportunity to commit to this relationship; it will not always be available to you (vv. 6, 7). Second, God’s thoughts and ways are so

much higher than even the most noble and righteous human paradigm that you would be far better off thinking and acting like God than you would be living by the best and brightest human paradigm (vv. 8, 9; read also 1 Corinthians 1 and 2). Third, God can and will accomplish anything and everything that He sets His mind to accomplish—you cannot (vv. 10, 11). That is why James advises you to seek out God’s knowledge, understanding, and wisdom (compare Prov. 3:1-6 to Jas. 4:13-17, Matt. 7:17-19, and 19:17-26).

The raw and plain truth about loving God more than anything else in life is explained by Jesus Christ in Matthew 10:32-39. Do not recoil at this discussion and think that it is cruel and too demanding. How could a God of *love* think this way? Well, let’s understand *God’s* paradigm.

Ephesians 1:4 reveals that God willed something before the creation of the orderly universe. In some scientific concepts, that would have been more than 14 Billion years ago. What did He will? He willed the creation of mankind in His image, which involves more than merely looking like Him (see Gen. 1:26-28 and 1 John 3:1-3). It means *being* like Him in heart, soul, and mind and, ultimately, in His form.

Verse 4 says that He willed that we should be holy, blameless, and loving. Achieving that will grant you entrance into His family through Jesus Christ (read vv. 5-14). Regardless of the *human* family into which you are born, you have an individual responsibility to be holy, blameless, and loving. You cannot ride anyone’s “coattails” into God’s family. Race, creed, gender, and social status are not the standards by which you will be judged worthy or unworthy to realize this great, ultimate potential. How do you put God first in your life?

Exodus 20:1-11 explains that in four simple commandments:

First, there are to be no other “gods” in your life—things or people that you “worship” (intense love or admiration) in any manner that puts them ahead of God and what He represents (v. 3).

Second, you are not to make an “image” of anything in heaven, on earth, or under the earth to which/whom you fall down in worship (vv. 4-6).

Third you shall not claim to belong to God and to be named after/for Him (ex.: “Chris-

tian”; “child of God”; etc.) and live a life out of context with His holy, blameless, and loving character.

Finally, You are to remember on a regular basis and keep holy the specific day He created for mankind to cease his labors and personal pleasures and devote to holy purposes that include learning about God’s thoughts and ways (compare Gen. 2:1-3 to Mark 2:27, 28). No person or animal under your authority and control is to be required or allowed to labor on that day.

How does this apply to loving God supremely? Jesus said in John 14:15: “If you love me, keep my commandments.” John says in 1 John 2:4: “He that says ‘I know [God]’ and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.” Paul says in Romans 13:8, 10 that love fulfills God’s law. If all of that is true, then loving God supremely involves obeying the first four of the 10 Commandments in *spirit* and in *truth* (see John 4:23, 24). Is that plain and simple enough?

Rule #2:

Love Your Neighbor Equal to Yourself

Notice, however, how Jesus puts it in Matthew 22:38: “This is the *first* and great commandment.” *First* is an ordinal number and requires at least a *second*. In v. 39, He says that the *second* [most important] is similar to the first: “You shall love your neighbor *as* yourself.” This has to do with regarding your neighbor in the same manner and to the same degree that you do yourself. It could also mean that your concern toward your fellowman would be like you were showing concern for your own thoughts, needs, and concerns.

In Ephesians 5:29, Paul writes: “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes it and cherishes it, even as the Lord does the Church.” Paul is speaking of the average, loving person, not the mentally and spiritually unstable person who does, in fact, hate himself/herself. He is not speaking of the hate-filled reprobate who has no regard for those he seeks to damage and terrorize. Consider the context of Paul’s remarks.

What concern does Jesus have for His Church? A truly loving man for his wife? That is the context of his remark. If the ultimate potential of every person

who has ever existed is as God has planned it, then we must be as concerned about their success in reaching it as we are for our own success in reaching it.

We must take into account that God's requirements have a *spiritual* side to them. It is important to God that we come to understand that spiritual side. We can find something of the meaning of this in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. God has chosen to *reveal* to His people things that mortal man has not seen, heard, or imagined (vv. 6-10). The only way that this is possible is for God to reveal *His* heart, soul, and mind to us so that we can become privy to the spiritual things He expects us to understand (see Isa. 55:8, 9; John 14:26; 16:13-15; and Rom. 8:13-17). If we submit to that revealed knowledge, we will have the mind of Jesus Christ (v. 16; see also 1 Cor. 3:16, 17 and Phil. 2:5).

Read Matthew 5:27-43. Notice how Jesus states the *letter* of the Law ("You have heard/been taught...") and then gives the *spiritual intent* of it ("...but I say to you..."). Adultery, for example, is not merely a physical act of sex between married people who are not married to one another. You also have to avoid any *thoughts* or *fantasies* about such an act because they are the driving forces by which you will also complete the physical act. As Barney Fife on "Mayberry" would have said: "Nip it! Nip it in the bud!"

Proverbs 23:7 says that you act out the things that you nurture in your heart. Matthew 7:17-19 says that a good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit—you will know a tree by the fruit it produces. Jeremiah 17:9, 10 says that God searches our hearts so see if there is any wickedness in them. He rewards us accordingly.

How do we love our fellow man equal to ourselves? There are six basic rules:

First, it is necessary for parents to live honorable lives, and it is necessary for their children to love and respect them for setting proper examples and teaching them proper "life lessons." That is the *letter* and the *spirit* of the commandment (see Ephesians 6:1-4).

Second, *kill* in Exodus 20:13 does *not* mean that you cannot put anything or anybody to death. It is *not* saying that only God has the right to do so. There are too many situations in Scripture where death was a penalty for wrong actions against one's fellowman. For example, Exodus 22:2 says: "If a burglar is

caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him." This is similar to a "stand your ground" law. You are allowed to protect your person and property; if your assailant dies as a result of your struggle, you will not be charged with murder or manslaughter.

The word *kill* in the Hebrew language is *ratsach*, which means "to murder or slay with premeditation." Cain committed premeditated *murder* against Abel. It can also apply to situations that are reckless, but not premeditated ... which show a reckless disregard for your fellowman. This is expressed in the "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" law of Exodus 21:22-25.

Do I have the right to defend my life and limb even if it means that the perpetrator of the struggle will die? Yes. I am not required to die for his wickedness. But ... I cannot suffer a beating at his hand and then plan how I will exact revenge against him in order to kill him for his offense. That's premeditated.

Also, Matthew 5:21, 22 Jesus says that being angry with your fellowman without cause is the spiritual side of the commandment about not killing (consider James 1:15, 16). Hatred produces a lack of concern for your fellowman that is not equal to your concern for yourself.

Third, married people are not to engage in sexual acts with anyone other than their marriage partners. Matthew 5:21, 22 also expresses the spiritual side of this: Do not engage in fantasies or any other kinds of thoughts that imagine such sexual activities. This would require that you truly love the person who is to become your spouse and fully settle your mind about being faithful only to him/her until you die. This law would solve myriads of relationship problems if heeded in the letter and in the spirit (all that comprises you heart, soul, and mind).

Fourth, you are not to be a thief in thought or deed. Think about this seriously. How much of another person's blood, sweat, and tears are you disrespecting by such thefts? What if what you have stolen was actually a gift or

blessing from God to that victim? In all thefts that you perpetrate, you will have violated God's holiness and will.

Fifth, you are not to lie to or against your fellowman. In some translations, it says that you are not to bear false testimony against your fellowman. At issue here is what some commentators call "sins of the lips." It involves any manner of speech by which you bear any manner of falsehood to or about your fellowman.

For instance, in Matthew 5:33-37 Jesus is speaking of just such a thing. He is insistent that God cannot be honored except by *truth* on the lips and *truth* in the heart (see John 4:23, 24). What Jesus shows is that even *oaths* among humans cannot not be trusted to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If you have a holy regard for truth because you have been invited to become a member of God's Family, then your "Yes" will be truth and your "No" will be truth. Anything else will be the product of Satan and/or your own evil mind. James 5:12 says not to swear by heaven, earth, or any other oath; rather, let your "yes" and "no" be the truth.

Finally, there is the matter of *coveting*. This describes an intense, ungovernable desire to take possession of something or someone that belongs to someone else. The Commandment describes the *inner* life of a person and does not quibble about whether or not the person actually follows up on those intense, ungovernable desires. The fact that they reside in the inner part of a person's life is indicative of the fact that those thoughts do not exhibit as much concern for one's fellowman as for one's own person. This is where the individual's *spirit* (that is, inner self) and body must be reined in and governed ... brought under the control of *holy* thought and intent (read 1 Cor. 2:6-16; 9:24-27; and Rom. 8:5-14).

The "bottom line" of this instruction should be apparent to you at this point. You should be able to see that God instructs us that our *individual lives matter to*

Him. If that is true (and we will accept that it is), then we should also accept that *all lives* must matter to us. If we are to be God's true people, then anything that matters to God must also matter to us.

If it is God's will that all humans should have the God-given, ultimate potential to become members of His family, then we should have the same desire for our fellowman to achieve it as we have for our own success in doing so. In order to do that, we must believe so firmly that our own individual life matters to God that we will accept His gracious, loving offer and live by the rules He gives to help insure our success.

Conclusion

It is interesting that I have far exceeded the actual word count of the Ten Commandments. These Commandments were actually so brief in their written form that they were called the "Ten Words." It is interesting that people can use such brief reminders as learning tools and memory devices. If you understand the "spirit" of the "letter," then it is not difficult at all to call to mind what the Lord God meant when He gave these marvelous "Words" to Israel as the legal basis for their metaphoric "marriage."

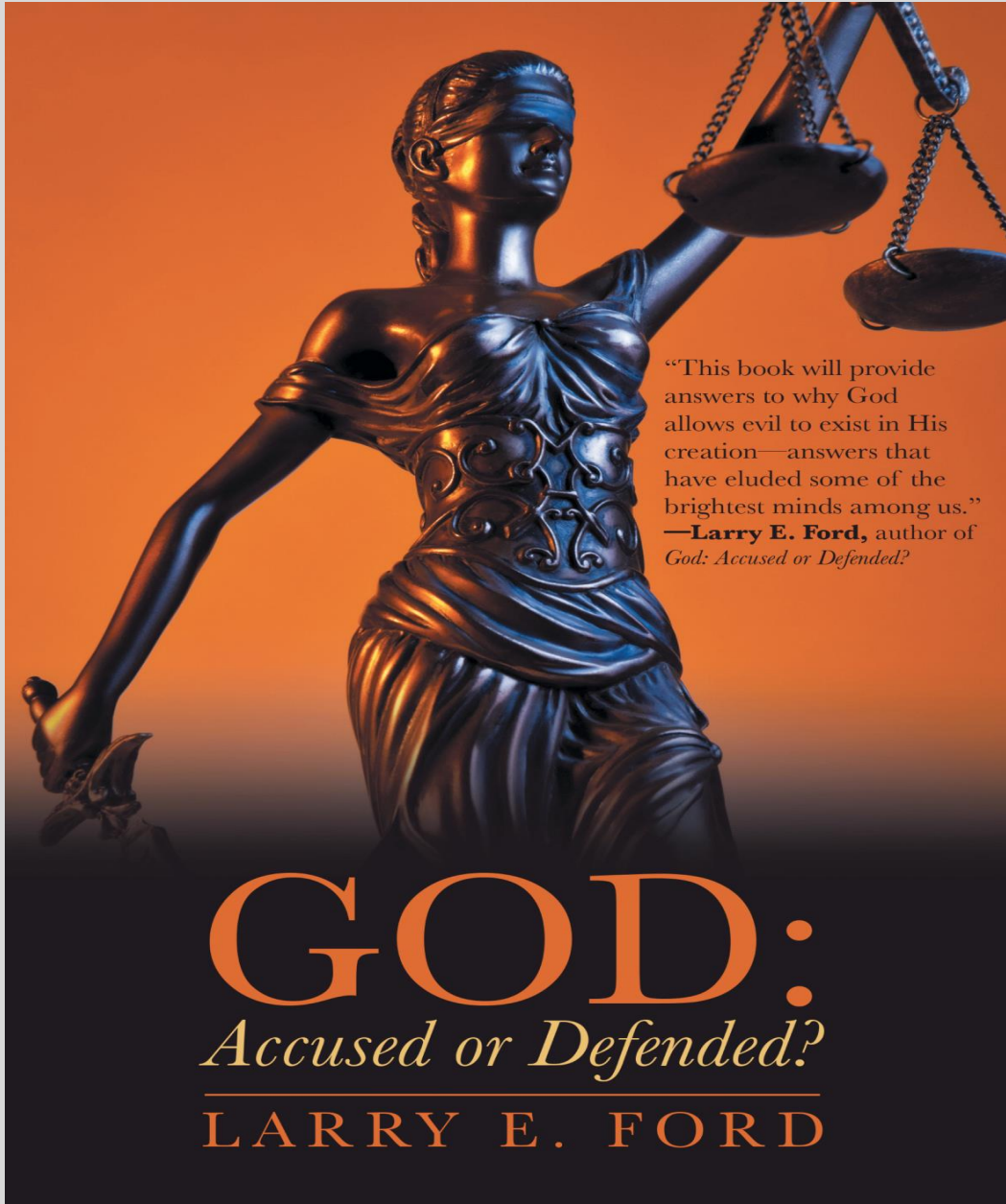
The mere expression of something like: "No idolatry" and "No adultery" is so easy to commit to memory. It is a "memory" tool to which you can attach *meaning*. No doubt, many of you might have been given the sentence "A red Indian thought he might eat turkey in church" in order to teach you how to spell "arithmetic." It's called a *mnemonic device* (from the Greek word *mnemon* that describes something that is mindful of or helpful to the memory).

Paul says in Galatians 3:24, 25 that God gave us that Law to be a schoolmaster to us so that we could be brought to Christ. What Paul means is that we come to have the mind of Christ when we learn the "10 Words" and understand the "letter" and the "spirit." That is the same thing we do when we learn the alphabet and numbers. Once we get that learned, then we can go on to reading, writing, and arithmetic and give "spiritual" meaning to their outward forms ... in other words, we learn that numbers and letters are more than simple numbers and letters because you can manipulate them to build far more knowledge and understanding. Once we have learned to do that without the schoolmaster having to remind us all of the time, we can become independent thinkers who use that inform-

ation in various ways to bring order and meaning to our lives.

Once we learn how to use laws like “No premeditated murder” and “No stealing,” then we can independently adopt the “spirit” of that instruction to help us bring order and meaning to our lives. We cannot be content to always having to be reminded by someone

else what those rules of conduct are and what they mean. That’s something that we must do for ourselves because we believe that it is important to build our own lives well and to help our neighbor to do the same with his/her life. *Make your life matter by learning and obeying these simple rules of holy behavior.*



God: Accused or Defended?
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The 2016 Holy Day Calendar

Some of the factors that are involved in the setting up of The Seventh Day Christian Assembly's Holy Day Calendar are not considered by others in our tradition: (1) the various "rules of postponement" that have been used since Hillel II, (b) how to determine the astronomical starting point relative to the Spring Equinox, and (c) whether or not the intercalation of Adar II (leap year) seven times during a 19-year cycle has any effect on "postponements." I have been made aware of the fact that the 2016 Holy Day Calendar is going to put the method we use to construct the calendar to a major test because we will be observing the Holy Days about 30 days before the others in our tradition. Why? Because they depend heavily upon the Jewish calendar constructed from Hillel II's method. To my knowledge, very few have constructed their own method ... maybe because they believe that Hillel II's model is based on scripture, or it is more convenient to let the Jewish practice dictate our practice. It is not in either case. In the 19th year of a 19-year calendar cycle, the "leap" year month Adar II causes the problem in 2016 because it "postpones" Abib by 29 days and pushes it beyond the Spring Equinox. Adar II, whenever it occurs, is considered a "winter" month. The claim is that "winter" is not the time to observe Passover. However, the Spring Equinox will occur during Adar II.

Hillel's calendar method did not come into existence until about A.D. 359. It is based on the "molad Tishri" (the conjunction of the moon that determines the start of the first day of the seventh moon – the start of the Jewish civil year). That "molad Tishri" is more of a name than an exact date to them because there are reasons why they think it is acceptable to "postpone" it by a few days. Most of the reasons are based on religious tradition, not scripture (see Matthew 15:1-9). Those traditions actually cause God's law to be nullified and the traditions to be treated as though they are God's law. How? Once the first day of the seventh month is established (on or near the molad Tishri), the rest of the calendar can be determined. That means that the Spring Holy Days are actually derived by counting backwards and forwards from the "molad Tishri" based on the type of year involved: (a) common (353, 354, or 355 days long) or (b) "leap" (383, 384, or 385 days long).

The first month of the year should be determined relative to the Spring Equinox, not according to traditions, the seventh month, or postponements. The Lord God gave Moses the commandment about the Passover of the exodus in the spring of the year (see Exodus 12:2; 13:4). *By their own interpretation of the Torah, the Jews normally contend that Passover must be observed at the first opportunity on or after the Spring Equinox.* Because of the intercalation of Adar II seven times in 19 years, the Spring Equinox will not always occur during Abib according to that kind of calendar. However, the first day of spring will always occur at the Spring Equinox. The intercalation of the "defective" month Adar II (29 days long) actually serves as a "rule of postponement" because Abib subsequently shifts by those 29 days to occur later in the New Year. Also, the "molad Tishri" must not occur on Sunday,

Wednesday, or Friday so that Atonement will not occur on Friday or Sunday – and the seventh day of Tabernacles will not occur on the weekly Sabbath. All of these factors are reasons for "postponements." They are driven by human religious traditions, not by the commandment of God.

That being the case, I have decided to continue with the present method that we use. The most prominent reason is simple: *By our present system, when there are no postponements, everyone else generally observes the same dates we do* (as in 2018). *When there are postponements, we will observe the Holy Days one to two days ahead of almost everyone else.* Sometimes, we observe the spring Holy Days together, but not the Fall Holy Days. It would be foolish to abandon our method just because their method happens to cause a major difference between our calendars. The 2016 situation is being caused by an intercalation problem that we have not experienced in the years since we adopted our present method.

Having said that, I have put together a five-year Holy Day Calendar (2016-2020). I have carefully considered all of the factors involved and have found no good reason to change our method. One primary rule that we will follow is this: Passover will not be observed before the Spring Equinox (as would be the case in 2019 if we were not careful). After the next article, you will find our five-year Holy Day Calendar. You will also be able to go to our website to download it:

www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org.

Larry E. Ford, Pastor
The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc.

How We Construct Our Holy Day Calendar

In this article, I am going to demonstrate how we in The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc. construct our Holy Day Calendar. I will begin by laying out the “Rules of Postponement” and explain how they actually set aside the Commandment of God. I will use the construction of the 2016 Holy Day Calendar as an example. These directions are simple enough that you should be able to use them in the future without too many problems. One basic rule to follow is this: Follow God’s instructions as much as He has revealed them.

The “Year”

In most of the world, a solar calendar is used. That means that it is based on the earth’s revolution around the sun, which takes approximately $365\frac{1}{4}$ “days.” The most accurate determination is 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 2.8 seconds. Because of the $\frac{1}{4}$ “day” involved, the year is rounded down to 365 days. However, every fourth year an extra day is added to February in order to account for the $\frac{1}{4}$ “day” omitted during the other years. You can usually determine a “leap” year if its number is evenly divisible by four (2016 divided by 4 = 504; therefore, 2016 will be a “leap” year).

Since the length of the solar year is slightly less than $365\frac{1}{4}$ “days,” a further correction is made during those centuries that are divisible by 400. The centuries 1700, 1800, and 1900 are not evenly divisible by 400, so the “years” in them are called “common years”; however, 2000 is divisible by 400, so those “years” are called “leap” years. This correction is more subtle than the normal “leap” year imposed every four calendar years.

The “Hebrew” calendar is somewhat different; it is known as a lunisolar calendar. It takes into consideration both the movements of the earth around the sun and the moon around the earth. The “months” are determined by the revolution of the moon around the earth. Such is not the case with the solar calendar. The moon revolves around the earth in about $29\frac{1}{2}$ days (29 days, 12 hours, 3.3 seconds, to be exact). In 12 revolutions of the moon around the earth, the lunar year will

be 354 days long ($12 \times 29\frac{1}{2} = 354$). That number is significant because it is $11\frac{1}{4}$ days shorter than the solar year.

For that reason, adjustments have to be made in order to keep the solar years and the lunar years reconciled. The “months” would drift so much that the seasons would be out of alignment. The days of the lunar year would drift 11 to 12 days *earlier* per year. In eight years, the months would “drift” 90 days ($11\frac{1}{4} \times 8 = 90$). You could literally have “spring fever” during the winter after a while. The “months” that are usually associated with a particular “season” would not match up.

Man-made calendars were constructed in order to solve the problem of the “drifts” in order to bring about the needed correction. In the Hebrew calendar, we find that they generally use a model based on the Metonic Cycle, which was named after a Greek astronomer named Meton who lived during the 5th century B.C.E. Meton figured out that over 19 years the lunar calendar could be reconciled if it was arranged with 12 regular years of 12 months and seven “leap years” of 13 months. This makes it possible to synchronize the solar and lunar calendars every 19 years.

Sometime during the early 300s A.D., the Jewish Sanhedrin set up a permanent Calendar Council that would consist of three to seven elite rabbis, and they adopted the Meton calendar model. The Hebrew calendar does this by adding a 29-day month called Adar II to the end of the regular calendar plus an extra day to the preceding month called Adar I. After the mid-

300s A.D. under the Sassanian rule, they “fixed” the calendar so that the 13th month intercalations would occur during the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th years. These years would add the 29-day month to make them “leap” years and the others would be the “common” years. The “common” year would be 353, 354, or 355 days long, and the “leap” year would be 383, 384, or 385 days long. However, their “problem” was not truly solved because the resultant calendar was not purely solar, or lunar, or lunisolar. And ... the rabbis had other concerns.

The Rules of “Postponement”

The rabbis did not want *Yom Kippur* (for us, the Day of Atonement) to fall on a Friday or a Sunday. They did not want back-to-back Sabbaths. They also would “postpone” the date of *Yom Kippur* in order that *Hashanah Rabba* (a Jewish custom not commanded by God that is observed on the 7th day of *Sukkot*—for us, the Feast of Tabernacles) would not fall on the weekly Sabbath during *Sukkot*. The physical nature of the celebration of *Hashanah Rabba* (gathering and later beating willow branches on the ground during a ritual ceremony) would cause them to work on the weekly Sabbath.

It appears that, since all of these problems occur in the seventh month, they felt obliged to “fix” the problems in the seventh month by declaring that the start of the month of Tishri (the 7th month) can be postponed up to two days beyond the new moon that is supposed to begin the civil calendar year (the molad Tishri). Add to this their self-imposed calendar requirement that the year will be no less than 353 days and no more than 385 days and that seven intercalations of a 29-day month in 19 years have to be made.

The first day of Tishri is the holy day *Rosh Hashanah* (for us, the Feast of Trumpets). You should be able to see the “trap” they fell into because of their man-made calendars and traditions. Remember what I said in the introduction about following God’s instructions as far as He has revealed them.

This is where God opened my understanding of Matthew 15:1-9 more clearly. Beyond what is typically taught about Christ not doing away with the law of clean and unclean meats and obeying God rather than man, there is a clear case about religious traditions versus God’s commandments that needs to be heeded. Jesus clearly pointed out how the *corban* tradition circumvented God’s Law and caused the participants in

it to make God’s fifth Commandment to be void in both letter and spirit. *If that is true, what must we understand about any other religious traditions not commanded by God that causes God’s Commandments to be broken and annulled?* How does the celebration of *Hashanah Rabba* fit into that question? How does the postponement of Atonement and the new moon (the molad Tishri) governing the Feast of Trumpets and the setting of the Holy Day calendar fit into that question? Let’s look at the five rules of postponement in order to understand the solution to the problem more clearly.

The rabbis established five rules of postponement that would justify making changes to God’s holy day calendar. Each postponement is determined to be justified when the molad Tishri occurs in one of the following ways:

1. If the molad Tishri falls on a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday of any year, then *Rosh Hashanah* is postponed one day.
2. If the molad Tishri falls at or after noon-time on any day of the week, then *Rosh Hashanah* is postponed one day. In essence, this is excusable because you have to have a starting point in the day to determine if the observance starts that day or the next.
3. If, as a result of rule #2, the start of Tishri is postponed to a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday, then *Rosh Hashanah* is postponed one more day (which would make it a two-day postponement because of rule #1).
4. If the molad Tishri, in a year following a leap year, falls on a Monday after approximately 9:32 A.M., then *Rosh Hashanah* is postponed one day.
5. If the molad Tishri, in a non-leap year, occurs on a Tuesday between approximately 3:11 A.M. and noon, then *Rosh Hashanah* is postponed two days.

Setting up a Holy Day Calendar

Here are the easy questions: Can you find anywhere in Scripture where God commanded the Israelites or the Jews to construct a calendar method like that discussed above? Can you find anywhere in Scripture

where God commanded them to begin His calendar with the seventh month? Can you find anywhere in Scripture where God's concern about His calendar involves any other "months" than the first and the seventh "months (do not count Pentecost because it is not determined by a "month")?"

The simple and easy answer to all of those questions is "NO"! If you are honest with yourself, you will admit that God does not give any detailed description about how to determine His Holy Days. If you are honest with yourself (and God), you will admit that God has no built-in reasons why any of His Holy Days should be postponed as a convenience for mankind's religious traditions. In essence, there is one beginning point from which all other points in the calendar are determined: the first day of the first month ... and each holy day has a specific time during the year to be observed. Let's see how this works.

Exodus 12:1 and 13:4 are the two verses from which we get our information about the beginning date. It occurs during the month of Abib, which occurs relative to the Spring Equinox, not the molad Tishri. In some Scriptures we can find the name *Nisan* (the Babylonian name; see Est. 3:7) used instead of *Abib*. It is the seventh month of the civil year, but the first month of the ecclesiastical year. *Tishri* is the first month of the civil year, but the seventh month of the ecclesiastical year. *Abib* has to do with the time during which the early spring grain (ex.: barley) would begin putting on tiny grain pods. That being the case, there is no reason for the Passover to be observed before the Spring Equinox.

With that information, you can understand how to use an ordinary *Farmer's Almanac* to figure ahead when to observe God's feast days. We use Eastern Standard Time to calculate the calendar we use. The *Farmer's Almanac* will use Eastern Daylight Saving Time from sometime in March to sometime in November. The DST is a man-made time function. If, for example, the *Almanac* shows 1:00 P.M. DST, then subtract the added hour and figure it to be 12:00 noon.

You can also refer to www.seasky.org and go to the astronomy calendar menu. You have to take into consideration the difference between their Universal Time Clock and Eastern Standard Time—EST is four hours earlier than UTC. For example, if the new moon occurs at 1:00 A.M. UTC, you subtract four hours to get the EST (1:00 A.M. minus 4 hours = 11:00 P.M. EST). This helps you to hone your elementary arithmetic skills.

Now, locate the calendar for March because the Spring Equinox occurs around March 20 every year. It is a stable, consistent reference point that God has fashioned into the change of the seasons (two equinoxes and two solstices). Locate the full moon that comes on or after the Spring Equinox. The time of the full moon's occurrence does not matter; you are using the full moon to find the new moon. For example: the Spring Equinox in 2016 will be on Sunday, March 20. The full moon that is to come on or after the equinox will be on Wednesday, March 23.

Since the holy day calendar year begins on the first day of the first month, I have to go back to the new moon in order to establish that first day. If the new moon comes before noon, the first day is on that day; if it comes after noon, then it is on the next day (which begins at sundown).

The new moon I'm looking for occurs on March 9 before noon (after noon on March 8); so, March 9 is the first day of the first month in 2016. My next question is whether or not Passover will occur before March 20 if I count 14 days (Ex. 12:6) into that moon cycle ("month"). I count the 14 days up to March 22. The equinox was on the 20th. No problem there.

Now I have to remember that the day is from evening to evening (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31). If I am to observe Passover during the evening of the 14th day of the first month (Lev. 23:5), then I have to observe it in 2016 on the night of Monday, March 21 (by the Julian calendar) so that the observance coincides with the biblical definition of the 14th "day" of the first "month" that is regulated by the Spring Equinox. I can now use the same moon to find the dates for the remainder of the feast days.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is to be observed from Abib 15 through 21 (Lev. 23:6). That means that this feast will be March 23 (beginning the evening of March 22) through 29 (beginning the evening of March 28). For Pentecost, I do not have to bother with another new moon to find out when it is to be observed because the instructions are given in Leviticus 23:15, 16, and 21. Notice that there will be a 50-day count from "the morrow after the [weekly] Sabbath." Sunday to Saturday is seven days. Seven times seven is 49 days. The 49th day will be a weekly Sabbath. The day after that weekly Sabbath will be the 50th day: Pentecost means "count 50." It will begin at the sundown that ends the seventh Sabbath (May 15, 2016). You might wonder why the Jews did not want *Atonement* to immediately precede or immediately follow the

weekly Sabbath, yet not be concerned with *Pentecost* (always on *Sunday*) following a weekly Sabbath.

In order to find the molad Tishri, I still have to use the first new moon. So, I have to count to the *seventh* new moon of the year. In 2016, the seventh new moon occurs on September 1 before noon. I will begin observing the Feast of Trumpets at the *sundown* of August 31. That will be the first day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:24, 25). Now it will be a simple matter of counting to the 10th day (Lev. 23: 27-32) and the 15th through the 22nd days (Lev. 23:33-39).

The 10th day of the seventh month will be September 10, 2016 (begins at sundown Sept. 9). The 15th through 22nd days will be September 15 through 22 (begins at sundown Sept. 14). If you have constructed your 2016 holy day calendar based on this model, then you should be able to construct one of your own in the future prior to the feast seasons. Remember: Follow *God's* instructions as much as He has revealed them.

Is Passover Always During *Abib*?

This one is going to seem like a contradiction if you are not careful to remember some basic points about the calendar. It is prompted by the fact that the first day of the new “year” does not always begin in March because the full moon after the Spring Equinox does not always fall in March. Let’s see how you can figure out this question.

In 2016, the Jewish calendar postpones the new “year” from March until April because the intercalation of Adar II pushes “Abib” to 29 days later in the year. Therefore, the Jews and those who follow their calendar system will observe what we call the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8) from April 23/24 to 29/30. They count that as being during “Abib.” We, however, figure “Abib” relative to the Spring Equinox, not relative to “postponements.”

Let’s look at a situation in which we will observe Passover in April, instead of March.

In 2017, the Spring Equinox falls on March 20. However, the nearest full moon that occurs on or after March 20 is April 11 at 2:00 A.M. The new moon prior to that occurs at 22:58 UTC on March 28. Subtracting the four hours difference translates this into 10:58 EST on March 27. That means that this new moon occurs after noon on March 27, so the new “day” is counted as beginning at sundown on the 27th and running until sundown on the 28th. When I count the 14 days for Passover, it will be observed from the “evening” that comes at sundown on April 9 until sundown on April 10. We list the Julian calendar date as April 10. So, beginning the new “year” on March 28, 2017 will begin “Abib.” I can figure out the rest of the 2017 holy days from there.

It should be apparent, then, that our calendar “months” will not always coincide with the Jewish calendar “months.” Their “Abib” will not always coincide with our “Abib.” But, according to the reckoning we use for determining “Abib” and the “first ‘day’ of the new “year,” we will always observe Passover during “Abib.” We are concerned only with the time periods that constitute “Abib” and “Tishri.”

In 2019, for instance, the new “moon” associated with the full moon on or after the Spring Equinox does not occur until *April 5*. This pushes Passover to April 18 and the Feast of Unleavened Bread to April 19-25. So, even though the Spring Equinox is consistently in March (20th or 21st), the first day of the new “year” is not. “Abib” in 2019 will not occur until April 5. The Jews and those who follow their calendar recognize this because they will observe what we call the Feast of Unleavened Bread April 21-27. Notice that they will be imposing “postponements” during that year because they observe these holy days *two days* later than we do. Next year (2016), they will observe them about *29 days* later! Yet, when there are no “postponements,” we observe them at the same time.

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The Annual Festivals of God

2016 – 2020

Roman Year	Passover	Feast of Unleavened Bread	Pentecost	Feast of Trumpets	Atonement	Feast of Tabernacles	The Last Great Day
2016	March 22	March 23-29	May 15	Sept. 1	Sept. 10	Sept. 15-21	Sept. 22
2017	April 10	April 11-17	June 4	Sept. 20	Sept. 29	Oct. 4-10	October 11
2018	March 30	March 31-April 6	May 20	Sept. 10	Sept. 19	Sept. 24-30	October 1
2019	April 18	April 19-25	June 9	Sept. 29	October 8	Oct. 13-19	October 20
2020	April 6	April 7-13	May 31	Sept. 17	Sept. 26	October 1-7	October

*** The Holy Days are observed beginning the evening before the date stated. ***

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Atonement and the Law

(Romans 3:31)

In Romans 3:31, the Apostle Paul asks the question about whether or not faith makes the Law void. Some say “Yes.” They base that answer partly on Colossians 2:14 by insisting that Paul’s statement means that the Law was “nailed to the cross” and cancelled. Others (generally the same people) insist that Hebrews 8:8, 13 support that claim by saying that Jesus Christ “will make a new covenant” and the mere mention of a “new covenant” means that the previous covenant and all that was involved in it has been abolished ... even the 10 Commandments.

Their argument is also based on a simple syllogism (an argument whereby a logical conclusion is drawn from two premises): **Premise #1:** Christ made the Old Covenant obsolete by creating a “new” covenant. **Premise #2:** The seventh-day Sabbath was part of the Old Covenant and the Law. **Conclusion:** Therefore: the literal observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is also obsolete. If you believe that Hebrews 4:9 means that the term sabbatismos is “a daily experience of spiritual salvation rest,” instead of “keeping the seventh-day Sabbath,” then you believe that the conclusion drawn in the syllogism above “proves” your argument precisely. *How can we demonstrate that such reasoning is a contradiction to how Paul answers his question in Romans 3:31? Atonement depends on the answer to justify its observance today.*

What Purpose Does a “Covenant” Serve?

In all of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *b^eriyth* is used exclusively to indicate the term covenant. The definition of this term is instructive to the point of our discussion: “a covenant is a divine constitution or ordinance with signs or pledges.” A constitution lays out the basic structure of the expected relationship between the participants and governs it by laws and rules of behavior. An ordinance is a statute or a regulation. In short, it is a type of law. This should explain to the most casual participant in a covenant that there are rules of behavior that govern the relationships established by the covenant agreement. If you do not live by the established rules of behavior, then you will have “broken” the covenant relationship.

A “covenant” relationship began between Abram and the Lord God (the one who became Jesus Christ) in Genesis 12 (vv. 1-9). At this point, it included the Lord God’s promise to give the land of Canaan (v. 7) to Abram and his seed. In Genesis 13:14-17, the Lord God expanded the terms of the covenant promise by saying that it would be for-

ever (v. 15). We must not overlook the eternal nature of this covenant. Why? Because this covenant is the core of the covenant made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. We’ll see this later in the discussion.

In Genesis 15, the Lord God expanded the covenant with Abram again to include all of the land between the Nile and Euphrates Rivers (v. 18)—the land of the Canaanites being only one part of the land to be claimed at a later date (vv. 19, 20). He firmly established His promise to Abram by taking an oath (see Heb. 6:13-20). This oath definitely regulates the Lord God’s behavior in this covenant as much as it does Abram’s.

In Genesis 17, we find some interesting points made about the covenant: (1) the Lord God changes Abram’s and Sarai’s names; (2) He reiterates the everlasting nature of the covenant; (3) He requires circumcision on the eighth day after birth for all males ... those outside of Abram’s household can be included in the covenant by submitting to circumcision; and (4) He specifies that it will be through Isaac, the son of promise, and his seed that the covenant will be perpetuated. This eventually includes the Israelites and Jesus Christ.

You should be able to see by this demonstration that *b^eriyth* is regulated by rules of behavior and the expectation of cooperation. If one pays the least bit of attention to Genesis 26:1-5, they will see in the transference of the covenant from Abraham to Isaac that *commandments, statutes, and laws* were invoked in the covenant relationship (v. 5) ... even when it was between the Lord God and Abraham. Abraham was obedient to those *commandments, statutes, and laws; that is, the rules of expected behavior*.

For those who do not believe that the Lord God had any *law* before Mt. Sinai, it should be understood that any “sin” that occurred, even in the Garden of Eden, was punishable by *death* (Rom. 6:23), and “sin” is defined as being a “transgression of the Law” (1 John 3:4). So, “sin” occurred anytime anyone went contrary to the behavioral expectations God imposed on mankind (Eph. 1:4).

It is no small matter, then, that the covenant with Israel was a *continuation* of the *everlasting* covenant between the Lord God and Abraham’s “seed.” This would mean that the Law given at Mt. Sinai was part and parcel to the same type of commandments, statutes, and laws to which Abraham was subject—Israel had the same *charge* (responsibility) to be subject to those behavioral expectations. This is implicit in Exodus 19:1-8 when the Lord God laid out His expectations, and Israel agreed to abide by them. *This is the purpose served by a “covenant” relationship.*

Abraham’s Example

Paul gives us some interesting information in Galatians 3 about Abraham’s covenant with the Lord God. His first question (v. 2) has to do with whether the gift of the *Holy Spirit* comes through the works of the *law of rituals* (Fenton; see Heb. 9:8-10), which were given by the Lord God in accordance with His will. The answer is “No”. Why? Paul’s answer is that the laws of rituals do not operate on the principle of *faith* (vv. 11, 12). He cites Abraham’s experience as an example. By doing so, he gives the impression that Abraham, rather than clinging to the *law of rituals* for justification, chose *faith* (see Heb. 9:8-10; 10:1). It is not the *ritual* itself that saves you; it is the *grace* that God extends

to you (because of the *faith* you have in what the ritual represents when the “reality” comes) that saves you (see Eph. 2:8-10).

Galatians 3:13, 14 explain the premise from which we should frame our argument: *Christ redeemed us from the curse* of the Law, not the Law itself. He did this for two reasons: (1) that the blessings of His *covenant with Abraham* could be shared with the Gentiles and (2) that we could *receive the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith*. So, the Holy Spirit does not come as a result of mere obedience to the law of rituals. It comes through the *faith* you have in God’s promise and oath. The covenant is a covenant of *faith*, not of laws of rituals.

The next thing Paul makes clear is found in vv. 16, 17. Here Paul makes the distinction between a single “seed” and multiple “seeds.” He says that the *promises* were made relative to a single “seed,” which is Christ. Indeed, the Christ was to be found among Abraham’s “seeds” through Isaac’s lineage. In v. 17, Paul says that the covenant between Abraham and the Lord God was “confirmed before of God *in Christ*.” He further states that the Law given to Israel 430 years after this event *could not* make that covenant null and void. That, in effect, was the same covenant that Isaac, Jacob, and Israel inherited from Abraham.

Verses 18-22 basically explain that the Law does not affect the existence of the covenant; it affects the existence of the *participants* in the covenant (see Heb. 6:4-8; 9:15). Verses 23-25 explain that the purpose of the Law is that of a *tutor* that would lead us to Christ. This could be done in two ways: (1) It can reveal to us the holy and righteous mind of God, and (2) it would enable us to recognize that the Law gives us *knowledge* of God’s thoughts and ways, but not necessarily *access* to God’s thoughts and ways through Holy Spirit (see Isa. 55:8, 9 and 1 Cor. 2:6-16).

Once we come to faith in Christ, we will have reached a point in our *spiritual* development where we will depend less and less on the tutoring of the Law and more and more on the influence of the Holy Spirit for our education in God’s thoughts and ways. This is what Jeremiah 31:31-34 pictures when it says that God’s laws will be put into our hearts and minds in the “new” covenant.

Now Paul sums up his overall point. Ephesians 1:6 says that we are made acceptable to the Father through Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:26 says that we become children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Verse 27 says that we have “put on Christ” (which is a description of our new spiritual character) when we are baptized into Christ. That action taken by the Jew or Gentile erases his fleshly identity (ethnicity, race, social status, and gender) because we become unified (the objective of Atonement) in Jesus Christ. That “body” (the Church) is then reconciled and unified with God through Jesus Christ. That being the case, we will have become Abraham’s “seed” (the multiple “seeds”) and will inherit all that Abraham and Jesus Christ are supposed to inherit (v. 29).

Now, ask yourself whether or not the “old” covenant was subject to being abolished if it was an everlasting covenant. We can pose another syllogism to “prove” our point: **Premise #1:** The old covenant was an everlasting, perpetual covenant. **Premise #2:** The covenant promises are not made void by the Law of God. **Conclusion:** The old covenant has not been annulled or abolished. How do we support this conclusion in Scripture?

The Kainos Covenant

Matthew 26:28 is the first place where we become aware of what is called the “new” testament (or, covenant). Jesus calls it a kainos testament (covenant). The term describes something that is “new” in the sense that it is unusual, not previously present, and/or in contrast to something old or obsolete. The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon defines Matthew 26:28 under this definition: “in contrast to something old: (a) with no criticism of the old implied; (b) in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by what is new. In such a case the new is, as a rule, superior in kind to the old.” The term obsolete implies that it has grown out of use because the original elements of it are no longer in use. Hebrews 8:8, 13 and Jeremiah 31:31 (see Heb. 10:16-18) are included in that sense of the definition. Elements of the “old” will fall into disuse. That’s important.

Paul makes an interesting point about the “old” covenant in 2 Corinthians 3. He shows in vv.

11, 13, with the expressions done away and abolished, that he is speaking in reference to his comments in vv. 9, 10. BAG shows the meaning of the Greek term for done away and abolished (katargeo) is that something passes away or ceases to exist in its present form because it is surpassed in glory by something else. If this signals falling into disuse, how does that happen?

He uses the radiance of Moses’ face to explain his meaning. Verse 11 implies that the “new” covenant causes the “old” covenant to be less glorious by comparison. The net effect is that the “old” covenant eventually dims in comparison as the “new” covenant shows itself to be a “better” covenant. The sense of this is that the “old” covenant is not simply summarily cast aside; it gradually dims in glory as Jesus Christ brings to reality that which is symbolized by the “shadows” that the rituals of the Law represent (Heb. 10:1).

Moses had to wear the veil over his face until the radiance diminished (v. 13). Paul suggests that the “old” covenant had a similar diminishing glory that pointed to the necessity of a “new” (kainos) covenant to replace it. Katargeo can mean that the “old” will become, or be made, ineffective and brought to nothing in this manner. How does that work?

Matthew 5:17-19 holds the answer. Verse 17 explains that Jesus came to fulfill all of the intentions of the Law and Prophets (see also Luke 24:44). If you link this to Isaiah 55:10, 11, you see that the Lord God expects His words to accomplish the purpose for which they are uttered. You can see in Matthew 5:18 that the task of fulfilling all of the intentions of the Law and Prophets will take place over a long span of time ... probably until the creation of the kainos heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17-25; Rev. 21:1). It was not done in one fell swoop when He hung on the cross.

Matthew 5:19 implies that the “shadow” of the Law and Prophets will be taught until the intention for which they were uttered comes to pass and the something “greater” appears and dims the glory of the “shadow” into obsolescence. Hebrews 10 is a great example of how the “shadow” of the law of the sacrifice of bulls and goats was replaced by the “very image” intended: the law of the real atonement sacrifice endured by Jesus Christ. When that “reality” came into existence, the rituals of the

bulls and goats *fell into disuse* for God's people thereafter.

Note another example of something that fell into disuse. Let's consider Paul's discussion of the Melchizedek priesthood in Hebrews 7. Jesus Christ has been made a High Priest by God in the order of Melchizedek (vv. 1-17). Why? Hebrews 7:11 says two things: (1) the Levitical priesthood was not capable of perfection or of making people perfect, and (2) there was, therefore, a need for another priesthood. This suggests that the Levitical priesthood was *destined* to fall into disuse. Why?

Hebrews 8:5 and 9:9 say that they were *shadows, examples, and figures* of the "reality" in heaven. Hebrews 9:9 adds that the Levitical priesthood in themselves could not "perfect the conscience of the worshipper." As a consequence, Jesus Christ had to come "once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (9:26). The "reality" came, and the "shadow" fell into disuse. Is the *Law*, therefore, destroyed or abrogated? No. It is taken to a higher, more perfect level in Jesus Christ.

Have you remembered that Titus came to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70? During that destruction, he also destroyed the Temple and disbanded the Levitical priesthood. Why? God brought an end to the imperfection of the law of rituals they followed and to the necessity of those who served in that capacity. The glory of the priesthood of Jesus Christ and His eternal sacrifice (that can and does make us perfect) causes the imperfect priesthood and the rituals they tended to dim into *obsolescence* by comparison!

Finally, notice the admonition of the Lord God to Moses in Exodus 25:40: "... See to it that you make it [the Ark of the Covenant] in agreement with their [the various parts] *pattern* that was shown you in the mountain." Hebrews 9:1-15, 23, 24 witness that the "pattern" of those things exists in heaven. Now note what John saw in the heavenly Temple (Rev. 11:9): the Ark of the Covenant with the 10 Commandments inside. Why do we find that Ark and the 10 Commandments in the heavenly Temple? The Ark of the Covenant represents the throne of God with the 10 commandments as the legal foundation of His government (underpinning His *justice* in dealing with those who break covenant with Him). He sits upon the

mercy seat from which He can dispense *justice* (which brings one side of atonement) or *mercy* (which brings a different side of atonement). This vision confirms that the principles of the 10 Commandments ... and, by extension, the prophetic nature of His Holy Days ... are still the foundation of His government. The "old" manner of His government over Israel pales into insignificance and obsolescence when this "reality" is brought to His creation.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the "old" covenant is *being replaced*, not *abolished*. Its "shadows" are *being fulfilled*, not *made void*. The Day of Atonement ritual of the two sacrificial goats represents the "shadow" of our *total redemption* (Greek = *apolutrosis*; Eph. 1:13, 14), through Jesus Christ and spiritual unity with God, from sin and fleshly limitations.

We should have learned three lessons from this study: (1) A covenant cannot exist without the Law; (2) the Law guarantees the order that is required for such a relationship to be meaningful; and (3) God's Law, especially the 10 Commandments, is not merely a list of "don'ts," but an explanation of how to love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself.

Here's another syllogism: **Premise #1:** The "old" covenant "shadows" were *glorious*. **Premise #2:** The "new" (*kainos*) covenant "reality" is *more* glorious than the "old shadow." **Conclusion:** The covenant becomes *kainos* ("new" in *quality*) because the "shadows" are coming to "reality."

The Day of Atonement is also a "shadow" of good things to come. Jesus Christ's sacrifice did away with the "shadow" when He was crucified. Can we say that He has brought the *full* intention of Atonement to fulfillment? Not yet. But ... as long as humans exist, they will have to be brought to Jesus Christ in order to be made acceptable to the Father and eventually added to the Elohim Family. Even when sin and death have been conquered, Jesus Christ and His saints will be concerned with Atonement in one way or another.