



WORSHIPING GOD IN

SPIRIT AND TRUTH

A MAGAZINE FOR UNDERSTANDING GOD'S TRUTH

JANUARY TO MARCH 2017

WHAT'S IN YOUR ... BIBLE?

YOU MIGHT VERY WELL BE SURPRISED!

Amazing Bible Truths That Contradict Mainstream Teachings About: Going to heaven, the immortal soul, the priesthood of the believer, the destruction of God's Law, Jesus in Hell, observing Easter, and the three-in-one God. How can so many be so wrong? ***This is a must-read issue!***

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In This Issue

From ... the Pastor: A frank discussion about some of the problems presented by the existence of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations. Many believe that “Christian” orthodoxy has been settled for centuries. However, the *differences* among them tell us a whole ‘nother story. You should understand the ramifications involved. **Page 2**

The Plain Truth About Easter: How did *Easter* get mixed in with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Why do bunnies, chicks, and colored eggs play such a pivotal role in the celebration that is supposedly about the day Jesus Christ came out of His three-day tomb? This is a simple lesson in *syncretism* clashing with biblical truth ... and what God thinks about it. **Page 3**

The “Evolution of the Immortal Soul” Concept: The objective of this study, therefore, is to engage you in a discussion about how the “evolution of the immortal soul” concept lent its voice to the religious doctrines afoot in the world today. You will be made privy to *God’s* concept about what man is and how his ultimate potential will unfold. **Page 10**

The Individual “Priesthood” of the Believer: For Martin Luther, it was a declaration of independence from the hierarchical Roman Catholic priesthood that interpreted Scripture for the individual believer ... leaving the believer no freedom to alter the interpretation. To others, like the Baptists, it was a declaration of independence that asserts that the individual believer is *autonomous* before God and, therefore, is competent to define his own personal relationship with God without the interference of others. What is it to *God*? You need to know! **Page 21**

What Difference, at This Point, Does God’s Law Really Make?: The objective of this article is to reveal the scriptural evidence about the difference God’s Law makes even today and in the unending future. In the face of the claim of most of traditional “Christianity” that the Law was “nailed to the cross” at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, you are going to be made privy to: (a) *why* God’s scriptural revelation of His Law *still* makes a difference and (b) the vitally important role it plays in His plan to bring all things in heaven and on earth into *reconciliation* to His will (Phil. 2:5-11). This is not an ordinary conversation about that traditional “Christian” claim. It is a conversation about the ultimate reclamation of all of Israel according to the New Testament (Covenant). **Page 28**

From the Desk of:



The Pastor

One would think that, in almost 2,000 years since Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father, it would have been possible for “Christianity” to figure out the challenge set before it in Ephesians 4:1-16: The “unity of the faith and ... the knowledge of the Son of God.” However, it seems that the more time passes ... the more “Christianity” is divided into so many more factions and denominations. How often is the question “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor. 1:13) even thought of among so many thousands of “Christians”? Surely, we who are naming the name of Christ on our lips must be concerned about the absolute disparity in doctrines and beliefs among us.

The Denominational Divide

One of the great drivers of the denominational divide is Luther’s construct that every believer is a priest under Jesus Christ and has the right to read and interpret Scripture for himself or herself as the Holy Spirit leads him/her. On its face, that is a good sound bite. If a man of the stature of Martin Luther proposed such a thing in the face of the Roman Catholic theology, then every Protestant should simply hew the line with the “Father” of “Protestantism.” How has Luther’s concept worked in mainstream “Christianity”? The **32,000+** divisions in “Christianity” do not represent that unity overly well.

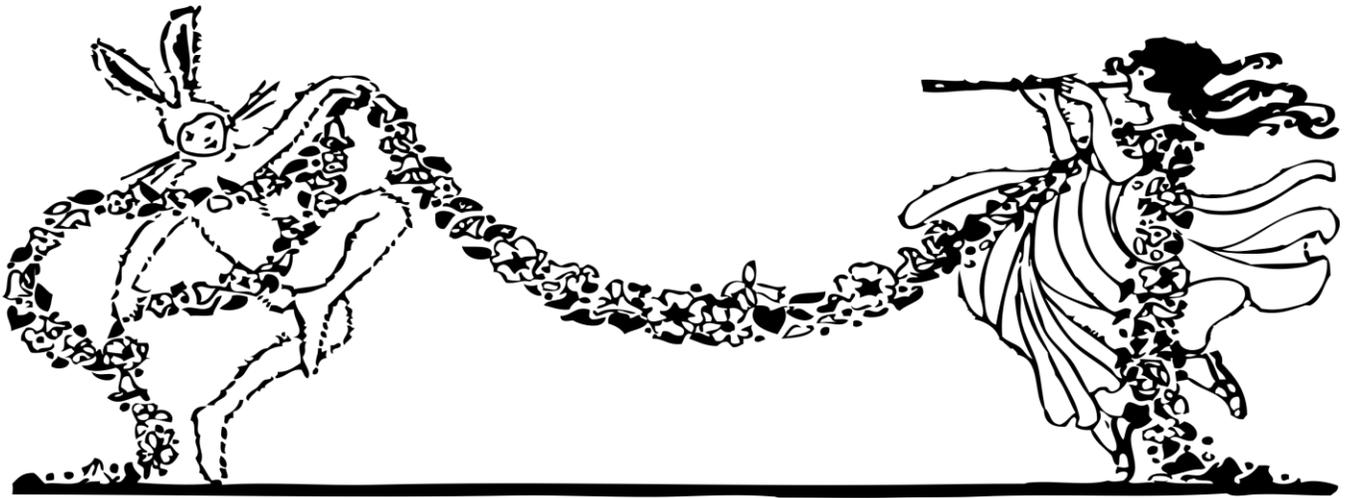
Here is the main question with which the thoughtful person should wrestle: “Is Christ divided?” In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul stresses the unity that should exist in belief and doctrine ... in faith and baptism and hope and the “God” we worship. He stresses in vv. 11-16 that God has set in place a “ministry” that is capable of teaching, educating, edifying, and bringing to spiritual maturity the “body” that Jesus Christ will claim as His very own “wife.”

It is not apparent in Paul’s instruction in Ephesians 4 that every believer is set loose to construct his own idea of the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). If you combine Paul’s instruction with Jude’s assertion, then you must logically conclude that God’s true faith was specified long before either Paul or Jude came along. Anyone who calls himself or herself a “Christian” must, therefore, search out what the “faith once delivered” is and, thereafter, conform to that “faith” ... not his/her own idea.

The Objective of This Issue

The objective of this issue of *Spirit and Truth*, therefore, is to give you seven amazing Bible truths that demonstrate the wrong-headed nature of mainstream “Christianity” to become even more divided than it presently is. These lessons will be sufficient to make the point that something is terribly wrong and must be corrected. If you are serious about understanding God’s truth, dig in and sort it out!

Larry E. Ford, Pastor



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The Plain Truth About Easter

Most “Christians” act as though Easter has always been an integral part of what represents true Christianity. The observance of this special “Christian” holiday probably pays more attention to the buying and selling of “Easter” chicks, bunnies, eggs, baskets, candies, and greeting cards than it does to the actual significance of the day. For too many people, the observance represents one of two days in the religious calendar when they are more likely to attend church services. Most who observe this religious holiday pay little attention to God’s warning about religious syncretism and worshipping Him in ways that He strongly abhors.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to set the record straight. According to *Wikipedia*, religious syncretism occurs when you “blend two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or incorporate them into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions” (emphases added). We need to understand this problem better. What does God think about this?

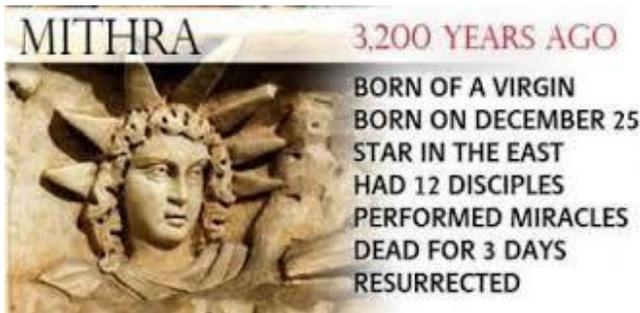
The Plain Truth About Syncretism

Let’s consider more exhaustive definitions of syncretism that will shed more clarity upon the discussion at hand. It is not as simple as taking two different or unrelated belief systems and blending them into a new and different system. It is also an effort to make contradictory things parts of the same “cloth.” Matthew 9:16 is a similar illustration. *It does not really work* because the differences matter to God. The compromise “works” only because people are willing to ignore the glaring differences.

True syncretism in religious matters is described thusly: “the reconciliation or union of conflicting beliefs or an effort intending such.” Many traditional “Christian” beliefs are the product of compromises that were made in order to form some kind of “universal [catholic] Christianity” to which the various warring factions of “Christianity” and paganism could subscribe. They only changed the beliefs that they thought were “similar” enough that the supposed “small stuff” of the details did not matter to them.

How did Constantine, a sun worshiping pagan emperor, translate the Roman Empire into a

“Christian” empire after his victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge? He had worshiped the sun god, Mithras, and prayed to him for success before that battle. Yet, he and the Roman Catholic Pope found ways by which Constantine’s fellow pagans could be incorporated into the “Christian” religion ... *syncretically*. For example: They both used *crosses* in their belief systems; so, they figured out how to make the “pagan” cross mean the same thing the “Christian” cross meant. It became the equivalent of “different paths to the same goal.”



(Photo by 5th seal.com; courtesy of www.google.com)

The next definition is a bit more troubling because it demonstrates that there is a “*flagrant compromise* in religion and philosophy: *eclecticism* that is illogical or leads to inconsistency: *uncritical acceptance* of conflicting or divergent beliefs or principles.” This means taking the “best” parts of the opposing, contradictory beliefs and philosophies and *unnaturally* blending them into a *new* religious belief and philosophical system – *forcing* them work together. Both old systems take a backseat to the new system. This action generally causes the resulting product to be *greater and/or larger* than either of the original parts. Let me explain how this worked relative to Easter and “Christianity.”

“Easter” is not a *Christian* name. Many of you might well point to Acts 12:4 in the *King James Version* of the Bible and declare: “It is used in the Bible. Why do you say that it is not ‘Christian’?” More modern translations, like the *Modern Language Bible* and the *Revised Standard Bible*, correctly translate the Greek term *pascha* to mean “Passover.” The context involves a *Jewish* king

and *Jewish* disciples of Christ. Verse three refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which, according to Leviticus 23:5, 6, is shown to follow the *Passover*. Why, then, would anyone think that *Easter* is the same as *Passover*? In fact, the only coincidence between them is that they occur about the same time in two different religious calendars.

Lexicons will add, or imply, the idea that *pascha* is the same as *Easter*. It absolutely is not! Historically, the pagans of Babylon worshiped what is called the colored *Pasch egg*, which figured into the Babylonian and Chaldean religious rites with the hot cross buns. Under Babylonian influence, these eggs flourished throughout paganism and were adopted into “Christianity” as “Easter” eggs. The Egyptians, Greeks, Hindus, Japanese, Chinese, and others also have had these “sacred eggs” in their religious rites for centuries ... many being pre-Christian. It is probably from this *Pasch* egg that the translators of the *KJV* derived their mistranslation. After all, *pascha* and *Pasch* might otherwise seem to be cognates – words from a common original form.



(Photo by markfulton.org; courtesy of Google)

If you have ever heard of *Beltis, queen of heaven*, then you might know that she is also known as *Astarte* and *Ishtar* (pronounced “Easter”), and *Isis*. The religion that surrounds her is associated with the worship of the sun god ... variously known as *Baal*, *Moloch*, *Osiris*, *Bel*, and many other names scattered among pagan religions. She was the consort of the sun god. It was

this same sun god, under the name of *Mithras*, that Constantine worshiped. It was this consort to whom Jeremiah referred in Jeremiah 44:17-19, 25. The “cakes” they baked were the equivalent of the “hot cross buns” that many bake during the Easter season. *Beltis* is also known by various other names in other pagan cultures: *Ish-tar*, *Isis*, *Astarte*, *Oestre*, *Ashtoreth* (see 1 Kings 11:5, 33 and 2 Kings 23:13). She is also named *Ashtaroth* in other places in the Old Testament. Do some leg-work and look her up in an exhaustive concordance.



(Photo of Beltis; courtesy of www.google.com)

Let me cite a historical source from ca. A.D. 1916 to make my point clearer:

To conciliate the Pagans to nominal [in name only] Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar [that is, moving the birth of Christ four years *later* than His actual birth], it was found [to be] no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity ... to shake hands (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, p. 105; emphases added).

Quite frankly, if you are not aware of the raw syncretism of paganism and “Christianity” that has taken place over the centuries, then you are not very knowledgeable about the history of the development of mainstream “Christian” theology or the demands of the God of the Bible that such a thing is **not** to be done.

God’s Warning About Syncretism

Consider the following information from Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor’s book, *The Great Cosmic Mother* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991, second edition):

Easter is the pagan festival of spring, the year’s rebirth or resurrection. The name comes from the Saxon Goddess of spring, Oestre, who also gives her name to the female estrus-cycle. (Her name is cognate with Neolithic Near Eastern Goddess Ostarte, Astarte, Ish-tar, Ashtoreth.) The Easter rabbits, the colored eggs hidden in the grass or rolled down the lawn, are fertility symbols of the Goddess. Finally, the Golden Number used to calculate the “moveable feast” of Easter is based on the lunar calculations, and on the 19-19-18 year eclipse cycle used by the Druids and earlier megalithic builders. The same number was once used to calculate the date of Christmas in relation to the winter solstice (pp. 321, 322).

The reference to “Neolithic” names a period of time during the late Stone Age in which mankind had learned to grind stones, use polished stone implements, make pottery, use the bow and arrow, domesticate animals, et cetera, et cetera. This is part of the evolutionary theory about the growth and development of the various species. Nevertheless, the use of the term demonstrates that Sjoo and Mor are speaking of

a time that is *pre-Christian*. Their reference to “Christmas” is also a *pre-Christian* reference.

Let me give you another *pre-Christian* reference from Alvin Boyd Kuhn, author of *Who Is This King of Glory?* (Elizabeth, NJ: Academy Press, 1944):

The entire Christian Bible, creation legend, descent into and exodus from “Egypt,” ark and flood allegory, Israelite “history,” Hebrew prophecy and poetry, Gospels, Epistles, and *Revelation* imagery, all are now proven to have been the transmission of ancient Egypt’s scrolls and papyri into the hands of later generations which knew neither their true origin nor their fathomless meaning (p. x).

Kuhn was very serious about the *pagan* source of the traditional “Christian” beliefs ... to the point that he called for “Christianity” to “acknowledge its parentage in a pagan past or, failing to do so, must perish” (Ibid.). He claimed that the evidence was found in the discovery of the Rosetta Stone and a portion of the wall of the Temple of Luxor (also known to be the ancient city of Thebes) that dates back to “at least 1700 years B.C.” (Ibid.).



(The ancient temple at Luxor, Egypt; Photo courtesy of Wikipedia)

The following is a short sample of the *paganism* with which he associates traditional “Christianity”. In this, he is discussing the evolutionary

cycles of immortal souls advancing toward their final step to emerge as individual “angels of light” known as “Christos.” I have no doubt that the “origin of the species” concept of the theory of evolution of the species was born out of this ancient pagan concept of the immortal soul.

Here is what Kuhn says relative to Easter:

Soul and star unite in meaning in the Egyptian word *Seb* ... And souls, like the stars, sank periodically into the domain of matter. A star falling or sinking below the horizon was the typograph of a soul going down, into incarnation in the earth, or into the earthy and watery elements of the body. The “west” was therefore the typical “region” where souls went to their “death,” or semi-dead condition of existence under the limitations of matter, in which state they gained a new life, were reborn at *Christmas* and finally resurrected at *Easter* (Ibid; p. 337; emphases added).

Here you have a perfect example of pertinent *pre-Christian* pagan beliefs that were syncretized into the “Christian” faith after the Apostolic era of the Church ended with the death of the Apostle John. The present similarity between the “pagan” and “Christian” is striking! And ... it is widely admitted by “Christian” sources that this syncretization, in fact, took place. *And* ... the fact that they have similar general religious concepts has made it *easier* for the compromises to take place.

Similarities do not Mean the Same Thing

How does that work? The pagan practice was to observe the Festival of Spring as a *mythological* event during which the “dead” soul emerged from its burial prison by resurrection. At the same time the children of Israel observed Passover and the first day of Unleavened Bread (see Lev. 23: 5, 6), there was a full moon that

occurs on or after the vernal equinox. At the same time of year, the pagans were observing the “resurrection” of the soul into its final, eternal state as a “Christos.”

Note how Kuhn frames his argument about this coincidence of practice:

It was the night of the Passover, placed by one account on the 14th of Nisan, by another on the 15th, a fact which gives it the simple significance of Easter.... On this “night,” under solar symbolism, the soul in the flesh on earth came to the end and consummation of all its labors in the body, finished its assigned task, accomplished the final stages of its perfection and stood on the door-sill of its liberation forever into celestial freedom out of earthly bondage (Ibid; pp. 396, 397).

To the spiritually blind and deaf, this might bear great similarity to mainstream “Christianity’s” unbiblical belief in the immortality of the soul and the significance of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And ... isn’t it interesting how the pagans observed something *similar* during the same time of the year? Doesn’t this indicate that they have something in common?

Consider Kuhn’s inference:

Hebrew symbology did assume *a quite different face* from this Egyptian in many respects. But it still remains highly significant that in both the Egyptian and the Hebrew (or Greek) scriptures the narrative crowds a long list of “events,” factual or ritualistic, into the few hours of this night of the Passover. The meaning of both groups of occurrences is, if the symbolism be penetrated, *one at base*. But the Egyptian was frankly allegorical, the Hebrew, under

Christian handling, purports to be history (Ibid; pp. 397, 398).

Thus, Kuhn avers that they are *one and the same* thing as far as *meaning* is concerned, but the *approach* to explaining the meaning is different. All that has to be done to correct the situation, he concludes, is that some kind of compromise or structural acceptance by “Christianity” needs to be made. That done, “Christianity” would admit its proper place in paganism and would thrive in the pagan world of religions. In fact, “Christianity” *has* borrowed liberally from the pagan concept and changed it from allegory (mere symbolism) into actual history!

All of that said, let’s understand God’s warning about such things. Let me preface this discussion with two New Testament statements, one from Jesus Christ and one from the Apostle Peter. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus Christ quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 by saying that we should live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The Apostle Peter used the same principle in Acts 5:29 when he said that we should obey God rather than men. Our question, then, has to do with what **God** has to say about mixing and mingling paganism in with His revealed truth.

Take note of Deuteronomy 4:2 where He warns about *adding to* and *diminishing from* His word (see also 12:32; Josh. 1:7; Prov. 30:6; and Rev. 22:18, 19). Use that principle to understand the following “word of the Lord” found in Deuteronomy 12:29-32: **Do not inquire about the religious practices of the pagans in order to use those practices to worship the Lord.** Why? Because it violates a fundamental principle of His covenant with His people found in Exodus 20:1-7: the Lord God was to be their **only** God.

According to Matthew 5:17, you cannot argue *in truth* that Jesus Christ did away with that fundamental law. According to John 14:15 and Matthew 22:36-40, you cannot argue that the *new* covenant between Jesus Christ and His Church is substantially different from the “old Law.” Why? Because Hebrews 8:8 says that the

problem with the old covenant was with the people, not the covenant itself.

This is where mainstream “Christianity” has been spiritually blinded to God’s truth. What is Jesus Christ referencing in Matthew 26:28? A new covenant. With whom? His reference point here is to Jeremiah 31:31-34. How do I know this? Because Paul references this Scripture when he discusses the “new covenant” in Hebrews 8. Note especially vv. 8-13. With whom is the “new covenant” to be made? Both “Houses” of Israel.

Now read Hebrews 10:1-17 ... and compare all of that to Romans 11:1-29. Has God cast away His people (v. 1)? No. He foretold this event in Isaiah 1, Hosea 2:13-23; 14:1-9; Amos 9; and Ezekiel 37. Notice in Romans 11:5, 12-29 that Paul says that the Gentiles who become Christians are grafted into Israel – the holy root (vv. 17-25; compare Rom. 11:5 to Isa. 1:9; 6:4-13).

What did Israel do? Part of the answer is found in Jeremiah 10:2: They learned the way of the heathen. Did Israel think she had done anything wrong? Read in Jeremiah 44 what their attitude was. Jeremiah said that they burned incense and served other gods (v. 3). The Lord God sent His prophets to warn them about that, but Israel ignored them (v. 5-10). Now read vv. 15-19.

What was their attitude? Read Paul’s comments in Romans 10. They were righteous in their own eyes! God’s truth was preached to them in many, many ways. *But ... they never focused their attention on the demands of the covenant they had had with the Lord God since Mt. Sinai* (read Ex. 19). Only a remnant was faithful – Isaiah 6:13 indicates that about 1/10th of them would eventually make up the “remnant according to the election of grace” to which Paul refers in Romans 11:5.

If the truth is told about Ephesian 2:1-9, that is what Paul is referring to about being saved by grace through faith. No amount of work or money could acquire such a marvelous gift from God for Israelite or Gentile. God had every right to completely destroy Israel (and the Gentiles) off

the face of the earth and forget them for eternity, but His love and mercy were the acts of grace He exercised toward them through Jesus Christ – even before He had created anything in the orderly universe (1 Pet. 1:18-21). That is what God thinks about syncretism.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18: Unholy Relationships

Paul discusses unequal yoking in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Notice the relationships he discusses: (1) believers with unbelievers, (2) righteousness with unrighteousness, (3) light with darkness, (4) Christ with Belial, (5) believers with infidels, and (6) the temple of God with idols. Matthew 24:15 shows the unequal yoking of idols with God’s Temple. Such a thing causes God to vacate the Holy Place and consider it unclean; thus, the expression “abomination of desolation.”

Read Jeremiah 7 in its entirety. Note well the charges that the Lord God brings upon the House of Judah ... long after He has already banished their brothers in the House of Israel from the land. There are some things to which you should pay careful attention: (1) They had polluted His truth by their hypocrisy – that is, claiming to be God’s people while resisting and not living according to His thoughts and ways; (2) they had polluted His Temple by mixing into the worship services the sacrifices and practices they learned from Baalism; and (3) they believed that they were righteous before God simply for being “religious.” What was God’s reaction?

In their long history of rebellion evidenced in their syncretistic practices, they paid no attention to some historic examples of the limits of God’s tolerance. In v. 4, He shows that they thought they had God in a “box” ... that they could actually confine Him to a temple in the midst of corrupt worship. In v. 10, He shows that they thought they were given the freedom to do all of the abominable things they were doing because of having Him confined to the Temple.

In vv. 12-15, He shows that He had vacated other holy sites due to their religious “uncleanness.” As a matter of fact, He has already cast a portion of Israel out of His sight out of the land; so, it would be no small thing for the House of Judah to realize that **they are next**.

If 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 tells us that we are “the temple of the Holy Spirit,” then we are charged by God to keep our bodies and spirits “clean” before Him and avoid unholy relationships. It would stand to reason, then, that we should avoid anything that has been syncretized out of paganism into the true faith. Haggai 2:11-14 tells us that we, thereby, must avoid becoming “unclean” in God’s sight. Such associations with paganism made Israel “unclean” in God’s sight. What we should take away from Jeremiah 7 is simple: If “Christians” believe that they can mix and mingle God’s truth with paganism and be safe from His wrath, then Malachi 3:6 and James 1:17 have a prophetic message for them about whether or not He has changed His mind about such things ... about what He will do about it. By the way, new (*kainos*) = quality.

Conclusion

Do you suppose that Isaiah 1:10-20 is a description of the Lord God’s disgust with His own Law ... Law that Paul refers to as being “holy, just, and good” (Rom. 7:12; see also 3:31)? The Law that David refers to as the Lord’s “righteousness” (Psa. 119:172)? If you do, then you do not yet understand the unchanging nature of the thoughts and ways of God. How does the New Testament express that idea?

Read Hebrews 6:13-20. What should impress you about Paul’s instruction here? First, Paul uses the Lord God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15) as the basis of his illustration (vv. 13-15). Second, Paul explains why the Lord God created the ritual described in Genesis 15:8-12 – it had to do with the promise and oath involved in His covenant with Abraham (vv. 16-20). What should you take away from Paul’s explanation?

Paul says that God’s promise and oath are **immutable** – that is, they **will not** change because they **cannot** change (see Rom. 3:4; see also Gal. 3:26-29). Most in mainstream “Christianity” imagine that God’s Law has been annulled and such things no longer matter ... that Christians are free to do such things and make them part and parcel to “the faith once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Really?



(Clip art courtesy of openclipart.org)

What relationship does God have with Easter bunnies and Easter eggs? None.



(Clip art courtesy of openclipart.org)

What relationship does God have with hot cross buns? None.



(Clip art courtesy of openclipart.org)

What relationship does God have with paganism? None.

NO Relationship. Do you get it?

The “Evolution of the Immortal Soul” Concept

What do **you** *really* know about the concept of the *immortal soul*? It is most probable that, because of the religious environment in which you were raised, you believe the concept and treat it as though it is more than myth or fantasy or mere speculation ... that it is so familiar and sensible that it is *fact*. It would be an “anomaly in the space/time continuum” (to use a *Star Trek* expression) if such were *not* the case. What would it do to your religious paradigm if you found out that the concept is mere philosophical/religious *speculation* that has been handed down from generation to generation for millennia? That God’s *truth* about it is actually revealed in the Bible?

The objective of this study, therefore, is to engage you in a discussion about how the “evolution of the immortal soul” concept lent its voice to the religious doctrines afoot in the world today. You will be made privy to **God’s** concept about what man is and how his ultimate potential will unfold. You will need your Bible to verify the claims made in this discussion.

“Background” Thought

In order for you to understand that the concept of the “immortal soul” is not peculiar to “Christian” thought and belief, I want you to consider the following explanation found in W. L. Wilmshurst’s book *The Meaning of Masonry* (5th edition, 1927, London: Rider Publishers):

... The primal source of life is not in the “West,” not in this world; that existence upon this planet is but a transitory sojourn, spent in search of “the genuine secrets,” the ultimate realities, of life; and that as the spirit of man must return to God who gave it, so he is now returning from this temporary world of “substituted secrets” to that “East” from which he originally came (p. 30).

On its face, what Wilmshurst is saying is part and parcel to what I call the “evolution of the immortal soul.” Notice the “mystery” language he uses when he writes of the “West” and “East” ... “the genuine secrets” and the “substituted

secrets.” The “East” is the symbol of *new birth*, while the “West” is the symbol of *death*. The “genuine secrets” are defined as the “ultimate realities,” and the “substituted secrets” are the myths and pretended dramas that *symbolize* the “ultimate realities.” To what does Wilmshurst connect his discourse?

The connection is made to the *immortal soul* and its journey through the material world for the education it can derive through the experiences it will have as part of its path back to the “heavens” from which it fell. Here are his assertions:

1. Every soul born into the material world has lived somewhere else before its existence in the material world.
2. Every soul will exit this material world and travel to another world beyond this one.
3. The human life in which it lives in this material world is merely a stop along the way “in the midst of eternity.”

4. When the soul enters this world, it must assume a material form ... a body that will enable it to relate to the physical world “to perform the functions appropriate to it in this particular phase of its career (Ibid.).

Thus, the immortal soul is the principle actor, not the “body” in which it lives. In fact, the immortal soul will have existed in other “bodies” before it has come to the “material” world, and ... it will exist in other “bodies when it leaves this “material” world. Why? Because it is being “educated” in the functions it needs to learn in order to regain its place in the “East” from which it came. The “material” world represents the “death” from which the immortal soul must be resurrected (revived) in order to be reunited “with the companions of its former toils both here and in the unseen world” (Ibid; p. 43). The “material” world, according to Wilmshurst, is the exact opposite of the more real world from which the immortal soul came and to which it can return by self-knowledge and self-discipline (Ibid; p. 47). Notice the emphasis on self.

He further teaches that all of the religious systems in the world are nothing more or less than dramatized and intensified forms of religious processes aimed at purifying the soul in order for it to move on toward the actualization of the individual “God” that is hidden and undeveloped within it (Ibid; p. 49). Wilmshurst’s persistent and much stressed claim is this: “... The intention of Masonry was to deal solely and simply with the greater science of soul-building” (Ibid; p. 66; emphases added). He admits very openly and candidly that the Masonic Order perpetuates the “mysteries” of Egypt – their principles and philosophy – which were hidden from “vulgar eyes” in order to cultivate and improve the human mind (Ibid; p. 87).

It is interesting that the Masonic Lodge plays a very important role in the “mysteries” involved in “soul-building.” For instance: the flooring (“chequer-work”) of the Lodge is symbolic

of man’s dense, earthy, sensuous nature. The ceiling is his ethereal, “heavenly” nature. When the individual has attained the 33 degrees necessary for full Mastership of his life, then the “soul” qualifies to be joined to the Grand Lodge above and will “shine as the stars” when the body dies so that the soul can be released to its ultimate “life” in the “East” – that is, going back to heaven from which it fell (Ibid; pp. 98, 99).

The “long” and the “short” of this background is that the concept of the “immortal soul” is not taught in Scripture. Whether the idea is discussed by W. L. Wilmshurst or Alvin Boyd Kuhn, it is discussed as a universal, uniform concept and belief that goes back millennia into mankind’s past history where it was implanted into the minds of the whole human family (which we should understand as being much smaller and more concentrated than it is presently).

Wilmshurst and Kuhn – along with a plethora of others through the ages – teach that this concept is the root doctrine regarding the nature and destiny of the “immortal soul” in its evolution from “death” to “resurrection.” It is about the “Christos” in every single human that automatically moves, in stages of growth and development, from age to age until it is fully realized in the form of individual “angels of light”:

... The Sages resorted to the measure of placing at the very heart of every religious system an ideal personage who should typify and personify man himself, in his dual nature as human and divine, struggling forward to the consummation of his ultimate glory ... their history, their destiny and their eventual conversion into angels of light (Kuhn; pp. 27, 28).

Your responsibility, if you truly desire to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24), is to sort out this concept in Scripture and see if you can find anywhere in it that man is an im-

mortal soul or that he has one. It is the difference between *truth* and *counterfeit*.

Man: A Typical “Christian” Definition

You can use this definition of “man” from Herschel H. Hobbs in order to see the connection between the pagan concept described above and the typical “Christian” definition of what “man” is:

... Man was made to live forever. It was after he sinned that he became subject to death. However, for that reason man’s *animal principle of life* [found in the physical body] shall cease; his body will return to the ground [Man’s] soul, ***the real person***, is immortal. It will never cease to be.

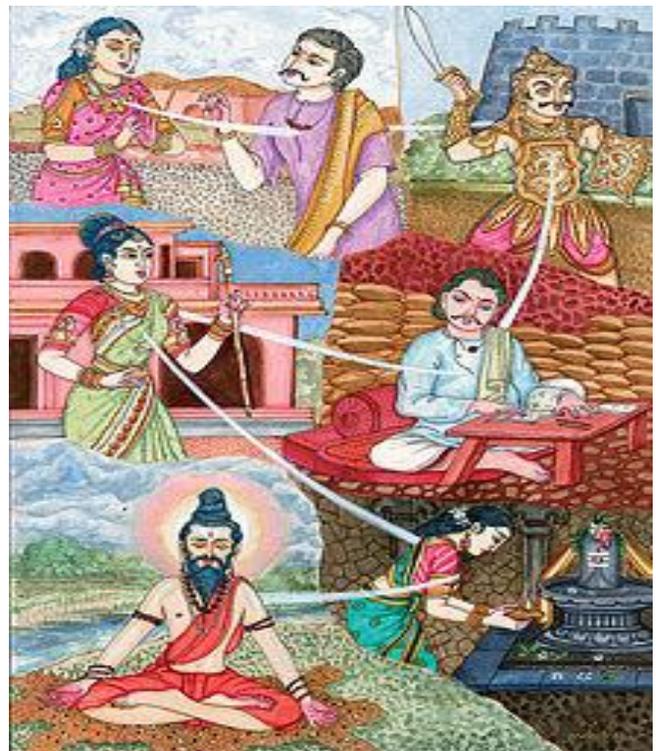
Man is two-fold in nature. He is both spirit and body. Man is ***not*** a body and has a soul. ***He is a soul*** and has a body. The body is mortal; the soul is immortal (*The Baptist Faith and Message*, Nashville: Convention Press, 1971; p. 51; emphases added).

In this definition, Hobbs shows his basic agreement with Wilmshurst and Kuhn that the ***real*** individual person is an *immortal soul*. The ***body*** is a temporary dwelling for the immortal soul until the body loses its ability to “live” ... subsequently perishing and returning to the dust out of which it was created.

Your starting point in Scripture is Genesis 2:7. Your first question is this: When God created man from the dust of the earth, did the “breath of life” He breathed into him constitute the imparting of an immortal soul into the body? We will look at many scriptural references in order to find God’s truth about the matter. You would do well to pay close attention to the difference between this account and the definition given above.

Let’s begin with Genesis 2:7. The main character in this vignette is the ***Lord God*** – from the Hebrew term ***Yahweh Elohim***. Realize from the entire lesson of the Bible that this character is the one who became flesh as Jesus of Nazareth ... the Christ.

The Anchor Bible translates this verse to read: “...God Yahweh formed man from the clods in the soil...” because the Hebrew term ***apar*** stands for “lumps of earth, soil, dirt’ as well as the resulting particles of ‘dust.’” (“Genesis,” E. A. Speiser, Doubleday, vol. 1, 1964, pp. 14, 16; emphasis added). It would have been difficult to find very much “dust” in that damp climate (see v. 6).



Representation of a soul undergoing *punarjanma* (the transmigration of a soul from one person to another). Illustration from *Hinduism Today*, 2004 (Courtesy of Wikipedia.com)

How did the Lord God cause man to come to life after creating him? The verse reads that the Lord God “breathed” the “breath of life.” into the dirt-become-flesh form lying before Him on the ground. Because of the entire concept about what “man” is, that is found ***in the Bible***,

this is not an account that is *pure allegory*, as Wilmshurst and Kuhn claim. It is an account that is to be understood as being “history.”

Once man came to life, what kind of creature did he become? Notice that the Lord God took the clods of the soil and used them as the material from which to construct man. Once He had the exact image He wanted, He administered CPR – breathing into man’s nostrils the breath of life – and man became “a living soul” (KJV). Be careful how you think about that term soul; it is not what many think it is. Dirt is not spirit.

The Hebrew term for “living soul” is nephesh. It is important to understand this term because it has many different applications to the life of the creatures the Lord God created. The term itself means “a living, breathing creature.” The same word is used in many places to refer to *animals* (for examples: see Genesis 1:21, 24; 2:19; 9:10, 12, 15, 16; Leviticus 11:46). So, man and animals are “living souls.” The same word is used to speak of dead bodies (Leviticus 19:28; 21:1; 22:4; Numbers 5:2; 6:11; 9:6, 7, 10). The “living soul” is also subject to death and decay (Genesis 2:17; Job 4:17; Ezekiel 18:4, 20). The “soul” can die! Read 1 Corinthians 15:46.

In Genesis 7:21, 22, do *animals* also have in them the “breath of life”? Would this indicate that the “breath of life” is merely breath? It is called “breath of life” because it caused Adam and the animals to come to “life.” The Lord God breathed His own breath into Adam to cause him to live. It is merely breath in the sense that there is no spirit or immortal soul involved. The Lord God exhaled breath, and man’s lungs were filled with it, causing him to become a living, breathing creature. No *immortality* was given to man in any shape, size, or quantity.

Now read Psalm 104:29 and then read the entire psalm. Focus now on verse 29: Whose breath is taken away? How can you tell if this includes man and beast? What happens to them when that breath is taken away? To what material do they return?

Now read Ecclesiastes 3:18-22. What advantage does the human have over the beasts? Why? Of what are both made? To what do man and beast turn when they die? You are beginning to build a volume of evidence about what the Bible teaches as opposed to what paganism teaches. Keep track of the difference.

In Ecclesiastes 9:4, 5, 10, what happens to the dead (human and animal) when they return to the dust? Pay close attention to verses 5 and 10. We’ll use this information more fully later on.

In Ecclesiastes 12:7, when man dies, what happens to his body and “spirit”? The term “breath of life” comes from the Hebrew term ruach. It is translated 28 times as “breath” (for examples, see Genesis 6:17; 7:15, 22; Lamentations 4:20) and 90 times as “wind” (for examples, see Genesis 8:1; 41:6; Exodus 10:13; Psalm 1:14). Ecclesiastes 3:21 and 12:7 are two examples where it is translated as “spirit.”

Both man and beast have been given the “breath of life,” and both return to the dust of the earth after death because both are mortal – that is, they are capable of dying. Once they die, that breath of life or “spirit” – ruach – returns to God who gave it. It has nothing to do with an immortal soul indwelling the body of man.

In Genesis 2:15-17, of what was man not to eat? Why? Based on what you have learned so far, what does it mean that he will die? According to the typical “Christian” definition, only the body of flesh in which the immortal soul (the real person) is housed will perish and go back to the dirt clods from which it was created.

What is the problem presented in Genesis 3:1-7? What deception did the serpent present to Eve about the Fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Like what/whom did the serpent say she would become? The serpent tells Eve in v. 4 that she “shall not surely die.” Commentator Adam Clarke has an interesting opinion about that statement:

The tempter insinuates the impossibility of her dying, as if he had said, God

has created thee immortal; thy death ... is impossible; and God knows this, for as thou livest by the tree of life, so shalt thou get increase of wisdom by the tree of knowledge” (Ralph Earle, ed., *Adam Clarke’s Commentary*: One volume Edition, Baker Book House, 1967, p. 21d; emphasis added).

In other words, Clarke opines that the serpent told Eve that she was *inherently immortal*. Also, the Hebrew term for “know” not only means to have an *understanding* about something, but also to be able to *experience* something in order to acquire that understanding. The serpent told Eve that God *did not* want them to be like Him, so He was withholding from them *knowledge* and *experience* about good and evil that would allow them to be like Him. In effect, he called God a liar.

Now read Genesis 3:19. What would be the result of their “returning unto the ground [from which they] were taken”? Why? Here “dust” is the preferred translation – not “clods.” Also, note the finality with which the Lord God spoke. He offered them *no hope* of surviving their return to the “dust” of the earth. He did not say to them that they would participate in a series of reincarnations in order to purge themselves of the “vulgar eyes” that they had acquired by sinning against Him. He offered *no hope* beyond the grave ... at that point. But, what did His subsequent action involve?

In Genesis 3:22-24, after the Lord God pronounced His judgment upon Adam and Eve, did He say that they would *live forever*? Understand that man became like God only in the sense of knowing good and evil – not that man became *immortal* or anything like it. The Lord banished them from the Garden so they would no longer have access to the Tree of Life, *which is a source of immortality*, but not necessarily of *self-sustaining, eternal life* (we’ll discuss this point later).

Genesis 3:22-24 reveals that the Lord God set in place the measures by which man’s *mortality*

– that is, ability to die – was enforced. He actually *prevented* them from gaining possession of the thing that would enable them to live forever! There would be some other avenue by which man must obtain access to eternal life – and, some other time at which that will be possible. That said and understood, refer back to Ecclesiastes 9:4, 5, 10. Based on this scripture, was there any type of consciousness or memory or activity awaiting Adam and Eve in the dust? Think seriously about what is being said here.

Finally, let’s consider the following information provided by Norman H. Snaith in his article “The Language of the Old Testament,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, vol. 1, 1952, p. 230). In discussing the fallacy of translating *Hebrew* thought with a *Greek* meaning, he uses the Greek word *psyche* as an example of how meanings can be changed and distorted from the original intent. For example, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) used the term *psyche* as the Greek translation of the Hebrew term *nephesh*. Snaith says that since the verb form, *psychein*, has to do with breathing (“that which is the clearest outward evidence of life”), the *Greek* meaning stands for a “breath-soul” and is used to describe that part of an individual that *leaves the body upon death*. So, *psyche* is used for “life.” However, as used by Homer and others, it speaks of *that part of man that survives death* – that is, *the immortal soul*. Snaith then warns the reader that using this meaning puts a meaning to *nephesh* that is *totally foreign* to the original, intended *Hebrew* meaning.

Snaith concludes his comments by saying:

Since the word “soul” in the English translation stands for the Hebrew *nephesh*, ***there is not one single instance in the Old Testament where the word “soul” should be thought of as that which survives death.*** When the Bible writer says ... that God “breathed into [man’s] nostrils the breath of life; and

man became a living soul,” ... **he does not mean that God thereby gave to man an immortal soul.** He means that God ... breathed into him his own life-giving breath, so that this shape of dust became alive. ... **If, therefore, the belief in the immortality of the human soul is held to be a Christian doctrine, then it should be realized that it is not a biblical doctrine.** The biblical doctrine is of a resurrection life [that is, of restoring life to the dead] for those who “have the spirit” and are “in Christ...” (Ibid; emphases added).

In effect, Snaith admits that there are differences between what the Bible says and what some “Christians” teach. Remember that because it will come in handy as you begin to orientate yourself to learning more about worshipping God in spirit and in truth (see John 4:23, 24).

According to Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10, does any and all mind-power cease to function at death? If this mental capacity ceases to operate at death, with what is man left? According to these verses, he is left with that euphemistic “sleep” we see in Daniel 12:2 – lying totally unaware of anything until he is called from the grave.

The Resurrection of the Dead

As you read in John 5:28, 29:

“...the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of [new] life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:23, Paul points out that there is an order to this matter of resurrection from the dead: Christ was the first to have been called from the grave (see also Acts 26:23); after Christ, those who are true Christians will be re-

surrected “at His coming”; finally, there will be at least one more resurrection to physical life – not spiritual, “born again” life (see the parenthetical statement in Revelation 20:5). Jesus teaches us in John 3:3-8 that we must be “born again” from flesh to spirit (see 1 John 3:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

Paul describes the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:42-49. Remember that resurrection means “to recover from death; raising the dead to life again.” Also, remember the Bible’s definition of death. Write down the description of the resurrection process in the order in which each body type occurs – for example: v. 42 = corruption to incorruption. Now do the rest of the verses. Notice which is first and which is second. This is important in understanding the revealed process.



The ankh is an Egyptian symbol of life that holds connotations of immortality when depicted in the hands of the gods and pharaohs, who were seen as having con-trol over the journey of life. (Courtesy of Wikiped-ia.com.)

In 1 Corinthians 15:46, of which material is man composed first – natural or spirit? How does this agree with Snaith’s comment? How does it agree with the Genesis account? How does it agree with Hobbs’s doctrinal statement?

Read Job 14:1-15. What does Job mean when he describes man like this: “...of few days...” (v. 1), “...continues not...” (v. 2), and “...his days are determined, the number of his months are with You; You have appointed his bounds that he cannot pass...” (v. 5)? In Job 14:10, what happens to man when he dies? He “gives up the ghost.” “Gives up the ghost” means “to expire” – that is, to breathe out his last breath. “Ghost” is from

the Hebrew *ruach* (see Gen. 25:8, 17; Matt. 27:50; and Acts 5:5,10).

This has nothing to do with a ghostly spirit surviving man when he dies. This is true wherever that expression is used (see other examples in Genesis 25:8, Matthew 27:50, Luke 23:46, and John 19:30). In Job 14:12, How long will it be before he is brought to life *again* (resurrected)? Notice that the term *sleep* is used here as a *euphemism* for *death*. A euphemism is a pleasant sounding word substituted for an unpleasant one. *Sleep* sounds more pleasant than *death*.

Now read Job 14:14. What does Job expect to happen to him when his “appointed time” is over? In Job 14:15, how will God end Job’s “appointed time” in the grave? In Job 19:25-27, what does Job expect to happen to him after the worms destroy his body? So, does he expect to *live again* after he *dies*?

It is clear that Job believes in a resurrection from the dead, but it is not clear that he understands the complete concept of the resurrection. In Matthew 13:10-17, what does Jesus Christ reveal about why some people are able to understand and others are unable to understand? (Read verse 15 carefully.) Does v. 17 indicate that prophets and righteous men of *times past* did not always understand some of the things that we who are in Christ are privileged to understand? (See also Daniel 12:8-10 for an example.)

In 1 Corinthians 15:50-55 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, does Paul agree with Job’s concept about what happens to the dead? How?

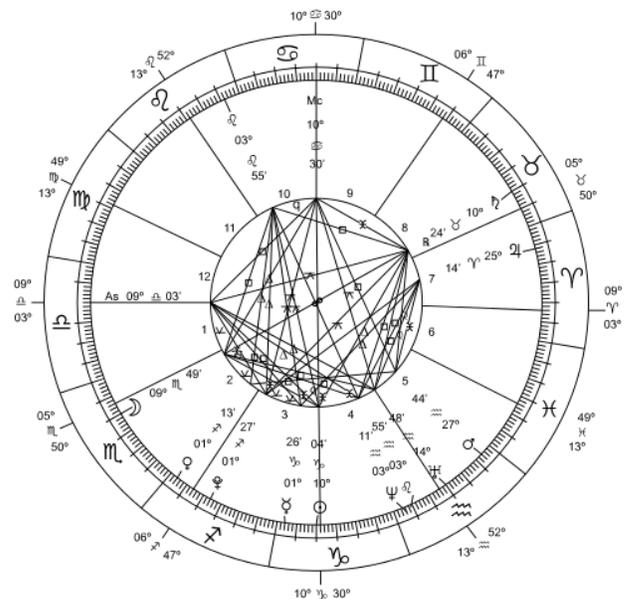
Snaith says that:

The New Testament follows the Septuagint and uses the word *psyche* as referring to something which is connected to *this life only*, and **not with any life after death**” (Ibid.; emphases added).

John Short, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, wrote:

The Christian doctrine [of life-after-death] is **not** one of [innate, inherent] immortality but of resurrection. We shall do well to get this point clear. As expounded by the apostle Paul, man’s hope of survival [beyond death] depends **not** on the inherent immortality of his soul, but on the act of God. ***His immortality is involved in his resurrection***, not his resurrection in his immortality. There is **nothing** in Paul’s writings nor in the N.T. to suggest that the soul is inherently immortal” (“1 Corinthians Exposition,” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, vol. 10, 1952, p. 253; emphases added).

Inherent means that something belongs, by nature, as an indispensable part of one’s being; it is *intrinsic* – that is, it belongs to the essential nature of something *from its inception*. If the soul is not inherently immortal, then it is reasonable to assume that immortality would have to be given to it – which is exactly Paul’s point in these scriptures: man is not *inherently immortal*; therefore, he has to *put on* immortality. Those who are “in Christ” will do that *when He returns*.



(New millennium astrological chart; courtesy of Wikipedia; Note the twelve astrological “signs” in the outer circle)

The “Evolutionary” Concept

What was the origin of the *astrological signs* of the *zodiac*? If you are familiar with them, then you know that there are twelve (12) of them that represent *astronomical* cycles. Kuhn writes of the cycles of nature that bear witness of “the high truths of divine wisdom” (p. 443). The ancients, according to Kuhn, found several “cycles” related to astronomical observation ... the most definite of which was:

... The precession of the equinoxes, the period of 2160 years during which the sun at the vernal equinox continues to fall in one of the *twelve zodiacal signs*, or passes through one-twelfth of its entire circuit that is completed in about 25,900 [exactly: 25,920] years (Ibid; emphases added).

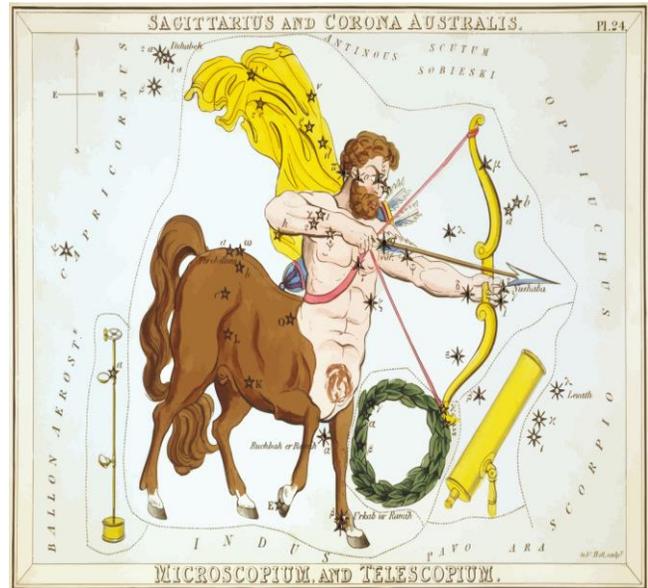
Kuhn avers that this “astronomically based periodicity” reveals “the analogue [a numerical amount corresponding to a physical change] for the greatest of all meanings in *spiritual evolution*.” What this “spiritual evolution” represents is called “incarnations” that represent “the *twelve* aspects of *completed deific nature*” (Ibid; p. 444; emphases added).

In other words, Kuhn claims that the zodiacal signs represent *the twelve stages of evolution* from “fallen soul” to “angel of light.” As he specifically puts it:

...Deity was given a twelve-fold catalogue of *changing attributes*, in accordance with the phenomena of the precession [the different signs of the zodiac]. ... Every one of the twelve signs is a dual or double representation of its particular *facet of divinity*” (Ibid; p. 445).

In order to understand the “dual representation in every facet, consider how *Sagittarius* is a symbol man as a god in the body of an animal

– the “sign” of a month that symbolizes the continuation of the soul’s descent into “the darkness of material embodiment” and “death” until it reaches the winter solstice at December 20/21 and begins the process by which it can be “resurrected” at the vernal equinox on March 20/21.



(Illustration of Sagittarius; courtesy of openclipart.org)

Kuhn teaches that:

... The zodiac was designed by ancient sagacity to intimate that the whole round of the aeonial cycle [that is,] the passage of the sun through each of twelve signs, symbolizing the peregrination [the essential strength or weakness] of the soul through *twelve stages of expanding growth*, brought out in manifestation *the final twelvefold perfection of its power* (Ibid; p. 455; emphases added).

Conclusion

All of that information should be sufficient to make my point that the ancient pagans devised *a counterfeit system of religion* based on *another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit*

(see 2 Cor. 11:4 and Gal. 1:6-9). It should be sufficient to say that the doctrine of the immortal soul is something that came out of the foolish mind of mankind unenlightened by the spirit of God's truth (read Rom. 1:18-25). Paul says that mankind has worshiped the creature, rather than the Creator and has changed God's truth into a lie (KJV).

Let me summarize seven important points we have learned here:

1. The belief in the immortal soul is an ancient pagan religious belief that has been syncretized into "Christianity."
2. The human body is believed to be merely the "vehicle" by which the soul can interact with matter and learn the lessons it needs to move forward in its evolutionary progress to actualization as an "angel of light."
3. It is believed that the immortal soul has always existed and will never die. This suggests that it was not created by God.
4. For 25,920 years, the immortal soul must go through twelve stages of education and refinement so that it can emerge as an individual "Christos."
5. Because this soul originally "fell" from heaven, it will return there when it has completed its series of "deaths" and "resurrections."
6. The Bible teaches us that the real person was originally formed from the dust of the earth and will return to the dust of the earth until God decides to raise it to life again in the form of His choice: flesh or spirit.

Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 15:46 that the natural body of flesh came first, and the spirit body must be "put on" in the resurrection (vv. 52-54). That being God's

truth, man presently has no inherent element of immortality.

7. The real person, therefore, will not go immediately to heaven or hell upon death because the real person is not an immortal soul.

God has an ultimate plan to put humans into the "God" family (see Gen. 1:26-28 and Eph. 1:1-4). However, the immortal soul is not a part of God's ultimate plan. It is not a "god" kind.

You should be able to understand how the "similarities" could tempt one to assume that similarities "prove" a relationship of "sameness." It is not logical to conclude that one "resurrection" belief is the same as all others. There are "denominational" differences in the concept of the immortality of the soul ... among pagans and Jews and "Christians." An assumption that similarity = sameness is wrong for the pagan, the Jew, and the "Christian."

One time in my past, a man with whom I worked and was friendly toward told me that we had a lot in common religiously. He based his comment on the few superficial conversations we had had about a variety of religious topics. I promptly told him that we had nothing in common. He was taken aback, to say the least. I explained it to him as simply as possible.

He said: "We both believe in the Kingdom of God." I answered: "Yes, but you believe that those who make up the population will be immortal flesh and bone. I believe they will be born again into spirit bodies as God is spirit." He protested: "We both believe in Jesus Christ!" I replied: "Yes, but you believe that Jesus Christ was originally an archangel [Michael] who was the brother of Lucifer. I believe that He was originally a God-being who exists alongside of a fellow God" [read John 1:1-3 and compare it to Philipians 2:5-11 and John 17].

My conclusion was that the things we believed have similarities, but not sameness. The pagan belief in the "death" and "resurrection"

they derive from sunrise/sunset and the seasons of the year is not the same thing as the “death” and “resurrection from the dead” taught in the Bible. Yet, traditional “Christianity” – over the process of time – made religious compromises with paganism based on similarities and forced them to morph into sameness. That is pure and simple syncretism. For what purpose? Universal “Christianity” – a “catholic” religion!

Let me close with the following observation: *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, in an article titled “Immortality of the Soul,” makes this very frank statement:

The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body [that is, after the body rots and wastes away] is a matter of philosophical or theological speculation rather than of simple faith, and is accordingly

nowhere taught in Holy Scripture” (1901 edition, pp. 564-566; emphases added).

“Holy Scripture,” in this case, refers to the Old Testament. You can rest assured that the doctrine is, therefore, also nowhere taught in the New Testament!

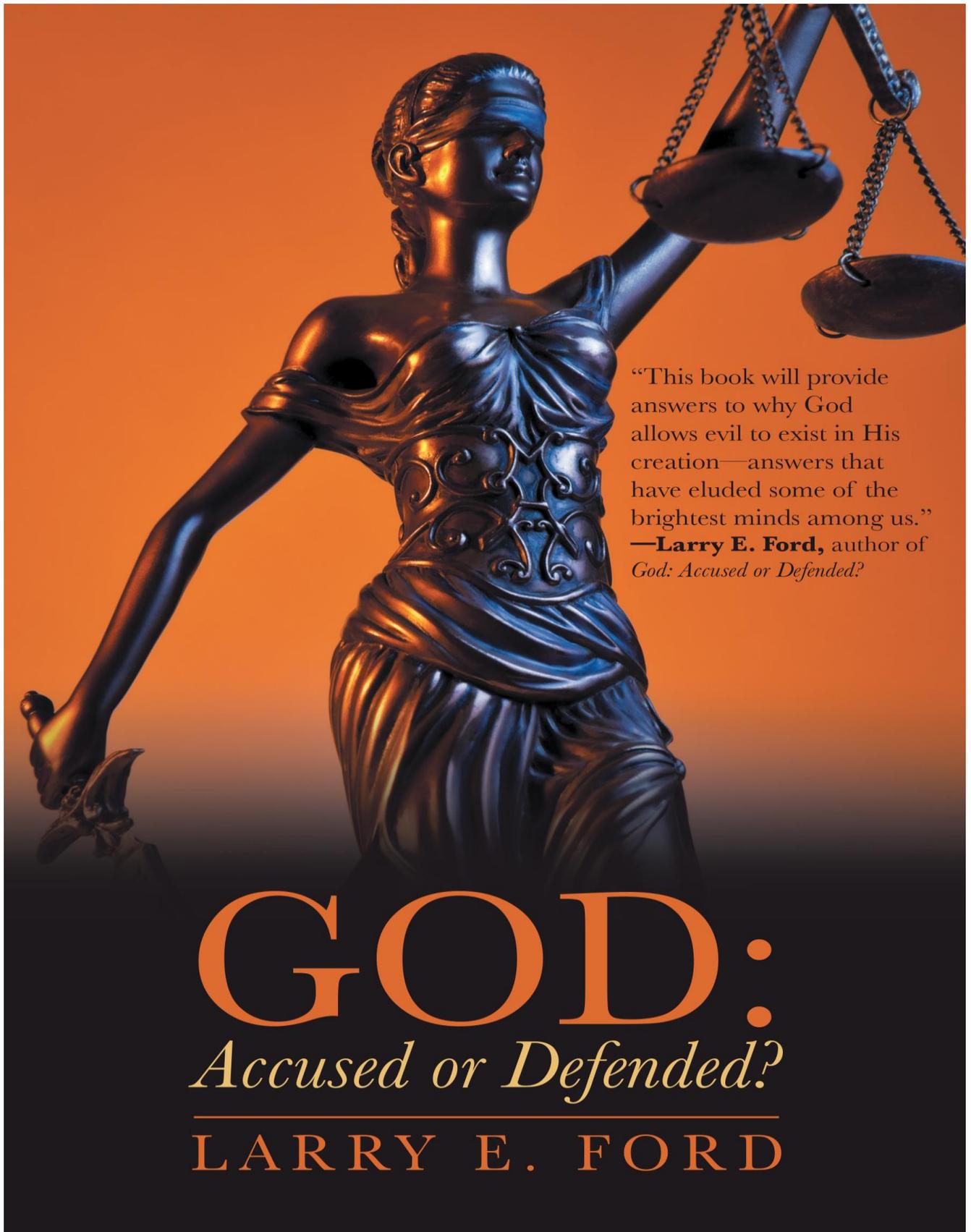
Our question is simple: Is this commonly taught concept God’s revealed truth? You need to know the answer. You need to know that God’s word gives us the unmitigated truth about what man is, why he is here, and what happens to him after death. There is no inconsistency between the Old and New Testaments about it. This should not be difficult to understand if you believe that the Bible is God’s inspired word of truth. If you are to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24), then it is incumbent upon you to pay attention to what His word teaches. Failure to do so is costly (Matt. 7:21-23).

This is the Wiccan “Wheel of the Year.” Notice the use of the solstices and equinoxes, each representing one of eight sabbats. The Wiccan, Pagan, and Witchcraft year runs from October 31st through October 30th. Samhain is associated with Hallowe’en, Yule with Christmas, Ostara with Easter, and Litha coincides with the celebration of the summer solstice (June 20-23) ... later changed by the Roman Catholics to St. John’s Day. Walpurgis Night is celebrated on the night of April 30 with song, dance, and the lighting of bonfires. Take time to look up information on these celebrations and understand why God abhors them.



Focus your attention on the center of the circle and note the unending “life cycle” represented there. Notice the “triads” of earth, air, and water ... and body, soul, and spirit. They are “trinitarian” religious concepts. The none-ending triangle and circle represent the immortal, eternal life of the Great Cosmic Mother discussed at the bottom of p. 26. Remember: similarity does not = sameness.

(Photo courtesy of www.wicca.com/celtic/akasha/holindex.htm.)



“This book will provide answers to why God allows evil to exist in His creation—answers that have eluded some of the brightest minds among us.”
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GOD:

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The Individual “Priesthood” Of the Believer

What is commonly involved in the concept concerning the individual “priesthood” of the believer? The concept is largely derived from two similar concepts found in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The first concept is found in Exodus 19:5, 6; the second is found in 1 Peter 2:5, 9. Both have to do with a “priesthood” in service to God. Among some church denominations, the concept merely involves spiritual service that is incumbent upon individual believers, while others add to it the concept of the individual *autonomy* of the believer.

For Martin Luther, it was a declaration of independence from the hierarchical Roman Catholic priesthood that interpreted Scripture for the individual believer ... leaving the believer no freedom to alter the interpretation. To others, like the Baptists, it was a declaration of independence that asserts that the individual believer is *autonomous* before God and, therefore, is competent to define his own personal relationship with God without the interference of others.

We would do well to study this concept in Scripture to understand better what **God** intends in faith and practice regarding any “priesthood” He established among flesh-and-blood believers. Here, I will run into a problem with either or both groups because I dare to tell others what God *means* and, therefore, *requires* them to believe ... individual competence and autonomy notwithstanding. I dare say that better understanding from **God’s** revealed point-of-view is to be more desired than the muddled mess of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations that continue to split and splinter into spiritual oblivion and spiritual disunity.

The “Priesthood” of Exodus 19:5, 6

In order to properly understand Exodus 19:5, 6, we need to get some background information. Matthew 25:34 is a good place to start. Jesus Christ says that God the Father prepared a *kingdom* for His true people “from the foundation of the world.” I have shown in other writings that the term *foundation* is from the Greek term *katabole*. The basic definition given in *Strong’s Concordance* is: “founding: figuratively – conception: – conceive, foundation.”

Needless to say, such a definition shows that a “foundation” can be traced all the way back to

the very *conception* of the idea ... but it can also mean the setting up of the *support base* upon which something is going to be built. Jesus covered that information in Matthew 7:21-29. Paul also covered it in a different manner in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. The *conception* of the idea comes before the *actualization* of the plan. God conceived of a kingdom (that is: a *family* and a *place* for that family to dwell) as an inheritance for the creature He was going to create in His image (Gen. 1:26-28).

Without going into great detail regarding this plan, suffice it to be said that Ephesians 1:1-14 and Hebrews 2:5-18 demonstrate that such a

plan existed “before the creation of the orderly universe” (Eph. 1:4) ... just as Jesus Christ was anointed to be the Christ “before the creation of the orderly universe” (1 Pet. 1:18-21). That “kingdom” (the *family* and the *territory*) ultimately were not to be ruled over by *flesh-and-blood* (see John 3:3-8 and 1 Cor. 15:50-54). Why? Because God is *eternal*, His ruling realm also has to possess eternal life in order to rule over the territory that will belong to them (Psa. 24; Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26-29; Gen. 15). In order for that to be possible, the flesh-and-blood creature must be *born again* (John 3:3, 7; 1 Cor. 15:52-54).

That said, let’s understand other background information on which to base the explanation. Hebrews 9:9 tells us that the *first* Tabernacle and accoutrement ... complete with the furnishings and priesthood ... represented “a *figure*.” A *figure* is a *symbol* or *type* of a greater *reality*. It is **not** the reality itself.

Such symbols are *prophetic* in nature – meaning that they represent something that **shall be**, not something that **already exists** (Rom. 4:17). The slaughtered sacrificial lamb was a *figure* of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The sacrificial goat and the scapegoat used in the Atonement service (Lev. 16) were *figures* of the role to be played by Jesus Christ in His scourging and crucifixion (Isa. 53; Psa. 103:12; 2 Cor. 5:21).

So, what we have in Exodus 19:1-8 is the Lord God’s proposal to Israel for them to be His “wife” – His *kingdom*. This is the *figure* of what He had conceived before the creation of the orderly universe. This is the *specific family* of all the families on earth that He chose to be His “wife” – His *kingdom*. While Genesis 1:26-28 sets the stage for the lineage through which this specific family would be chosen, it is incomplete in explaining this proposal of “marriage” between the Lord God and the twelve tribes of Israel.

What does He tell them in Exodus 19:5, 6? He tells them that they have been chosen *above all the nations on earth*. He tells them that they will be a “kingdom of priests” and “a holy nation.” What does that mean?

Let’s think about this seriously at this point. Does He indicate that **every** man, woman, and child will be individual, autonomous priests in that kingdom? If He did, why would He claim all of the firstborn *sons* from the individual families as His own (Ex. 13:2, 11-16)? Why would He later redeem the firstborn sons in order to establish the *males* of the tribe of Levi as His *priests* (Num. 1:47-54; 3:11-51)? Why did He make *Aaron’s* family the only ones that could become the High Priest and other priests?

Let’s look at Numbers 1:47-53. This discussion concerns the duties of the Levites outside of the family of Aaron. Notice that they take care of the Tabernacle: the setup, takedown, all of the vessels and furnishings, wood for the sacrificial fires, the water, clean up, and assistance to the “priest” class in their duties and sacrificial assignments.

They do not execute the office of *priest* in this arrangement; the family of *Aaron* does the *priestly* duties (Num. 3:1-10). On the Day of Atonement, only the *Aaronic* High Priest is allowed to go into the Holy of Holies in order to execute his responsibilities there in God’s presence (read Lev. 16:1, 2 and Heb. 9:19-28) – the other priests are not allowed to go into it at any time.

What does this tell us? It tells us that Israel was to be a nation that had a *family of priests* who were to serve the interests of the nation relative to the commandments and statutes of the Lord God. Not **every** man, woman, and child was to be a priest with individual, autonomous priestly duties. But ... all of them were to yield to God’s leadership of the nation and to be in **spiritual unity** with God and fellow man.

It is evident in Numbers 16 that some among Israel preferred to have the “individual priesthood of the believer” and go their own rebellious way against God’s will. Korah, the leader of the rebellion against Moses and Aaron, was not a descendant from the same line of Levites. According to 1 Chronicles 6:3, Aaron, Miriam, and Moses were descended from *Amram*, while

Korah was descended from *Kohath* (v. 22). Their rebellion was about who was in charge of Israel and its religion (see Num. 16:3). Korah's co-conspirators were Dathan and Abiram, who were descended from the Israelite tribe of Reuben. They were *faithless* in regard to the covenant they individually had sworn to uphold (see Ex. 19:8). God showed His will among Israel about who was to be Israel's leaders (vv. 28-35).

It is impossible, therefore, for me to find in the Old Testament any indication that the Lord God revealed the concept of the individual "priesthood" of each and every individual Israelite. It is revealed that they had the individual responsibility to be obedient to God's will as He established the religion in which they were to have faith ... what they would *corporately* believe and practice *without deviation from the word of God* (see Deut. 8:3 and Matt. 4:4 and compare them to Rom. 10:16-21 and Judg. 21:25).

The "Priesthood" of 1 Peter 2:5-10

First, let's understand to whom Peter addressed this letter. He calls them "the strangers *scattered* throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1). If I take my cue from Galatians 2:7, I would assume that Peter was writing to the "circumcision" (the Jews and/or the Israelites who had been scattered to the four winds between 721-718 B.C. (see 2 Kings 18:9-12). Both "Houses" of Israel were the "circumcision." Whether they were in Assyria, Babylon, or Media, or elsewhere in the world, they were in the "dispersion." They were "strangers" because they no longer lived in Israel. A substantial number of Jews did not return to Israel after the 70 years of Babylonian captivity ... especially among those who were born in Babylon.

In Ezekiel 1:1, the *Chebar River* places Ezekiel among the *House of Israel* in territory presently occupied by Iran (see Ezek. 3:15-17) ... between Turkey and the Caspian Sea. In Ezekiel 6:8, 9; 22:15; and 36:19-24, Ezekiel refers to them as being "scattered" (KJV) – that is, "dispersed" in

several directions. Anyone from either "House" who did not return from the captivities assigned to them were designated as "scattered" and "strangers." *It is interesting that Peter knew where some of them were and how to contact them regarding Jesus Christ.*

You have to understand that God did not *irrevocably* cast off His people – either "House" of Israel (Rom. 11:1-5). Isaiah 1:1-9 demonstrates that the Lord God reserved for Himself a "remnant" lest the entire nation had been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. The Disciples were the "holy root" *remnant* that God reserved for Himself in order to continue His covenant with Israel. This "remnant" received the promise from Jesus Christ at the Passover supper before His crucifixion that a "new" covenant will be realized when He establishes the Kingdom of God at His return (see Matt. 26:26-29).

This promise is part of the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:31-34 that is referenced by Paul in Hebrews 8 and 10. It is foreshadowed in Hosea 2 where the Lord God tells Hosea that, *first*, He will *punish* Israel for her sins (vv. 1-13), *then* "allure" her again to be His "wife" (vv. 14-23).

It is part of Paul's message to the Romans in chapter 11:25-29. It is part of Peter's message to the "scattered strangers" (1 Pet. 1:1) that they were being called "...out of darkness into his marvelous light" (v. 9) because they "...in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (v. 10; see also Hos. 1:9; 2:23).

In Galatians 2:7, Paul makes it clear that he was commissioned to take the gospel to the *Gentiles*, and Peter was commissioned to take it to the "*circumcision*" – that is, to both Houses of the nation of Israel. What Peter is writing here is aimed at both Houses of the "circumcision" with the intent that they should remember what was offered them in Exodus 19:3-6.

Paul is very bold in his claim in Romans 11:11-25 that the *Gentiles* are being "grafted" into the "holy root" that represents the "remnant [of

Israel] according to the election of grace.” In other words, Paul is saying that the Gentiles, because of being called into God’s truth, are actually becoming “Israelites”! Why? Because the Lord God chose Israel out of all the nations on the earth to be His “bride”! Romans 11:29 says that the Lord God does not change His mind (that is: repent) about such a gift and calling. Paul explains this very well in Hebrews 6:13-20 (Gal. 3:26-29).

All of that being said, what is Peter’s objective in 1 Peter 2:5-10? Is it to teach Christians that they are individual, autonomous “priests” under Jesus Christ ... with the right to read and interpret Scripture for their own personal relationship with God? If so, then we have “proof” of that with the existence of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations that argue and quibble about what God requires of us in Jesus Christ. That suggests that God does not care about all of the conflicting doctrines and preachments afoot among mankind ... that God sees no problem with such a schizophrenic Holy Spirit leading religious people off into so many different opinions about who “God” is and what He is up to!

Peter’s emphasis is punctuated in 1 Peter 2:5 with this sense of meaning:

You are being used as ‘living stones’ that are being built up into a spiritual house ... a holy priesthood that will offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Peter’s focus here is on a progressive movement that signals a continuing action or state. Several modern translations can be understood to mean exactly that. The marginal reference in my wide-margin *King James Version* indicates that it can be translated: “Ye also, as lively stones, be so built as...” (emphases added). More understandably stated, it translates out as imperative encouragement to allow themselves to be built into a “spiritual house.” How can we tell that this is true?

How many true Christians have come into existence since this statement was made? Is each succeeding generation of true Christians in the process of being added to this “spiritual house”? If that is true, does it make sense, then, that the “spiritual house” has not presently been completed ... that it is still moving forward toward completion? It is in the process of being built.

Now, what does each “living stone” represent relative to the “spiritual house”? Does it represent the creation of an individual, autonomous “spiritual house” independent of all the other “lively stones”? Hardly! It represents “lively stones” that are being brought together to form a unified “spiritual house.”

In other words, “Israel” is being reclaimed by Jesus Christ (who was the Lord God of the Old Testament) to be His “wife.” That will not be completed until He returns to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 11:39, 40; Revelation 6; 11:15; 14:14-16; and 19:6-9. The repentant, reclaimed House of Israel will constitute the “spiritual house” of which Paul and Peter speak.

Few in mainstream “Christianity” understand this “mystery” of God. The Gentiles who have been converted to God’s truth will be counted as being “Israelites.” All people, nations, and languages will have representatives in that “spiritual house.”

Paul speaks somewhat prophetically about this in Ephesians 4:1-24. Notice how he stresses unity of faith, doctrine, and practice in vv. 3-6. In vv. 11-14, he stresses the fact that God has provided ministers of various kinds in the true faith to preach and teach the things that promote the unity of faith, doctrine, and practice. He shows that God does not will His people to be “scattered” across the spiritual landscape and taken advantage of by those who promote such differences. Being “Israel,” the “spiritual house” He is building, demands that everything must be done according to the will of God, not according

to the individual, autonomous spiritual whims of so-called “*individual*” priests under Jesus Christ” (see Matt. 7:21-23).

Paul calls this kind of spiritual unity “...the **unity** of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13). Sad to say, 32,000+ forms of “Christianity” have not reached that point by a long shot!

Paul also calls it the “...edifying of the **body of Jesus Christ**” (v. 12). What does he mean by that expression? Paul explains it rather clearly in Ephesians 5:19-33: Christ’s “wife” is His “**body**.” That “body” is the Church. Paul says this in v. 30: “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” Then he uses Genesis 2:23 to explain his meaning. Notice the Lord God’s expectation of the man and woman He “married” to one another: “...they shall be **one** flesh.”

In order to grasp the significance of this, read John 10:30: “I and my Father are **one**.” Does he mean that they are one and the same being? No. The Greek term for “one” is *eis*, which means that they are in **unity** of thoughts, ways, and purpose. Notice how this **unity** is stressed in John 17:5-22. What is Jesus Christ praying about to the Father?

He is praying about the “children” that God has given Him to teach God’s truth (vv. 6-8). He is praying about the Father keeping them safe and apart from the thoughts and ways of the world (vv. 9-16). He asks the Father to set them aside for special holy purposes *through His truth* (v. 17-19). In v. 20, He makes it clear that He is also praying for those who will continue to be added to His followers in God’s truth. What does v. 21 teach us about this **unity** that is to be in accord with God’s truth?

Read the last part of v. 22: “...that *they* may be **one**, even as *we* are **one**...” Jesus is not asking the Father to return true believers to a celestial “God-blob.” He is asking that the result of sanctifying believers through the truth of God’s word will be a **unity** of *faith, doctrine, and practice*. In 1 Corinthians 14:33, Paul says that God is not the author of confusion. If that is true,

why should God accept the existence of 32,000+ examples of theological confusion? There is something terribly wrong with that picture!

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes about the distribution of spiritual gifts to the “body” of Jesus Christ. In v. 4, he says that there are “...diversities of gifts, but the *same* Spirit.” This tells me that the Holy Spirit is the **unifying force** among true Christians. Whatever the gifts are and however they might be distributed, the “body” is going to execute them in **unity** to those who will receive the knowledge and understanding from them. In v. 13, he says that true Christians have been “...baptized into **one body**...” by God’s **one** Holy Spirit.

He makes it plain in v. 14 that there are many “members” in the one “body.” By saying that, Paul is not promoting a multi-denominational “Church” arrangement. In vv. 15-24, he demonstrates, by using examples from the human body, how the “members” contribute to the **unity** of the “body”: *The individual members do not constitute separate, autonomous entities unto themselves*. Why? Verse 25 is so very plain in its meaning: “...*that there should be no schisms in the body*...” Paul is very plainly saying that there are to be no splits, divisions, gaps, denominations, et cetera, et cetera *in God’s true Church*.

Then he punctuates the fact that God has placed among the “members” of the “true body” a range of spirit-led ministers to give the “body” **cohesion** and **unity** of *faith, doctrine, and practice*. Such instruction calls into question the concepts of the “individual priesthood of the believer” and the “competency of the soul in matters of religion.”

One Last Pregnant Thought

I find it interesting that Wilmshurst would make the following comment:

For every Mason is intended to be the High Priest of his own personal temple and to make it a place where he and

Deity meet.... aspir[ing] to be the master of his own fate and captain of his soul... (*Masonry*; p. 97).

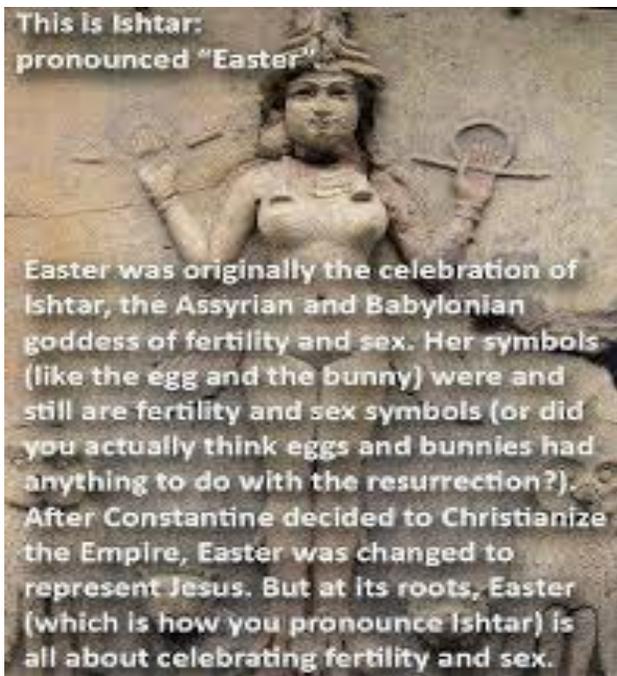
Wilmshurst used that comment to explain the black and white squares in the “chequered flooring” of the Masonic Lodge – the “good and evil” and dual nature it has in “everything connected to terrestrial life” (*Ibid*; pp. 96, 97). Each individual “soul” has to go through its own “situation ethics” and determine how best to become the master of its own fate and the captain of its own salvation. What might be “right” for some can actually be “evil” for others. No matter; each has his own “journey” to undertake to self-actualization. This is “individual priesthood” and “soul competency.” This is autonomy to work out its own salvation apart from the “unified body” concept that God has created.

It does not surprise me that so many do not get this right. After all, we have two Scriptures that warn of this: Matthew 22:1-14 and 1 Corinthians 1:19-31. Jesus shows in Matthew 22:1-14 that God has extended to mankind an invitation to be part of the “wedding feast.” Excuses

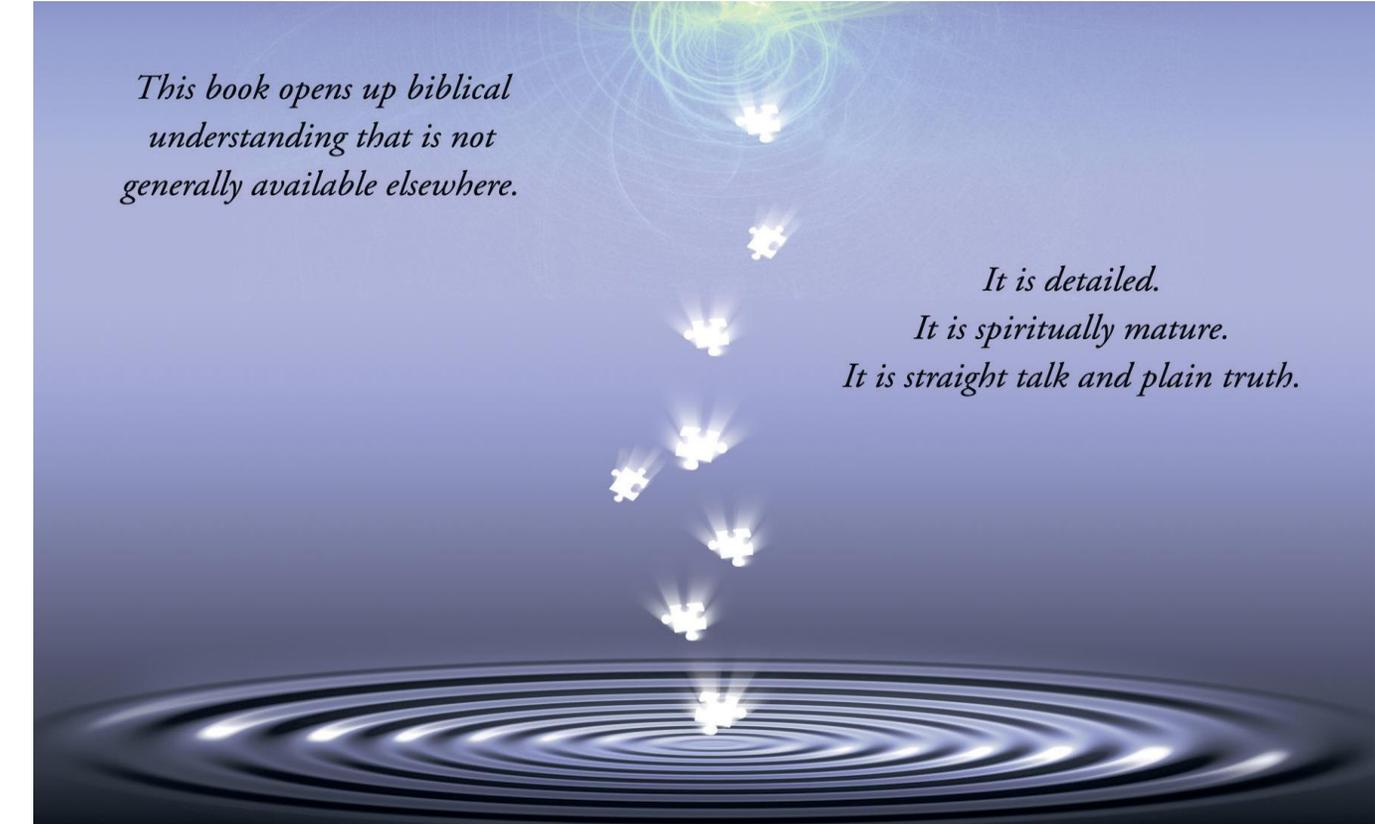
abound for not attending. The ultimate lesson is that “many are called [invited], but few are chosen.”

In 1 Corinthians 1:19-31, there is a slightly different objective to the lesson: the wisdom of the world might be fine for dealing with the things of the world, but it pales into insignificance to the wisdom of God. As a matter of fact, God does not call many of the rich or wise of the world to execute His plan. He calls the weak and despised to confound the mighty. After all, the glory of His plan belongs to Him ... not to the individual human who has grown wise and rich and noble by worldly standards.

I love the claim in “Onward Christian Soldiers!” that goes: “All one body we; one in hope and doctrine, one in charity” (emphases added). It is amazing that such a song is sung lustily on any given Sunday, by the members of the 32,000+ “Christian” denominations, without a second thought about how little it correctly describes them ... how totally opposite that claim is to the reality. No amount of personal autonomy or personal priesthood or soul competency will make it align with God’s will.



You should be able to see how interchangeable the name of this goddess was (examples are cited above). The same image above (p. 5) was named Beltis. She is, in fact, worshiped by Neopagans as the Great Cosmic Mother – the hermaphroditic divinity who gave birth to herself, created all that is (the “world”), and is known by her devotees as the “Great Egg” (her symbol). She is Easter. The comments and the photo are provided courtesy of www.google.com



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What *Difference*, at This Point, Does God's Law *Really* Make?

I will admit a bit of a lack of creativity that is exhibited in the title of this article. However, if you are at all savvy regarding current events over the past five or so years, you will recognize that there is a line of reasoning behind it whereby a leading politician “caved” in the face of an event that was billed as being one thing, when it proved out to be quite another. When called before a Congressional Investigation Committee to answer for the disparity between the “smoke screen” and the reality, she blurted out: “What *difference*, at this point, does it *really* make?” It turns out that the difference between the “lie” substituted for the “truth” made a great deal of difference.

So, the objective of this article is to reveal the scriptural evidence about the difference God's Law makes even today and in the unending future. In the face of the claim of most of traditional “Christianity” that the Law was “nailed to the cross” at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, you are going to be made privy to: (a) *why* God's scriptural revelation of His Law *still* makes a difference and (b) the vitally important role it plays in His plan to bring all things in heaven and on earth into *reconciliation* to His will (Phil. 2:5-11). This is not an ordinary conversation about that traditional “Christian” claim.

Modern Israel's Dilemma

In a recent conversation that I had with a man about the impending presidential election, I mentioned one favorable aspect of Donald Trump's candidacy: *His unmitigated support for the nation of Israel*. The man's immediate reply is a relatively common assumption: “You do not want to mess with Israel *because they are God's people*.” On the surface, he was correct.

I did not want to pursue with him the details of the thought I was having because I did not feel that he was informed enough to understand it properly in the short time we had for our discussion. The thought was this: “How do you explain the scriptural fact that the Lord God *divorced all of Israel*?” All you have to do is read Jeremiah 3, Hosea 2, and Ezekiel 16. One thing that many do not understand is that He divorced her with the *future* plan of cleaning her up and “remarrying” her (Ezek. 16:59-63; Hos. 2:10-23).

What does that do to His *present* relationship to Israel? And ... what does His *Law* have to do with it now and in the future?

Here in the final week of December and 2016, we have learned that the Obama administration abstained from a crucial vote in the United Nations that, *on the surface*, prohibits Israel from continuing to build settlements in the “west bank” part of her nation. This is supposed to force Israel to be more serious about a “two-state” solution to the Palestinian “problem.”

On *Fox and Friends* (Dec. 26, 2016), Alan Dershowitz (a prominent American lawyer, jurist, author, scholar, and Law professor-emeritus at Harvard University) revealed that the proposal also included a prohibition of Jews praying at the “Wailing Wall” (a Jewish holy site that is considered to be the western wall of her ancient Temple), attending Hebrew University, boycotting products made by Israel and labeling those made in disputed territory, defining “Israel” ac-

ording to pre-1967 borders, charging her leaders with war crimes, and several other similar prohibitive measures that literally “handcuff” them from doing anything in their own nation.

To the “inquiring mind,” of course, the question arises about why God would allow such a thing to happen to *His people* ...if they are, in fact, presently His people.

The cry for the destruction of Israel and Jerusalem has gone on for centuries. Psalm 137:7 and Obadiah are two accounts of Edom’s call for that destruction. Edom, by the way, is the nation who was Jacob’s (whose name was changed to Israel) twin brother (see Gen. 25:19-34; Rom. 9:1-15). Edom presently exists among the Arabic, Muslim nations in the Middle East who are still so violently opposed to the existence of Israel.

In an article that I wrote for *Spirit and Truth* in the January–March 2015 issue, I stated the following:

Consider the two boys born to Isaac and Rebekah: Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25:25-30). Esau, who is described as being “red all over like a hairy garment,” (v. 25) was also called Edom (v. 30). Jacob was later called Israel (Genesis 32:24-28; 35:9-12). *Smith’s* says that Edom is also known as Idumea (Mark 3:8) – located in a ruddy-hued mountainous region around Mt. Seir about 100 miles long and 20 miles wide. The ancient capital was Bozrah, Petra was its stronghold, and Ezion-geber was its seaport.

If you look at a Bible Map, you will find the Edomite territory on the eastern side of the Jordan River and the Great Salt Sea – running from the south end of the Great Salt Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba (Ezion-geber being the port city). If the modern Shemitic Hebrew Abrahamic Isaachian Edomites still occupy that territory, then you might wonder

why they have such hatred for the Shemitic Hebrew Abrahamic Isaachian Israelitish Jews. Their ancestors Esau and Jacob, after all, were twin brothers! (pp. 9-12)

Why should an ancient family squabble make such a difference in today’s world relative to a question about whether or not the Jews are God’s people? Many of the Psalms are complaints about all of Israel’s enemies who wanted to destroy her. It’s not just the jealousy of one brother’s descendants who want revenge for the imagined theft of a firstborn’s birthright blessing. It goes far beyond that ... and it grows more and more intense as the years go by. *It is modern Israel’s dilemma* ... and *Judah* is only one of Israel’s twelve tribes.

The Background to the “Old” Covenant and the Law Attached to It

As stated above on pp. 21-23, the “Kingdom” that God planned “before the creation of the orderly universe” was to be “holy, blameless, and loving” (Eph. 1:4). Whether or not Israel had been *specifically* chosen at the time to be that “Kingdom” is of little consequence in the larger scheme of things. God was going to have a “Kingdom” that would be a national inheritance (see Matt. 25:34). How did that plan come to actualization?

Genesis 12 is the beginning of a relationship that came into existence between the Lord God and a man named Abram. The initiation of the Lord God’s covenant relationship with Abram was predicated on the following: (a) a specified territory *on the earth* for Abram’s “seed” to live in and expand the “family” and (b) Abram’s “seed” was, in turn, to be a blessing to all other nations (Gen. 12:1-9; Gal. 3:6-9). Read Genesis 13:14-18 and make note of the expression “all the land you see I will give to you and your seed **forever**” (emphases added). This was not intended to be a short-term covenant with Abram; it

included him and his “seed” **forever**. Note in v. 16 how numerous that “seed” was intended to be. The problem was this: At the time, Abram had no “seed.” He was 75 years old, and his wife, Sarai, was 65 years old and barren (Gen. 12:4; 15:1-6). At first, Abram and Sarai attempted to solve that problem on their own.

Abram proposed to adopt his steward, Eliezer, as his son (Gen. 15:2, 3). The Lord God denied that request and told Abram that he would be the father of his own son (v. 4). In v. 5, the Lord God shows Abram how numerous his “seed” would be from the birth of that inheriting son. In v. 7, the Lord God tells Abram that His specific reason for bringing him and his family out of Ur of the Chaldees was to give a specific territory to him as an inheritance. This is where the fulfillment of Matthew 25:34 begins to take shape.

Abram proves to be an inquisitive man in the face of all these promises. In v. 8, he wants to know how he can know for sure that he will, in fact, inherit the land. At this point, the land is the “**promised** land.” The Lord God instructs Abram to set out various animals for a special ceremony (vv. 9, 10). This ceremony was not merely a sacrifice. It was a ceremony in which an **oath** was made to seal the sanctity of the **promise**. This oath required the ones who walked among the dead carcasses to **die** if either of them broke the promise and/or oath. Paul explains this very well in Hebrews 6:13-20. If you read Genesis 15:12, 17 closely, you will understand that only the Lord God walked among the carcasses. That promise and oath made it doubly sure that the Lord God’s territorial blessing to Abram was as good as done.

Note also Genesis 15:13-16. This is a prophecy about the future existence of Israel and her captivity in Egypt. She would be there for over 400 years. Verse 16 indicates that the reason is that the Lord God is in judgment against the Amorites who will live in the “promised land” until He is able to complete that judgment and drive them out of the land (read Lev. 18 – especially

vv. 24-30). Israel did not exist at that time ... so Abram was not an Israelite or a Jew.

Genesis 16 shows us that Sarai had her own solution to her barrenness. She talked Abram into impregnating her handmaid. He did; the handmaid gave birth to a son, Ishmael (v. 15). Abram was 86 years old at the time; Sarai was 76 (v. 16). The question at this point is whether or not the Lord God let Abram’s first-born son with Hagar stand as his inheriting “seed.”

In Genesis 17, we find that Abram’s name is changed to Abraham, and Sarai’s name is changed to Sarah. This is peculiar because Sarai’s new name means “a mother of nations” (v. 16). It is important that you understand the importance and impact of Genesis 17:1-14 relative to the “covenant.” The “covenant” is an “everlasting covenant” regarding Abraham’s “seed” and the “promised land” (vv. 7, 8).

The impact of Genesis 17:15-21 is of major importance. The Lord God revealed that Sarah would give birth to Abraham’s very own son. Abraham would be 100 years old, and Sarah would be 90 (v. 17). Next, Ishmael would **not** inherit the covenant from Abraham. The promised child, who would be named Isaac, would be the inheriting son – the firstborn son of Abraham with Sarah. God would give Ishmael twelve tribes as descendants, bless them, and make them a great nation.

In order to shorten this explanation substantially, let’s look at Genesis 25. This chapter is important because of what happened when Abraham died. Sarah died when she was 127 years old (Gen. 23:1). When Abraham was older, he married a woman named Keturah and had six more sons by her (Gen. 25:1-4). When Abraham died at 175 years old, he left everything he had to Isaac (v. 5)– but gave generous gifts to his other sons – even those he had fathered with his concubines (v. 6; there is no mention of how many or who they were). Each group went their separate ways and occupied land away from Isaac’s.

Genesis 26:1-5 is a pivotal point in this story. From Genesis 25:19-34, we learn about the birth

of Esau and Jacob to Isaac and Rebekah – and that Esau was expected to be Isaac’s inheritor. What was he to inherit? That is where Genesis 26:1-5 comes into the mix. The Lord God appears to Isaac and tells him that he is to inherit “... the oath which I swore to Abraham your father.” Why? That would put one of *Isaac’s* sons in line to inherit it from Isaac, instead of Ishmael.

If you read Genesis 26:5 correctly, you will learn that the Lord God had revealed to Abraham “... commandments ... statutes ... and ... laws.” It appears from this revelation that there was a *legal basis* that underpinned the Lord God’s covenant with Abraham. The fact that Abraham “... kept my *charge*...” suggests that Abraham was given the responsibility of knowing and enforcing the Lord God’s commandments, statutes, and laws among his “seed.”

What do you imagine would have been the Lord God’s reaction if Isaac had told Him that he had no intention of accepting the same charge He had given Abraham? Food for thought. Nevertheless, we find Isaac accepting the inheritance and transfer of the covenant; so, we can safely assume that Isaac did not refuse to be faithful to the legal underpinnings of the covenant agreement.

From Isaac to Jacob

Genesis 25:31 gives us evidence that Esau, because he was the *first* twin to be born, was expected to receive the birthright promise from Isaac. However, when Rebekah had inquired of the Lord why her twins struggled so in the womb, He revealed something that is prophetic:

Two nations are in your womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from your bowels; *the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the older shall serve the younger* (Gen. 25:23; emphasis added).

This was prophetic in two ways: (1) The Lord God indicated that the “struggle” between “two manner of people” in Rebekah’s womb would not end when they were born, and (2) the younger would be stronger than the elder, which would result in the older serving the younger. In fact, that would indicate that it was the Lord God’s will to later give the covenant to *Jacob*. Paul takes up this issue in Romans 9:1-15.

If you continue to read Romans 9, you will find a very important principle that reveals the mind of God in fulfilling His will. Read especially vv. 19-23 – the gist of which is plainly stated by Paul: God has revealed certain things and prepared certain people for the purpose of displaying and making known His power and glory. If you think that men and nations can destroy what God has determined to be, you will be taught a great lesson (see vv. 15-21).

Paul’s point is that *God* chose Jacob to inherit the covenant blessing from Isaac. Because He is the sovereign God over all, who has the right to challenge His determinate will? Like all other gifts of God, this was an act of grace, not law or debt.

Genesis 27 shows how Jacob deceived Isaac into giving him the birthright inheritance. Jacob’s name defined his character: “one who supplants [to take the place of another by plotting and trickery].” You can see Isaac’s and Esau’s consternation in vv. 32-41. The Lord God had not intended for Jacob to get the blessing in the manner by which he got it, but He did not interfere with it.

Now read Genesis 28:10-15. Jacob’s dream of the ladder reaching from earth to heaven was the occasion when the Lord God confirmed the transfer of the covenant from Isaac to Jacob. In chapters 29-31, Jacob meets Rachel and bargains with her father, Laban, to take her as his wife. Laban resorts to some trickery of his own: he requires Jacob to marry his older daughter first. Jacob ends up having to work for Laban fourteen years for his daughters Leah and Rachel. Over time, Jacob, his two wives, and their

handmaids produce twelve sons and at least one daughter. The twelve sons become the twelve tribes of *Israel*. Why not the twelve tribes of *Jacob*? It is from the event in Genesis 35:24-30 that we get the answer to that question.

Jacob got into a wrestling match with someone who is eventually revealed as being the Lord God. Because of Jacob's tenacity, the Lord God changed Jacob's name to *Israel* – "a prince who has power with God and men." *This was the moment of Jacob's spiritual conversion.* The Lord God returns later to meet Israel and to confirm again that the charge of the covenant is in his hands (Gen. 35:9-12). That means that the increase of "seed" that the Lord God promised Abraham is well under way through a specific lineage (remember Gen. 17:18-21). We can now skip the intervening history to Exodus 19:1-8

The "Marriage" Proposal

When the 400+ years of captivity in Egypt had passed (Gen. 15:13-16), the Lord God raised up Moses to lead them out of Egypt. They are now at Mt. Sinai where the Lord God will make them an offer consistent with the covenant He promised Abraham and sealed with His oath. This comes in the form of a "marriage" proposal (Ex. 19:1-8).

We can tell that this is a "suzerain-vassal" covenant because it is *conditional*. Notice the "if... then" nature of the proposal. That "marriage" relationship between Israel and the Lord God is predicated on Israel's agreement to obey the Lord God's "voice" and keep His covenant – which includes the "commandments, statutes, and laws" for which Abraham was held responsible ("charged"; Gen. 26:5). With this, we see the Lord demanding the absolute right to exclusively rule Israel in exchange for His protection and blessings. He will be Israel's only Lord and King.

In such an agreement, "love" means total loyalty and service. The "commandments, statutes, and laws" are the legal bases that define

what "loyalty" and "service" are. There is no difference between this and what Jesus Christ said to His Disciples in John 14:15: "If you love me, keep my commandments." Once Israel agreed to the demands of the proposal (Ex. 19:8), the Lord God set forth the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). What were they? Exodus 34:28 specifically defines this: "... [Moses] wrote upon the tables **the words of the covenant**, the ten commandments" (emphases added).

Now read Exodus 2:24, 25 in order to understand what the Lord God was up to just prior to instigating the exodus from Egypt: Remembering the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By now, you should be impressed with the fact that **God's Law** was the rules and regulations that expressed His will and code of conduct about being holy, blameless, and loving people in covenant with Him (see Rom. 3:31; 5:12, 13; 7:7, 12, 14; 1 John 3:4; Rom. 6:23; Gal. 3:19-25).

The "long" and the "short" of the matter is simple: God operates all things according to laws and codes of personal conduct. In Isaiah 55:8, 9, they are called the "thoughts and ways" of God. The Lord God is the one who became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14). He is the one who covenanted with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the one who has made a similar "marriage" proposal to His Church. Has he done away with the **Law** that underpinned His relationship with Israel? No ... and for very good reasons.

Psalm 119:172 proclaims: "... All your commandments are righteousness." What does that mean? It means that God's Law is the means by which relationships are kept in a just, upright, virtuous, and moral manner. It is *righteousness* when your "Yes!" and "No!" are the final, trustworthy words (see Matt. 5:33-37). This is taken from Numbers 30:2, which stipulates that a man is to be as good as his word. If you are to be holy as God is holy (Lev. 19:2; *righteousness* is implied) the you are to act like God would act: just, upright, virtuous, moral. Isaiah 55:10, 11 says that the *words* of the Lord go out of His mouth and

accomplish the thing for which they are uttered. That is righteousness ... and God's commands enable us to know the mind of God with regard to what constitutes the "breaking" of the covenant with Him (see Rom. 5:20). We should also know that God has a "righteousness" not defined by Law – grace and mercy are two examples. There is no law that requires God to be gracious and merciful. However, we also know that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16).

Now read Deuteronomy 7:9. Imagine what 1,000 generations must be! If the Lord God is love, then what does Paul teach us in Romans 13:8? Is the Law also love? Is that why Jesus Christ told us in Matthew 5:17 that He did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets? Is it because He is the Law because the Law is holy, just, good, spiritual, and righteous (Rom. 7:7-14; 8:1-4)? An expression of what He is and what He expects us to be if we are in covenant with Him?

For what purpose did the Lord God chose Israel to be His "wife"? Let's consider His instruction to Moses in Deuteronomy 4. In v. 4, He says that those who were faithful were the ones He brought out of Egypt into the "promised land." In vv. 5-8, He tells them that He gave them statutes and judgments from which they would gain godly wisdom and understanding.

The net effect would be that the other nations of the world would recognize Israel as being a great people with great wisdom and understanding – a people whose God is near them in all things. In other words, the Lord God expected Israel to be a bright, shining example to the other nations of the world so they too would be attracted to Him and be converted. Read very carefully vv. 32-40. Read very carefully v. 13. All of this is prelude to Deuteronomy 28.

"The Remnant According to the Election of Grace"

Deuteronomy 28 is the Lord God's instruction to Israel about keeping covenant with Him in the metaphorical "marriage." Verses 1-14 are

the manifold ways by which He would bless them for being faithful – with the proviso in v. 14 that they should not go astray from the agreement and/or serve other gods. Verses 15-68 are all the ways by which the Lord God would curse them if they broke covenant with Him. Was His warning heeded by Israel?

Isaiah 1 is a sorry reflection of Psalms 14 and 53. Israel became so sinful that the Lord God concluded that further punishment would serve no practical purpose (Isa. 1:5, 6). They had spoiled every ounce of holiness the Lord God had invested in them ... to the point that they had corrupted the religion He had taught them. It made Him ill to see them practice their syncretized religion in His name (vv. 10-31).

What was the Lord God to do? Destroy them like He had done the generations of mankind before the universal flood? Verse 9 gives us an insight to His contingency plan: He would reserve for Himself a very small remnant of Israel who had not broken covenant with Him. Isaiah 6:8-13 shows Him calling out Isaiah to pronounce upon the wicked His sentence: He would close their "eyes" and "ears" to His instruction and knowledge for a very long time (vv. 11-13; compare to Matt. 13:9-17). Isaiah 8:16, 20 says that He would allow only the very small remnant (His disciples) to understand. All the others might preach and teach similar things, but it would not be the true, undefiled religion that He wanted and expected. Also not Isaiah 9:16, which explains the source of the problem: Leaders – which includes ministers (see 1 Cor. 11:4, 13-15).

In Jeremiah 7, He sent Jeremiah specifically to the House of Judah – the tribes of Judah, Le-vy, and Benjamin that were left in the land after the Assyrians had taken the rest of Israel into captivity ... a captivity from which they since have never returned. Jeremiah's message to the House of Judah was simple: "You think that you have me locked up in your Temple and that I have no choice but to be there to serve you. Pay close attention: I am withdrawing my name and presence from you and the Temple because of

your wickedness and failure to keep covenant with me.” Now read vv. 21-34. Why did the Lord God *divorce* Israel?

The Jewish nation presently called “Israel” is only the tribes of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin. The other tribes of Israel do not exist as a corporate body. They are scattered to the ends of the earth. But ... the Lord God reserved for Himself a “remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5). He did not have to do such a thing. Law did not require Him to do such a thing. It was a manifestation of a *righteous* He possesses outside of the requirements of the Law (sin = death). *Israel’s time of punishment is not over*. If it were, all *twelve* tribes would be together as a single nation and the world would be a totally different place.

“The Time of Jacob’s Trouble” (Jeremiah 30)

Jeremiah 30:3 prophesies a time when both houses of Israel will be returned to the promised land. Ezekiel 37 is a prophecy about how the greater part of that will happen in the future. I want you to understand this “time of Jacob’s trouble” (v. 7) so you can understand what is yet before us in world events ... what is in store for the *Jews* and the *Israelites* who have been scattered throughout the world since 721-718 B.C.

The Lord God does not mince His words about it! One thing that you have to be aware of is this: The Lord God is judging all of *Israel* according to the *Law* that bound Him to her in covenant. *Wherever she (both “Houses”) has been scattered, He has still held her accountable for obeying the legal bases of the covenant He made with her*. That reconciliation is contingent on her *obedience*. Her continued rebellion justifies God’s continual adversarial actions toward her.

Paul reveals in Romans 1:24, 26, 28 that she, like all of rebellious mankind, has been turned over to suffering the consequences of breaking covenant with Him. He reveals in Romans 8:20, 21 that mankind’s sins have caused God to sub-

ject *everything* in creation to an ultimately pointless, hopeless condition that can take it to its ultimate destruction. Jesus Christ validates this in Matthew 24:21, 22 when He says that the Great Tribulation is the line of demarcation (*God’s red line*) at which His decision to allow the total destruction will be made. *If Jesus Christ does not intervene in order to reclaim all of Israel, then nothing will survive the carnage that follows!* Yes ... it is that serious.

Because of present-day circumstances, in which the “House of Israel” is scattered among the nations and only a small portion of the “House of Judah” occupies a small portion of the “land of promise,” some believe that they have to be put back *into* slavery before they can be returned *from* that slavery. The “House of Israel” is in a *scattered* condition, so she will be brought back to be a unified nation again ... ultimately joined to the “House of Judah.” That is the sense of v. 3. How will that happen?

Verse 11 tell us that the Lord God “will make a full end of the nations where I have scattered you.” Israel will still be held accountable for her violations of the covenant (vv. 11-17). In v. 14, we see that *all of Israel’s allies will forsake her*. They will have used her to their own advantage and thrown her away. Verse 6 says that her unfaithful “lovers” and enemies alike will pay a heavy price for doing such a thing. Much of this will take place during the coming Great Tribulation.

If we combine Zechariah 14:1, 2 with Revelation 11-19, we can understand this in the context of the “last days.” Revelation 11 covers the three and one-half years of the ministry of the two witnesses in Jerusalem leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. Verse 2 says that *Jerusalem* shall be trodden down for 42 months (3½ prophetic years). Verse 3 says that the Two Witnesses will be there for prophetic purposes during that same time (1,260 days). Verse 11 says that Jesus Christ will intervene against the nations involved. This relates to Zechariah 14:1-9.

Revelation 12 shows that Satan will be cast out of heaven into the earth and will cause

major problems for the inhabitants of the earth (vv. 7-12). The “woman” (vv. 1-6) will be taken to her place of safety to be protected during that same time period (v. 6, 14). She represents God’s True Church ... His “spiritual” Israel. Some of her “seed” will not be taken to the “place of safety” and will suffer the horrors of the Tribulation that is fomented by the “Beasts” of Revelation 13. This action of the “Beasts,” inspired by Satan, will be aimed at all of Israel, whether or not they belong to God’s True Church (which is made up of that “very small remnant according to the election of grace”). The idea Satan has is to wipe both of them out of existence forever. Doing so would totally defeat the plan of God to establish His Kingdom. As far as Satan is concerned, such a plan cannot be allowed to stand.

In Revelation 14, we find two things happening: (1) Jesus Christ effects the resurrection of the dead saints and the change from flesh to spirit of those still alive (see John 3:3-8, 1 Cor. 15:50-54, and 1 Thes. 4:13-18). Once He secures His chosen ones on the cloud where He sits, He will engage the armies that have come against Jerusalem.

We get a description of this from Revelation 14:17-19:21. We can see from Revelation 9:13-21 that one great wave of horror after another will have been launched before we see in Revelation 16:12-21 that the final battle will come shortly thereafter. Why do I say “shortly”? Because the Tribulation Period is only 1,260 days long. Jesus Christ will intervene about 900 days into that to pour out seven “trumpet plagues” (Rev. 8-11), resurrect His saints, deliver Jerusalem from the invaders, and finish off the remaining wicked with seven “bowl” plagues (Rev. 16-18) ... all in 360 days.

Revelation 19 shows us two more things of great interest: (1) Jesus Christ will “marry” His Church (vv. 7-9; compare this to Hos. 2:14-23) ... the “very small remnant [of Israel] according to the election of grace” (read Rom. 11), and (2) He will lead them to the earth to Jerusalem to destroy the nations of the earth who have at-

tacked Jerusalem and His saints (read Dan. 2:44, 45; 7:13-28).

Isaiah 2:1-5 shows us that He will establish His headquarters in Jerusalem and govern Israel and the nations of the earth according to His Law. Note v. 5: “O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the Lord.” That is a clarion call to those of Israel who were not changed from flesh to spirit at His return to cooperate in His continued ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17-21; compare this to Isaiah 1:16-20 and Rom. 11:25-36). How long will that last?

If you consider that the saints who have been in the “resurrection” at the return of Christ will reign and rule with Him for at least 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4-6; 1 Cor. 15:23-28; Zech. 14:9-21), then you have a portion of your answer. The completion of the ministry of reconciliation, which will affect the Israelites and Jews who were not in the first resurrection at Christ’s return, will be completed in that 1,000-year period of time. I have no idea how many of them will survive the last great battle, but there will be survivors

All of the problems that Judah has suffered throughout history are part and parcel to this process of making her realize what a price she and the rest of Israel have paid for breaking covenant with the Lord God. By the time they have suffered such unrelenting punishment, generation after generation, they will finally acknowledge that the Lord God has been more than loving toward them ... that His love is everlasting – beyond the eternity ahead. Abraham’s ancient hope and expectation was that the Lord God would build His holy residence in the “land of promise” (see Heb. 11:10). In fact, that is exactly what He plans to do (see Rev. 21:1-5).

The New Covenant

Now you are going to learn what difference, at this point, God’s Law really makes. We do this by making connections between a series of Scriptures that fill in the blanks between the Old

Testament (covenant) and the New Testament (covenant). The result is both exciting and informative. It reveals one of God's great mysteries that lies in plain sight in Scripture.

First, God planned to create a "kingdom" on the earth. That presupposes that the "kingdom" will have a ruler, subjects, territory, and laws. Because the main goal was to adopt the "subjects" into His very own family, they ultimately would have to have eternal life in eternal bodies. God did not begin His project by giving His subjects spirit bodies (Gen. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:46). Why? Because they would have to be **trained** to be holy as He is holy (Heb. 12; Eph. 1:5, 6).

Second, from all of the nations on earth, the Lord God chose one nation, Israel, to be His "kingdom." He "married" her by eternal covenant and established her to be the means by which other nations could see how marvelously wise and blessed He made her through His commandments, statutes, and laws so that they, too, could ultimately be converted to His thoughts and ways.

Third, Israel broke covenant with Him and, after centuries of effort on His part to turn her back to Him, He had no recourse but to divorce her ... all twelve tribes of Israel. Even in the midst of the rebellion and punishment cycles, He swore that He would allure her back into the "marriage" and return her to her original calling as His "wife." In order to accomplish that ultimate goal, He reserved to Himself a "very small remnant according to the election of grace" (Isa. 1:9; Rom. 11:5).

Fourth, when Jesus Christ established His Church (Matt. 16:13-20), He founded it upon "... the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone..." (read Eph. 2:10-22 for a fuller understanding). That made the Church the "very small remnant according to the election of grace," which enables us to understand that the Church is the remnant of Israel that the Lord God reserved for Himself. We can also now know from Ephesians 5:22-33 and Revelation 19:7-9 that the Church is to be

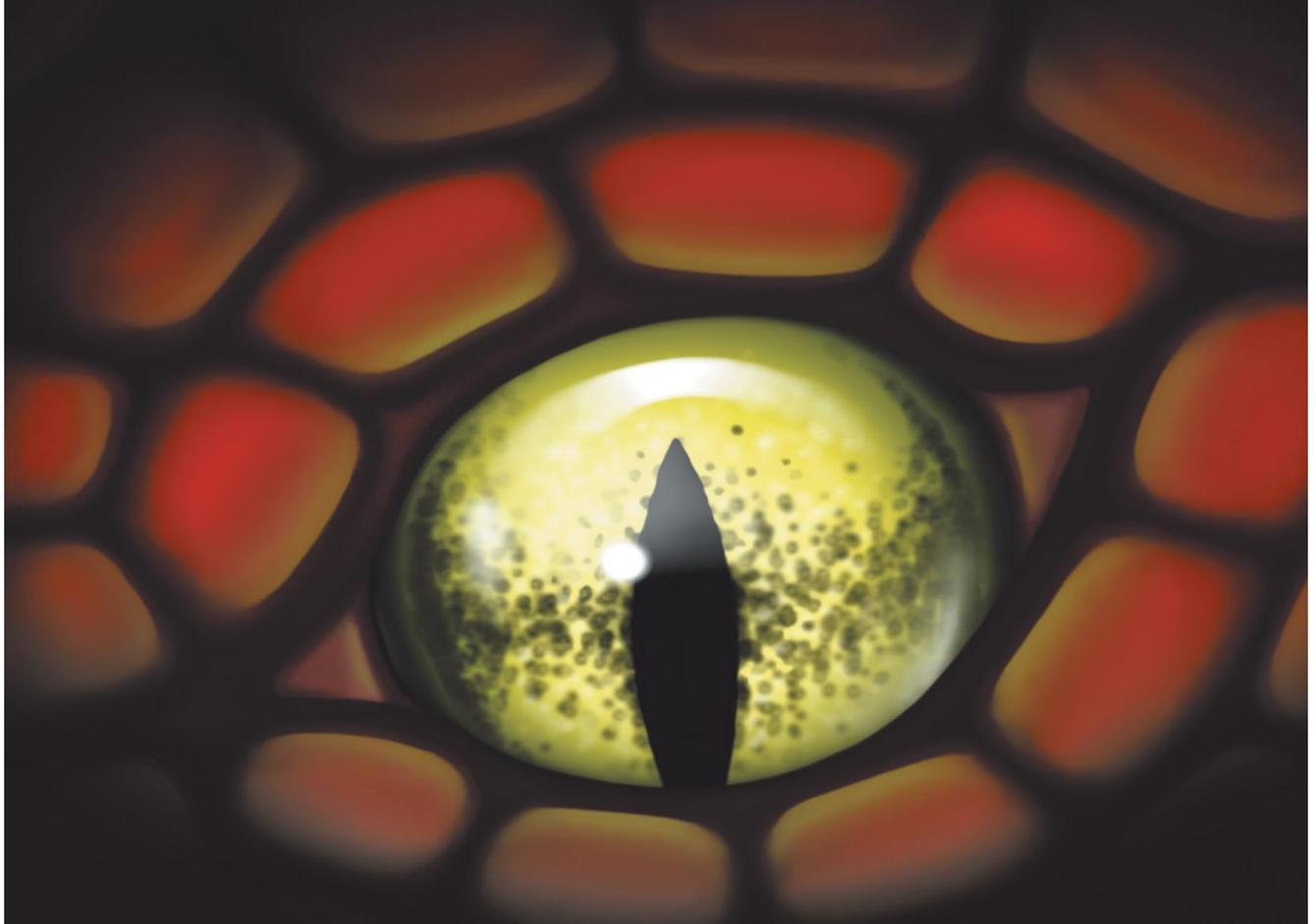
made the "bride" of Jesus Christ after He has returned and changed her members into spirit-composed members of His family (1 Cor. 15:50-54; 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

Fifth, we know from Romans 11 that the "remnant according to the election of grace" is the "holy root" (Rom. 11:16) to which the Gentiles are made to also be "Israelites" – both presently and in the future after Jesus Christ returns. That is the sense of being "grafted into" the "holy root." The sense of vv. 17, 23 is that all but the "remnant" of Israel was cut out of the "olive tree" that symbolizes Israel. God can "graft" them back in if and when they repent and return to Him. The Gentiles who boast against the role of the "holy root" can be cut out of it just as easily as Israel was cut out of it (vv. 18-25).

Now we can understand Matthew 26:26-29 and its relationship to Jeremiah 31:31-34. Paul says in Hebrews 8:7, 8 that the Lord God will have a new covenant with Israel, not because the old one was faulty ... but because the people were at fault. Then he quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 ... just as he does in Hebrews 10:15-17. Please note that Paul addressed this to True Christians – the Church that Jesus Christ is building. So, we can understand that Jeremiah 31:31-34 is connected to Matthew 26:26.

What is the point of Jeremiah 31:31-34? The new covenant (the ten commandments according to the letter and spirit) that Jesus Christ will make with Israel will include a total "change of heart" on the part of Israel. His Law will be put into their "inward parts ... in their hearts." This, after all, was His original goal. For brevity's sake, read the following Scriptures from Deuteronomy: 5:29; 7:6-11; 8:1-3; and 10:12-22. Did the Lord God desire that His Law would eventually be spiritually comprehended by Israel so that they would be spirit-minded, holy people? Did He attempt over and over again to get that lesson across to them? Read Exodus 16:4 and compare it to Jeremiah 17:9, 10. Do you see the difference God's Law really makes at this point in time?

LARRY E. FORD



Understanding
the
“Beasts”
of Revelation 13

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