

Worshiping God in

# Spirit and Truth

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## **Whom Will Jesus Christ “Marry” When He Returns: Israel or the Church?**

A Frank Discussion about God's Fidelity to His Gifts, Callings, and Promises

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## From the Desk of ... the Pastor

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There are some interesting statements made in scripture about the *character of the Lord* to which we need to pay close attention. I introduce the thesis of this issue of *Spirit and Truth* with these statements in order to set the foundation for the arguments (a method of persuasion by giving evidence) I will make about whom Jesus Christ will marry when He returns. This is not a trivial theological squabble into which I am entering because opinions about that pending “marriage” are passed back and forth through rumors and suppositions that are not at all well-founded in scripture. I intend, through *scriptural* evidence, to focus the readers’ attention on God’s revelation in such a way that the conclusion of the argument cannot be denied ... even though it will be.

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### The Unchanging God

One such statement is found in Malachi 3:6: “I am the Lord, I *change* not” (*KJV*; emphases added). The term *change* means more than having a simple change of mind. Any careful reader of scripture could probably find at least one instance in which the Lord God *did* change His mind about something (Ex. 32:7-14).

The Hebrew term from which *change* is translated (*shanah*) shows the Lord God professing that He is not *double-minded* or *duplicitous*. It also shows that He is not subject to change from one nature or purpose into another. Matthew 1:23 and John 1:14 show that He remained “God with us” even though He came in the flesh. However, we must take His comment in Malachi 3:6 in the context of His over-all actions about “covenant” in the scriptural record. Why?

If you read back into Malachi 2, you will see “covenant” mentioned in vv. 4, 5, 8, 10, and 14. It is in the

*context* of “covenant” that the Lord God says: “I change not.” Whether it was a covenant with the tribe of Levi or the tribe of Judah or the whole House of Israel, the Lord God says that He has not changed His mind with regard to “covenant.”

If you include the variations of definitions cited above, then you can add that He also is not *double-minded* (see James 1:5-8, 17). Nor is He *duplicitous* – saying one thing but meaning another (see Isa. 55:10, 11). He is the Lord God of the “yea” and “nay” (Matt. 5:37; James 5:12). Why was this comment to the Levites and Jews important relative to all of Israel? Is there a very specific point He is making to them that is important to the true identity of the “New Testament” Church?

Read Malachi 3:1-6. There is coming a “messenger of the covenant” who will “refine” the wayward signatories of the “covenant” (see Rev. 3:14-19). This is a signal to them that He has not changed His mind

about the “covenant” into which He entered with them. Is this an echo of Hosea 2 ... where He promises to “purify” and “refine” His wayward wife and thoroughly punish her for her adulteries and promiscuity and, at a later time, allure her (v. 14) and “marry” her again forever (v. 19)?

If He is not double-minded or duplicitous ... if His word accomplishes the thing for which it is intended ... then we must pay attention to His comments. *It is not good to admit the truth of these things on the one hand ... and deny them on the other.*

## The Unchanging Nature of “Covenant”

Hebrews 6:13-20 is a monumental assessment by the Apostle Paul of the unchanging nature of the Lord God and the covenants He makes. In this case, he is explaining the covenant that He made with Abraham in Genesis 15 – a covenant upheld by His promise and His oath. Paul’s point in v. 15 is that Abraham finally obtained the Lord God’s promise (manifested in Isaac) ... presumably, after Abraham showed his willingness to obey the Lord God (Rom. 4:13-25). As indicated in Heb. 11:4-8, this “faith” and “obedience” was rare among mankind from Adam to Abraham.

Note in Hebrews 6:17 that the Lord God has been willing to show His faithfulness to this covenant to the heirs of the promise. What is the promise? That is found in Genesis 15:18-21: the “promised land.” Who, then, are the “heirs”? The context of this promise and oath is in Genesis 15:1-6. Abraham is concerned about having an heir (“seed”) who will inherit all of the blessings of land, descendants, and divine favor after he has died (note especially v. 3). It is interesting that mainstream Christianity considers that land promise to be a symbol of going to heaven. “I am Bound for the Promised Land” is a well-known hymn expressing that belief.

In Genesis 15:7, the Lord God reminds Abraham why He brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees: to give him a stretch of land on Earth for an inheritance. If Abraham was mortal, how long would that inheritance serve him? And ... he wanted some kind of proof that he would, indeed, obtain it as a perpetual inheritance (v. 8). The Lord God had promised Abraham the land, but now He added His oath to doubly secure the inheritance (vv. 9, 10).

The animals signified an oath whereby the parties involved would suffer the same fate as the sacrificed animals if they broke “covenant.” Notice, however, that Abraham fell asleep (v. 12); so, only the Lord God walked among the carcasses (v. 17). In that situation, the Lord God took upon Himself the sole responsibility to make the promise and oath accomplish the purpose for which it was intended (see Eph. 1:6 re: being “made acceptable” through Christ). The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not that penalty.

In Genesis 15:13, the Lord God spoke to Abraham about the “seed” inheritors of that covenant. Based on the many factors involved, it is evident that Abraham would not be alive when his descendants received the “promised land.” Therefore, it should also be apparent that the “covenant” situation is truly *an inheritance in perpetuity*. If it is in *perpetuity*, then we must admit that the words “forever” and “eternal” have value in the following discussion we will have about Israel and the Church.

The concern for an *inheriting* “seed” is evident throughout the Abraham story. Paul validates this assertion in Romans 3:1, 2 and 9:1-5 by showing that the “seed” were the guardians of God’s oracles (Greek = *logion* – God’s promises, revelations, and teachings), as well as the adoption (I will discuss this later in another context), covenants, law, and service of God. Because of sin, the nation of Israel was ultimately reduced to the House of Judah – that’s why these comments applied to the Jews – a *remnant* of Israel.

Now read carefully Hebrews 6:13-20. To whom is Paul addressing these comments? *Christians*. He is not, in this case, being a Jew to only the Jews. This is addressed to the *body of Christ* – whoever they might be. Why? It is apparent that *the Church* (true Christians) has a stake in the Genesis 15 covenant undergirded by the Lord God’s promise and oath.

Long after the House of Israel disappeared at the hands of the Assyrians between 721-718 B.C., and the Jews had rejected Christ, the true Church of Christ is counted among the “inheriting seed” of Abraham. John infers in John 1:11, 12 that some (a remnant?) of the Jews did accept Him as Messiah. That would make them “Christians” ... and members of His Church.

What Paul teaches in Hebrews 6:17-20 is most astounding when you realize that the instruction is for *Christians*. The Lord God made it plain to the “heirs

of promise” that both the promise and oath are *immutable*. That means that it not only *will not* be changed, but that it *cannot* be changed. Because God is not a liar and is not duplicitous or deceptive, then Christians can claim their “heir” status and have strong confidence in laying hold of the *hope* involved in such a covenant. Is God *changing His mind about Israel* and revealing that change of mind through Paul?

As a matter of fact, Paul continues, Jesus Christ has secured that for us in the Holy of Holies behind the Temple veil in heaven. It is *sure* (absolutely without question or doubt) and *steadfast* (firmly fixed and unchanging). This tells us that the covenant of Genesis 15 has come into the possession of *the Church*.

The question we will pursue from this point forward will involve this: Did Jesus Christ *totally terminate* His relationship with Israel and form a totally new “help-mate” from a mixture of Israelites and Gentiles? Before we get into answering that question, it is necessary that we lay a fundamental groundwork for the conclusions that will be drawn from scripture about the *perpetuity* of the Lord God’s covenant with *Israel*.

## Principle-Centered Theology

A *principle* is a fundamental truth, law, *et cetera* upon which other truths, laws, *et cetera* are based. In essence, it is a *paradigm* – a generally accepted concept that explains a complex idea, set of data, *et cetera*. It is the basic part that drives the thought and action relative to the management and integrity of the complex idea and data.

In the early 1990s, Stephen Covey published one of his landmark books on leadership titled *Principle-Centered Leadership*. Consider the following as a sample of his working thesis:

When people align their personal values with correct principles, they are liberated from old perceptions and paradigms.... Centering on *unchanging* principles brings *permanency* and power into their lives (New York: Simon & Schuster; p. 20; emphases added).

Covey sets forth in his book “eight discernible characteristics of ... principle-centered leaders” (Ibid; p. 33). Why tie such a book to our present discussion? Be-

cause of an underlying *principle* that demands serious, firmly fixed, and directed attention to *unchanging principles and permanency*. After all, this is the claim of the entire matter of God’s word of truth:

If you make the commitment to yourself and then break it, your self-esteem will be weakened and your capacity to make and keep another promise will be decreased (Ibid; p. 34).

Breaking your word weakens your ability to perpetuate your thoughts and actions. Does God demonstrate that principle in scripture? If He does, then how will that drive *your* faith in His word?

Jesus Christ stated a piece of principle-centered theology in John 17:11-17. There are three basic concepts involved in this theology (that is, in this understanding of God’s character and how He keeps His word according to that character). If God is a *liar* or *duplicitous*, then His position as the bastion of truth is seriously compromised. Jesus Christ’s principle-centered theology is based on the following:

1. Christ’s followers are kept through God’s *name*;
2. They are *sanctified* through God’s truth; and
3. God’s *word* is truth.

The basic idea behind having the *same name* is to confer upon Christ’s followers the *unity* of will and purpose needed to conduct God’s business (see Eph. 4:1-16; John 10:30; 17:18-23). *Sanctification* (being set aside for holy purposes) comes through the *truth* (*divine* truth as opposed to all falsehoods) of God. The most significant part of the principle that drives the first two principles is that God’s *word* (that is: God’s revelations and commands that are connected to what He has spoken [Greek = *logos*]) is His *truth*.

Now let me set forth the most important principle we can find in scripture that undergirds the entire argument I will be making about the relationship between Israel and the Church. I will need only a few scriptures to make this truth so apparent that other

theological principles and truths cannot avoid being attached to it. From these few scriptures, we should be able to form the *paradigm* that drives the argument about whether or not Jesus Christ will “marry” Israel or the Church.

### Numbers 23:19

The basic setting involves a Moabite King named Balak who tried to get a prophet named Balaam to prophesy against and curse Israel. Numbers 23:19 are the Lord God’s words spoken through Balaam:

God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: has He said, and shall not He do it? Or has He spoken [*promised – Modern Language and New International Version*], and shall He not make it good?

### Isaiah 55:11

The basic idea behind the following revelation is that the Lord God’s thoughts and ways are far more dependable than man’s; therefore, man’s surrender to God’s thoughts and ways is the logical step for sinful man to take for the sake of his eternal welfare:

...My word ... that goes forth out of my mouth ... shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.

Isaiah 44:1-8 gives us the information we need in order to understand the thought upon which Isaiah 55:11 is based. It involves the ability to say a thing at one point in time and make it happen in the distant future. All of this has to do with *sanctification, truth,*

and *word*. This is the basis of Jesus Christ’s statement in Matthew 5:17-19 with reference to fulfilling the purpose and intent of God’s Law and Prophets. He did not come to do away with them, but to fulfill them. Jesus makes that point very clear.

### Romans 11:29

For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

The basic idea here is Paul’s assertion that the Lord has reserved for Himself *a remnant of Israel according to the election of grace* (vv. 1-8; see also Isa. 1:9; Rom. 9:21-29). This, too, has to do with *sanctification, truth, and word*.

If you add into those scriptures Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 6:13-20, and James 1:17, then you should begin to understand the *permanence* and *perpetuity* built into the Lord God’s promise and oath that was passed from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, and to the nation Israel. You should be able to more easily grasp the idea that the Lord God is not double-minded regarding His promises to Israel. He did not tell them one thing and then do quite another. He has not changed His mind about His “marriage” to Israel – even though He did divorce her for her adulteries and promiscuity.

*This is what drives the true meaning of the promises and oath of God. This is principle-centered theology – understanding the correct perception and paradigm about the holy character of God and His steadfast determination to keep His holy word from falling uselessly onto the ground. Paul says in Romans 3:4: “Let God be true but every man a liar.” **Unless and until you understand that principle-centered paradigm, you will not be able to truly understand the mystery of God’s Church.** And ... in the end, you will **not** be able to “stand” on His promises.*

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## A Personal Note to the Reader

I use numerous scriptures and references in an attempt to give you every opportunity to study through the claims I make. I understand that this requires the thoughtful, serious reader to do some of the “leg work” in sorting out God’s truth. My interest is to be a pastor *and* a teacher. As such, I will attempt to lead you through difficult concepts ... but you must do your part. After all, are you a *reader* ... or a *learner*?

# Dispensational Theology

Is there a *fundamental* and *permanent* distinction between Israel and the Church?

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One of the things that drives this discussion is found in what is called *dispensational theology* – the kind of theology to which the leaders of the former Worldwide Church of God fell prey after the death of Herbert W. Armstrong in January, 1986. Within 10 years after his death, the WCG, the corporate entity, disappeared from the face of the earth and became part of the dust of history. This theological concept is widespread among Evangelical Christianity and poses a serious threat to God’s truth. Let me establish a background from which the following discussion can be understood.

Lewis Sperry Chafer makes the following claim in his book, *Dispensationalism* (1936): “Throughout the ages, God is pursuing *two distinct purposes*: one related to *earth* with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to *heaven* with heavenly people and heavenly objectives, which is Christianity” (emphasis added). In Samuelle Bacchiocchi’s book, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire* (1998), he gives the following insight: “Dispensationalists... apply their distinction between Old and New Covenant as representing the existence of a *fundamental* and *permanent* distinction between Israel and the Church.” The net result of these two claims raises questions about the significance of and relationship between Israel and the Church because they are two significant focal points in God’s plan to create a kingdom and include mankind in it (Matt. 25:34; Luke 12:32).

In order to understand the *distinction* between Israel and the Church, we must first understand the basic claims made by the Dispensationalists and compare them to the scriptural record. Are there *two callings* made by God: (1) *earth* for the *Jews* and (2) *heaven* for the *Christians*? It is of the utmost importance that the seeker of God’s truth (John 4:23, 24) should know how God originally framed His plan for humankind ... and whether or not He has stuck to it as He had laid it out “before the creation of the orderly universe” (Eph. 1:4).

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## The Seven “Dispensations”

In his book *The Mysteries of God* (1908), Henry Allen Ironside, a dispensationalist, makes the following comment:

Failing to distinguish between the earthly and the heavenly callings, present-day Christianity has become a sad and wonderful [astonishing ... in the sense of *amazement* or *great surprise*] mixture of Judaism, heathenism, and Christianity. The Church’s portion and hope are both lost sight of, and Jewish expectations cherished in their stead.

This is the “pad” from which he launches his case for the existence of seven *dispensations* ... supposedly revealed in scripture ... that prove his point about the *two callings* – Israel’s and the Church’s. What are those seven *dispensations*, and what was their supposed purpose in God’s plan?

Let’s first define the term *dispensation* as Ironside and others understand it. In 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2, he finds the expression “before the *world* began” (*KJV*; emphases added) and declares that it is better translated as “before the *age-times* began” In fact, the entire expression means “before time began” (Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 27). Nevertheless, these *age-times*, according to dispensational theology, are defined as follows:

**Dispensationalism** is a religious interpretive system for the Bible. It considers Biblical history as *divided deliberately by God* into defined periods or ages to *each* of which God has allotted *distinctive administrative principles*. According to dispensationalist interpretation, each age of the plan of God is thus *administered in a certain way*, and humanity is held responsible as a steward *during that time*. Each dispensation is marked by a cycle. God reveals himself and his truth to humanity *in a new way* [during each cycle]. Humanity is held responsible to conform to *that revelation*. *Humanity rebels and fails the test* [during each cycle]. God judges humanity and introduces *a new period of probation under a new administration* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalism>; emphases added).

The following is Wikipedia's summarization of the seven "dispensations" that are generally taught by the "mainstream" dispensationalists:

The number of dispensations discerned by theologians within Biblical history vary typically from three to eight [some divide them into ten "age-times"]. ...The typical seven-dispensation scheme is as follows:

Innocence – Adam under probation prior to the Fall. Ends with expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Some refer to this period as the *Adamic period* or the *dispensation of the Adamic covenant* or *Adamic law*.

Conscience – From the Fall to the Great Flood. Mankind is left to follow human reasoning. Ends with the worldwide deluge.

Human Government – After the Great Flood, humanity [is made] responsible to enact the death penalty. Ends with the dispersion at the Tower of Babel. Some use the term *Noachian law* in reference to this period of dispensation.

Promise – From Abraham to Moses. Ends with the refusal to enter Canaan and the 40 years of unbelief in the wilderness. Some use the terms *Abrahamic law* or *Abrahamic covenant* in reference to this period of dispensation.

Law – From Moses to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Ends with the scattering of Israel in AD 70. Some use the term *Mosaic law* in reference to this period of dispensation.

Grace – From the cross to the Second Coming. Ends with the wrath of God comprising the Great Tribulation. Some use the terms *Age of grace* or the *church age* for this dispensation.

Millennial Kingdom – A 1000-year reign of Christ on earth centered in Jerusalem. Ends with God's judgment on the final rebellion.

Numerous purposes for this cycle of administrations have been suggested. God is seen to be testing humanity *under varying conditions*, while vindicating His ways with humanity in originally granting them free will. The dispensations reveal God's truth in a progressive manner, and are designed to maximize the glory that will accrue to God as He brings history to a climax with a Kingdom administered by Christ, thus vindicating His original plan of administering rule on earth through "human" means. The goal of the dispensations is summarized by Paul the Apostle in Ephesians 1:9-10, "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him [Christ] with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth" (NASB; emphasis added).

If you study the above definition and compare it to the list of "dispensations," what do you find to be the most outstanding problem with the concept? Is it that

God has administered His “plan” in different ways to different people at different times ... holding each “age-time” to a *different* standard from the others? Or, is it the idea that God wants to *prove* to man that he is going to *fail* no matter how God administers His plan? Are you at all concerned that the “ages” of *grace* and the *Millennial kingdom* are included in the mix? Does this concept *really* make sense to you?

How does the following statement by Ironside affect you?

When “the dispensation of the fullness of times” has come in, all God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled. *They will be blessed on earth. The Church will be blessed in heaven.* Christ will be the centre [sic] of a redeemed universe, and His bride the sharer of all His achieved glories.

This is the mystery; glorious, inconceivably grand, and transcendently wonderful! (emphases added)

We would do well to examine this thoroughly. Otherwise, we might very well buy a “pig in a poke.”

### What is Meant by the Biblical Term “Dispensation”?

Let’s go to Ephesians 1:10 where Paul writes of “the dispensation of the fullness of times.” Is there any reasonable sense in which the expressions “dispensation” and “fullness of times” can mean “age-times” as it has been applied by Dispensationalists? The term *dispensation* is found four (4) times in all of Scripture – all of which are in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; and Col. 1:25). They are all from the same Greek term *oikonomia* – from which we get the term *economy*.

Scholars generally apply three definitions to the Greek term *oikonomia*: (1) management of a household (1 Cor. 9:17; Col. 1:25; Eph. 3:2); (2) arrangement, order, plan (Eph. 3:2; 1:10; Gen. 1); and (3) training in the way of salvation (Heb. 12:5-13).

I checked the translations of several Bibles in order to get the sense in which they render the meaning of

the Greek term *oikonomia* in Ephesians 1:9, 10. The following is what I found in the Bibles that I have available in my personal library:

King James Version: “the *dispensation* of the fullness of times.”

Modern Language: “a *plan* to be brought to completion when the time fully comes.”

Living Bible: “a *plan*...that when the time is ripe...”

Revised Standard Version: “a *plan* for the fullness of time.”

The Jerusalem Bible: “the *hidden plan*...to act upon when the times had run their course to the end.”

Moffatt: the *purpose* of his design so to order it in the fullness of the ages.”

Good News for Modern Man: “God’s *plan*, which he will complete when the time is right.”

The Daily Study Bible: “a *purpose* which He formed in His own mind before time began, so that the periods of time should be controlled and administered until they reached their full development.”

The Anchor Bible: “the secret of his decision...that [Christ] should *administer* the days of fulfillment.”

As you can see in the above translations, only *KJV* favors the term “dispensation.” All others focus on “plan,” “purpose,” and “decision.” *TAB* posits that the term *oikonomia* provides, as a test of genuineness or a turning point in understanding God’s plan and purpose, the foundation for their translation. Their translation clearly shows that *Christ* has been made the *administrator* of the “days of fulfillment” – the “Lord” of all things in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth (see Phil. 2:10,11 and Col. 1:19).

Even if He does not know the time (“the day and hour”) that it will be brought to completion (Matt. 24:36), He, nevertheless, is charged with the continued revelation of God’s plan and purpose until He has brought everything in heaven, on earth, and under the earth under the control of God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Phil. 2:10). When that happens, “a new period” of the purpose of God’s promise and law will prevail (see Jer. 31:31-34 and compare it to Hebrews 8:6-13 and 10:12-22).

*TAB* offers the following explanations that militate against dispensational theology as defined above:

The *oikonomia* is an *uncompleted* performance, not a timetable, blue-print, or program. It is action in the process of being completed or brought to realization.

The noun *oikonomia* means in itself performance, execution, administration, rather than plan.

There is no evidence in Paul’s other epistles that he could be aware, or was aware, of any other meaning of *oikonomia* besides “stewardship” or “administration.”

Colossians 1:25 is a parallel to Ephesians 1:10. As such, Colossians 1:25 means “administration.”

The rest of Ephesians shows Christ to be an active servant of God rather than a mere instrument or impersonal sphere. He is not a mere bystander in the continuing fulfillment process.

From all of this information, it would be difficult to conclude that *dispensation*, as used by the Dispensationalists, is valid – especially the concoction of seven different “age-times” during which God has dealt differently with each one according to different administrative principles (compare Deut. 10:17 to Gal. 2:6).

One dispensationalist whom I found in my research proudly proclaimed that Christians today are not responsible for the dictates of any previous or future dispensation. They do not have to be concerned

with the “Law” period of Moses or the millennial kingdom administration of the future. This they do in their interpretation of Paul’s expression *fullness of time*.

## What is the “Fullness of Times”?

The English term *fullness* (of times – *KJV*) comes from the Greek term *pleroma*. *The Anchor Bible* comments that: “NT parallels to Eph. 1:10 show that ‘fulfillment’ designates not just *an end point*, but the drawing of *a new period* in which God’s promise and law (that is, even all that is said in the Scriptures), are fulfilled” (vol. 34, p. 88; emphases added).

Indeed, you can refer to Isaiah 65:17-25, Jeremiah 31:31-34, and Luke 24:44 for examples of this explanation of *pleroma*. My *BAG* lexicon shows it to mean: “the state of being full, fullness.” That is too simplistic because the sense of Ephesians 1:10 is more complicated than that. *TAB* exemplifies that in their description that the various “periods” of fulfillment are connected to all that is said in scripture.

As several of the translations that are cited above posit, it has to do with a “consummation” point – the point at which something is completed or finalized. In those translations, the term “time/times” is treated as a singular point, not multiple points. What does that mean? If something unfolds in stages, that, in and of itself, does not imply a *plurality* of “pleroma.”

Let’s consider, then, the term *times* (Greek = *to kairon*). *BAG* defines the Ephesians 1:10 reference in the context of “one of the chief eschatological times.” We could refer to Daniel 8:19; 12:7 and Revelation 12:14 for examples of a type of “time/times.” We could also refer to Leviticus 23:4 for another. *BAG* gives it the sense of the things that must be completed before the final consummation (ex. = Acts 1:7).

*The Interpreter’s Bible* says: “The multiple strands of life, the entire manifold of nature and of history, and all the particular blessings of God lead to one universal goal ... [in which] all things fall into place in a single gigantic pattern centered in Christ ... This is the destined issue of creation, the end [that is: goal, purpose] for which the universe was brought forth...” (vol. 10, p. 620). Such an explanation is found in Ephesians 1:1-14.

What is *not* implied or plainly set forth in these comments is any indication of seven specific “age-

times” during which God has introduced to each totally new administrations of His plan and will. It is evident, then, from *TAB*’s translation that the “fullness of times” [*pleroma + to kairon*] has to do with the completion of the purpose of God through the administration of Jesus Christ (see Phil. 2:10, 11 and Col. 1:19).

## Dispensational Concept of The “Mystery of the Church”

Let’s read Romans 16:25-27. Make note of Paul’s comment regarding “the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.” In v. 25, Paul seems to be saying that this “mystery” was not explained in the Old Testament. Indeed, Peter shows that the prophets diligently inquired and searched into it to no avail ... and even the angels desire to study into it (1 Peter 1:10-12). In Romans 16:26, Paul says, in the context of the New Testament Church, that it is now being revealed through the prophetic writings of the Old Testament ... the only Scriptures that were available during that era.

Ironside, therefore, claims that only Paul was the chosen vessel through which the mystery would be revealed. He asserts that the mystery was not included in any part of God’s revelations to the previous dispensations. Therefore, *Paul did not learn this from Old Testament Scriptures; he learned it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ.*

In 1 Corinthians 2:6, 7, Ironside says that Paul implies that the “mystery of the Church” is included in the things not visually, audibly, or mentally comprehended by mankind. Here is the basis of his reasoning:

God is displaying in the hidden purpose of His heart in the bringing in of “a new thing on earth,” even the mystical body [that is: the Church] of His Son to share with Him all the glories He is yet to enter upon, when the regular line of prophecy is again taken up (emphases added).

What does he mean by that last comment?

He goes back to Ephesians 1:9, 10 to make the point that:

...The prophetic clock stopped at Calvary. Not one tick has been heard since ... all the affairs of the kingdom spoken by Old Testament seers and prophets have been in abeyance [that is: in temporary suspension] (emphases added).

This line of reasoning leads him to conclude that God rejected Israel as His “Church” and began a process by which the “Church” that Christ Himself is building will be His Bride. This, of course, is part and parcel to the Dispensationalists claim that God reveals that there exist *two callings*: one for Israel and one for the Church – that there are *two plans of salvation in Christ*: an *earthly* one for the Jews and a *heavenly* one for Christians. After all, if God made promises to Israel, then He is bound to fulfill them (see Rom. 3:4).

The questions we must ask are simple: Is this *really* what Paul was claiming? What is the truth about the “prophetic clock”? What is the scriptural distinction between Israel and the Church? If God rejected Israel, why does He have an earthly plan for the Jews? Is there a *fundamental* and *permanent* distinction between Israel and the Church? Do Ironside and the Dispensationalists understand who Israel is? Is this another case of Paul’s charge in Romans 1:25 about those who have changed God’s truth into a lie? We will see if that is, indeed, the case.

## Unraveling the “Tangled Web”

Because of numerous “tangled webs” in mainstream Christian theology, it is always profitable to go back to the *beginning* revealed in Scripture so we can get a reasonable idea about what God originally intended. It is not revealed in Genesis 1:1 or John 1:1-3. Both give us revelations of pertinent information, but not the *specific* plan that was set out before any of the creating began. In order to do this, I typically hold in reserve Ephesians 1:1-14, Philippians 2:5-11, and 1 Peter 1:18-20. Why?

If you do not have a firm comprehension of Ephesians 1:1-14, Philippians 2:5-11, and 1 Peter 1:18-20, then you are missing two of the great building blocks of God’s revelation – His explanation of what He is up to and why. Ephesians 1:1-14 enables you to understand more fully Genesis 1:26-28 ... as well as

the path that Scripture will take in order to unfold that knowledge for better understanding.

Also, if you understand the fundamental difference between “the *God* and *Father* of Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:3) and Jesus Christ Himself, then you are able to understand why the *Lord God* is so prominent in the Old

Testament (compare Exodus 24:4 and John 5:46). If you understand that, then you will understand who was “married” to *Israel* (Ex. 19:3-8; 20:1-17; Jer. 3:1; Ezek. 16:1-8). That, in the process, will inform you why there is no such thing as a *stopped prophetic clock*. We will continue in the next article.

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## The God Family

God is a family of divine Beings that are composed of self-sustaining spirit. No member of the Godhead depends on any source outside of itself for its existence. It is underived, uncreated existence. The Lord God expressed this to Moses in Exodus 2:14 when He identified Himself as I AM THAT I AM. This self-sustaining existence is properly referred to as eternal life because it has always existed and will continue to exist into unending eternity. In all of their revelations about themselves, they have not made mankind privy to how such a self-sustaining existence is possible – only that they are willing to share it with mankind.

We are first introduced to this family in Genesis 1:1 with the statement that “God created the heavens and earth.” The English term *God* is translated from the Hebrew term *Elohim*, which is a collective noun – a plurality. What does that mean? It is generally understood that the plural is often used in Hebrew to enlarge and intensify the idea expressed in the singular form: *El*. *Elohim* is considered by most biblical scholars to mean “the strongest of the strong, the fullness of divine perfections, and the sum of all the powers of all imaginable gods.”

That idea notwithstanding, scripture reveals that *Elohim* is not an intensification of majesty. It is a collective noun. A collective noun names a group that can act either together or independently (examples: family, team, class, herd, organization, et cetera). Contrary to teachings about *monotheism* (one God) and *Trinitarianism* (one God who plays three roles), the Bible reveals that *Elohim* is a family of God-beings that consists of more than one independent Being. However, there is only one *Elohim* family. Only in that sense is *monotheism* possible in the Bible. Let’s understand the Bible’s revelation.

While Elohim are generally described as being omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omni-benevolent, those characteristics are generally misunderstood and misinterpreted. The prefix *omni-* has two basic meanings: (a) universal and (b) unrestricted. Unrestricted is the meaning that is most applicable to these characteristics. For instance: *omniscient* does not mean that *God* knows everything about everything, even before it happens. It means that *God* has unrestricted power and authority to know whatever they choose to know. They are, after all, *learners*. Since that is true, according to scriptural revelation, then they do not already know everything about everything.

Applying that same logic to the other characteristics, then *God* should be described more properly as having: (a) unrestricted power and authority to do whatever they want to do (omnipotent); (b) unrestricted power and authority to be wherever they desire to be (omnipresent); and (c) unrestricted power and authority to be charitable toward others (omni-benevolent). With that in mind, the God Family (*Elohim*) made a decision at some point in time to create heavens and earth, complete with plant and animal life, for the purpose of populating it with human beings to be made in their own image and character. This was a planned decision to actually increase the *Elohim* Family.

There is a distinct difference between the two known members of the Elohim family. One has become known as the “Father,” and the other has become known as the “Son.” Even though Jesus said “I and the Father are one,” He was indicating their *unity* in thought and action, not that they are one and the same Being. The English term *one* is translated from the Greek term *eis*, which describes a type of *unity*. Scripture has revealed the difference between the “Father” and the “Son.” (*A Statement of Beliefs*, pp. 1-3; see our website for more)

# Standing on the Promises

The hymn “Standing on the Promises” was written by R. Kelso Carter (1849-1928). I am not sure that he wrote it about the promises and oath the Lord God made with Abraham, but his language in the song certainly sounds like he was at least familiar with Hebrews 6:13-20 because he writes of how God’s promises “cannot fail” despite what is going on in the world (verse 2). This “Christian” hymn demonstrates a belief in the fidelity of God to His promises; yet, it is demonstrable that many in mainstream Christian theology posit that there is a distinction made between what the Lord God promised *Israel* and what *Christians* are promised. Such theology posits a distinction between Israel and the Church. Let’s understand this more fully.

## The Old Testament Background for the Christian’s Inheritance

How shall we understand the relationship between Israel and the Church? Is there any relationship between what the Lord God promised Abraham and his descendants and what Jesus Christ promised His Church? In the midst of such a query lies the inevitable question: Whom will Jesus Christ “marry” at His return: *Israel* or the *Church*?

The question itself implies that Jesus Christ was the Lord God who “married” Israel. God’s *mystery of the Church* is made clear in scripture ... if you are willing to allow scripture to speak to you God’s truth (John 4:23, 24). It is not so apparent as to make the “mystery” part of it laughable. You might very well be surprised by what scripture reveals!

Because of Paul’s explanation of the covenant of Genesis 15 in Heb. 6:13-20, we need to examine the New Testament in order to find how various aspects of Old Testament covenant agreements now affect Christians. Why? If you misunderstand what the “promises” are, then you will have a *misplaced faith*. If you believe that the Genesis 15 covenant has nothing to do with New Testament Christianity ... and you set your sights on going to *heaven* instead of inheriting territory on the *earth* ... then you could be placing your faith in something that is not at all God’s will (see Matt. 7:21-23).

What does Paul mean in Romans 15:8 when he says that: “Jesus Christ was a minister of the *circum-*

*cision* for the truth of God, to *confirm* the promises made unto the fathers”? If you are honest with the scriptural record, you will admit that this has to refer to the promises made in the Old Testament. Why? Because Paul did not have New Testament scriptures as a reference point for his theology: *They did not yet exist*. Even if they had existed, a goodly percentage of the New Testament is predicated on the Old.

Paul explains in Hebrews 2:16 that Christ “took on him the seed of Abraham.” That means that the Lord God chose to become a descendant of Abraham through Israel and Judah. Moses wrote in Genesis 17:9-27 that the Lord God required that Abraham and his male “seed” should be *circumcised*. Notice the last part of v. 13: “My covenant shall be in your flesh for an *everlasting* covenant” (*KJV*; emphases added). In vv. 18-20, the Lord God made a distinction between Ishmael (the *existing* son) and Isaac (the *promised* son ... who was also circumcised in Gen. 21:4). Luke 2:21 shows that Jesus was circumcised as a *Jewish Israelite* on the eighth day according to the covenant made with Abraham.

In Genesis 17:19, 21, the Lord God says that His covenant will be with *Isaac* “... for an *everlasting* covenant” (emphases added) – even though Ishmael had already been circumcised. So, *perpetuity* is built into the covenant from the beginning and passed down to the *heirs* of the promise. Ishmael was not an heir in the same sense that Isaac was. And ... circumcision is not simply a *Jewish* ritual. *All* of the nation of Israel is included in the expression “the circumcision.”

Notice how Matthew Henry frames his commentary about Romans 15:8:

Christ ... [who] looked upon himself as primarily sent to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel, laid hold of the seed of Abraham* (Heb. ii.16, margin [Gr. *he takes not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham he takes hold.*]), and by them [that is: by the seed of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob] caught at the whole body of mankind. Christ's ministry was appropriated [set aside for a specific use] to them [Israel and the whole body of mankind] (*Commentary on the Whole Bible* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1961; p. 1794).

In this vein of thought, Paul goes back to the Old Testament to proclaim God's truth. He cites Psalm 18:50, Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11:10. Why? Because that is where the scriptural revelation was for the Apostolic Church. Paul framed his argument on the basis of *Old Testament* revelation. What Paul found is in the following discussion.

Who has the first right to the promises? The legally declared heir. Those promises were passed down from Abraham to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5) and from Isaac to Jacob (Gen. 35:9-12). The legally declared heir is not always the firstborn. Ishmael was rejected by the Lord God in favor of Isaac; Esau was rejected by Him in favor of Jacob. Reuben was rejected in favor of Joseph.

When Jacob/Israel was on his deathbed, he made Joseph (his firstborn with Rachel) the heir of the covenant birthright instead of Reuben (his real firstborn with Leah; see Gen. 48:8-20; 49:3, 4; and 1 Chron. 5:1, 2). Genesis 49 is the record of the blessings Jacob/Israel gave to all of his sons thereafter.

Notice especially Genesis 49:8-12 where *Judah* was made the *royal/kingly* line through whom the Messiah (*Shiloh: "the one to whom it belongs"*) would come. That does not mean that Judah was made the heir of the *covenant birthright*. His blessing was the royal lineage connected to the Messiah as King of kings. Genesis 17:4-8, 15, 16 show that part of the covenant called for *royalty* to come through Abraham's and Sarah's descendants. That certainly

also will apply to Christians who become rulers in the Kingdom of God.

From the above-cited scriptures, Deuteronomy 32:43 is a declaration by Moses that the Lord God will defend His chosen people against their Gentile *adversaries*. This is not a statement opposing future salvation for the Gentiles. After all, most of Abraham's off-spring are Gentiles. Moses is warning of grave consequences to those Gentiles who attempt to thwart God's plans for Israel (see Deut. 4:1-13) and wipe her off the map (see Psa. 137:7).

Psalm 18:50 shows that the Lord God will deliver David, His king, from his adversaries because He has an *eternal* covenant with him and his royal house. Read carefully 2 Samuel 7:18-29 and note the place in the Lord God's heart and plan for David, his royal house, and all of Israel. For how long is this covenant to last (see also Jer. 33:19-26 and Ezek. 37)? David was aghast at the perpetuation into eternity the Lord God had included in his royal lineage. Jeremiah 33:19-26 speaks of the *immutable* covenant the Lord God has with David and Israel. Such comments in the Old Testament make it very plain that the Lord God must be as good as His word regarding David and Israel. The inclusion of Gentiles into the plan of salvation cannot break this covenant!

Psalm 117:1, however, turns attention to the *Gentiles* (anyone outside of the nation Israel is considered to be a Gentile). This very short psalm is an *invitation to the Gentiles* to accept the Lord God of Israel as their own God and, thereby, participate in the covenant blessings with Israel – the idea behind Deuteronomy 4:1-13.

You will find in Exodus 12:45-49 that Gentiles could become *Israelites* by accepting the religion revealed to Israel and being circumcised. Read carefully the last part of v. 48: "He shall be as one that is born in the land" (*KJV*). In other words, he would become a *naturalized* citizen with all of the rights and privileges of Israelite citizenship. How does that principle work relative to Paul's discussion in Romans 11:16-29? We will discuss that in another article. The implications are astounding!

Paul, in Romans 15:8-16 and Galatians 3:6-8, is demonstrating that such an idea is not "New Testament" theology. It was ingrained in the Lord God's conversation with Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and with

Isaac in Genesis 26:4: “In you shall *all nations* be blessed.” How permanent is that promise?

## How Jesus Confirmed the Promises

Paul also says that Jesus Christ came to *confirm* the promises made to the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). What did he mean by that? The term *confirm* basically means that He came to *prove the truth* of the promises – to give a formal approval of them. After all, it would have seemed in Paul’s day and age that the centuries that had passed served as a testimony that those promises had been long *forgotten* by the Lord God! Israel longed for the coming of the Messiah to institute the blessings so long ago covenanted. Millennia had passed. At every turn their hopes and faith had been dashed to the ground. Where was the hope of their inheritance?

So, Paul says that Jesus came to *confirm* that they are still in play and that God does not change His mind simply because of the passage of time (see Isa. 55:10, 11; 45:21-25). Peter also is very explicit in his commentary in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is not inactive or delinquent in fulfilling His promises. Whatever “time” means to mankind, with God it is reckoned differently. In fact, the seeming lack of action on God’s part is really evidence that He is being patient with mankind and desirous of saving as many as possible. He is not rushing to judgment.

Galatians 3:6-8 is Paul’s explanation to the Gentiles, over whom he was appointed the Apostle (see Gal. 2:7-9), about how they are to be included *with Israel* in the promises made to Abraham. Abraham, who was neither a Jew nor an Israelite, is the “father” of faith because of his reaction to the Lord God’s calling, gifts, and promises. *Abraham was the first among mankind to receive such “covenant” attention from the Lord God.*

We know from Paul’s comment in Romans 4:13 that the promise and oath were eventually extended to the *entire earth* – probably because of the promise of “seed” as “the dust of the earth” (Gen. 13:16) and as numerous as the stars (Gen. 22:17; 26:4) and the sand of the sea (Gen. 22:17; 32:12). How does that happen merely through the “seed” of Israel?

However, because of Jesus Christ being the “seed” of Abraham, the promise and oath are also

expanded beyond that to “all things” (Col. 1:16; Rev. 21:7) when you realize the importance of Romans 8:16, 17 and Galatians 3:26-29 relative to what will be inherited by the heirs. *All of this was confirmed by Jesus Christ as being the “promises made unto the fathers.”* All of this is, therefore, also *the true Christian’s inheritance.*

It is vitally important to understand the role of the *covenant birthright* relative to the promises made by the Lord God to all of Israel. It is not the same as the *royal line* covenant given to Judah.

## The Covenant Birthright

The short answer is that the covenant birthright is the “material” portion of the Lord God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Israel. Please note in the Old Testament that the Lord God’s first and only “marriage” covenant was with *Israel*. Joseph’s son, Ephraim, was the last recipient of the birthright promise. The birthright is the inheriting son’s double portion inheritance of his father’s wealth and property (see Deut. 21:15-17). That is the *birthright covenant* that was passed from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Joseph to Ephraim. Read this blessing in Genesis 49:22-26. That is the “material” portion of the *birthright covenant*. Contrast that with the promises made to all of Israel in Deuteronomy 28:1-15.

End-time prophecy reveals the continued significance of Ephraim and Judah (see Jer. 11:10-16). As a preface to later remarks about the “new covenant,” read the entirety of Jeremiah 31. Note the importance of Ephraim. Note what action *precedes* vv. 31-34. From where will Ephraim (the House of Israel) be coming? *Out of dispersion among the nations of the world.* To where will they be coming? *To the land promised to Abraham in Genesis 15.* That piece of information is pivotal in understanding the promises.

Many men in past history have taken this story and applied it to the Anglo-Saxon, British, and other such-like races all over northwestern Europe. They have declared Great Britain to be Ephraim and the United States to be his brother Manasseh because of the great power and wealth they have wielded in the world. Essentially, they have narrowed down “Ephraim and Manasseh” to be the white, English-speaking nations of the world: Great Britain, the

United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and others – all of whom do not have a clue who they really are.

Oddly enough, in that same historic and prophetic claim, they have traced Queen Elizabeth II's lineage back through Britain, Scotland, Argyleshire, and Ireland (through Queen Tea Tephi and King Herremón – both of the Jewish royal line – who were married at Tara, Ireland by the prophet Jeremiah, who brought Tea Tephi to Ireland from Jerusalem) – therefore, from King Zedekiah of Judah and back to David.

The claim is that Elizabeth II represents the continuation of a “seed” of David of Judah upon a throne in the midst of Israel (Herbert W. Armstrong's *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy* and J. H. Allen's *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*, among others). Whoever succeeds Elizabeth will continue that lineage. Such information sheds interesting “light” on the very hard-tested concept of “keeping covenant.”

From all of this, be aware that the *royal scepter* is not the same as the *birthright covenant*. The disappearance of the House of Israel left the House of Judah as a “remnant” of Israel ... and, by default, the only Israelites (Judah, Benjamin, and Levi) left in the land who could reasonably preserve the oracles of God, the adoption, glory, covenants, law, service of God, and the promises (Rom. 3:2, 9:4, 5).

We know that the House of Judah was made up of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin (see 1 Kings 12). The tribes of Israel who were taken away from Solomon and placed under the Ephraimite Jeroboam made up the House of Israel. From that point in First and Second Kings, you will read of the kings who ruled over the House of Israel and those who ruled over the House of Judah. However: *The covenant birthright was never removed from Ephraim*, the head of the House of Israel and the Lord God's chosen *firstborn* (see Jer. 31:9). To this day, he is still the heir.

What we presently have regarding the promises relative to the “covenant” and “remarriage” is sim-

ple: *Both are presently pending fulfillment*. “All things” are in *Christ's* possession ... and He has only *chosen* His fiancé' (see 2 Cor. 11:2 and Rev. 19:7-9). At present, not even the Church is a mate suitable for Him because she is flesh-and-blood and He is spirit (see John 3:3 and 1 Cor. 15:50). He will not “marry” her until they can be “equally yoked” (2 Cor. 6:14-18). In fact, she must be “born again” in order to be fit to be equally yoked with Him (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

Make no mistake about this one thing: You can read Old Testament prophecies and understand that the Lord God is very intent on humbling Israel to the point that she will want to return to Him. He vows to clean her up spiritually and allure her to be His wife. Once that is accomplished, He will “marry” her again *forever*. Read carefully Hosea 2, Ezekiel 16, and Jeremiah 31 (note especially Jer. 31:7, 8). Built into these prophecies are the Lord God's *promises* and *oath*.

Ephesians 5:26 says that Jesus Christ will “sanctify and cleanse [His Church] with the washing of water by the word.” Titus 3:5 says that: “according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” John 6:44, 65 say that we have to be *drawn* into this relationship to Jesus Christ. At what point do we begin to connect these New Testament teachings to Hosea 2:14-23, Ezekiel 16:60-63, and Jeremiah 31:31-34?

You should now be able to begin to form a “picture” of the answer to the question about whom Christ shall “marry” when He returns. Think very seriously about the personality of God ... His attitude about His covenants, promises, and oaths. Is He double-minded, duplicitous, capricious? Is He a liar? How much can you trust Him? How much *do* you trust Him? Remember this: You cannot replace His promises with things on which He clearly has *not* put His holy stamp of approval (Rom. 1:25). That would not be in unity with His holy and righteous will. You have to choose His truth over religious tradition.

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“I will betroth you to me *forever*.” Hosea 1:14

# ISRAEL: THE “CHURCH” IN THE WILDERNESS (ACTS 7:38)

There were some claims in the teachings of the “parent” Church of the various “Church of God” groups that seem to go counter to scriptural revelation regarding whom Christ will “marry” when He returns. In his two books (*The Incredible Human Potential* and *Mystery of the Ages*), Herbert W. Armstrong did not fully explain the “marriage” to Israel and the “re-marriage” proposed in Hosea 2:14 and other places as they related to Romans 11. The claims made in the old *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course* are as follows:

1. Israel had a “covenant,” not a “testament” (which requires the death of the testator).
2. Because of Israel’s disobedience, she never received the promises made to Abraham.
3. The Holy Spirit was not available to Israel.
4. When Christ died, His “marriage” contract with Israel was dissolved; therefore, He is free to “marry” whomever He chooses.
5. The Old Covenant contained only material promises to a single, temporal nation: Israel.
6. Christ was *husband* to *physical* Israel under the Old Covenant, but He will be *HUSBAND* to *spiritual* Israel, God’s true Church born again at the resurrection under the New Covenant/Testament (emphases on “husband” and HUSBAND are ACBCC’s).

The difference between the “old” covenant and “new” covenant/testament, it is said, is based on the fact that *Gentiles* will become “Christians” ... so, the new covenant “marriage” will be to a *spiritual* Israel: a combination of *Israelites and Gentiles*. It is not made clear exactly what is meant by a “*spiritual* Israel.” Nevertheless, all of these factors combine to mean that they seemingly teach that Jesus Christ will not be “marrying” the Israel to whom He was “married” under the old covenant. Our quest is to find out if that conclusion is correct ... if, in fact, that is what the claim is. We need to understand whom Jesus Christ will marry when He returns.

## The Essential Questions

The essential questions are simple: Will the Lord God, who became Jesus Christ, keep His word to the *nation* Israel ... or change the terms due to the inclusion of the Gentiles? Did He say one thing ... but mean another? How firmly can ancient, *physical* Israel stand

on the promises of her God? These essential questions demand scriptural answers. We will take the “long road” to get the answers, so be prepared to understand some of the minutiae involved.

Read Jeremiah 31:1-11. This is in preparation for vv. 31-37, which is cited by Paul twice in Hebrews (8:6-13; 10:15-18). Notice Jeremiah’s inspired com-

ments about “The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest” (vv. 1-3). This prophecy must be considered in the context of Isaiah 1:9, Acts 7:38, Romans 9:25-29, and Romans 11:1-7.

Isaiah 1:9 speaks of a “remnant” of Israel ... as does Jeremiah 31:2 and Romans 9:25-29; 11:1-7. Jeremiah 31:2 speaks of the “wilderness” ... as does Acts 7:38. Are they connected in any way? Logic demands that they are. How? Why?

In Acts 7:38, Stephen speaks of *Jesus Christ* having been “in the church [*ekklesia*] in the wilderness” only to have Israel “thrust Him from them, and in their hearts turn back again to Egypt.” That comment gives us information about who the Lord God was ... and who He became. It tells us that He, in dealing with Israel, was dealing with His *ekklesia*. Was Stephen drawing his information from Jeremiah 31:2?

If you read Acts 7:42 and understand Stephen’s reference correctly, you understand that over 40 years the Lord God pared down Israel from her original size to a remnant in the wilderness according to the election of grace. Numbers 13 and 14 reveal that the Lord God punished Israel in this way because of her faithless reluctance to enter His “rest”: the “promised land” – note especially Numbers 14:26-39: There was a surviving faithful remnant that constituted Christ’s *ekklesia* in the wilderness.

Later, Paul took up this point of Christ’s presence among Israel in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5. He points out that they were “baptized” (vv. 1, 2). They ate the same “*spiritual* meat” and drank the same “*spiritual* drink.” They drank that “*spiritual* drink” from the “*spiritual* Rock that followed them”: Jesus Christ. Why does Paul go to this kind of commentary?

His point to the Romans in Romans 9:4, 5 indicates that Israel received “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises that had been given to the fathers” (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). We will discuss later what “receiving the promises” means.

At face value, Paul says in no uncertain terms that Israel received the promises. He also points out that being only a *physical* Israelite does not qualify you to inherit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul indicates that you qualify for that in a way that is different from mere physical descent (vv. 6-14, 30-33). The answer

to the conundrum is found in vv. 27-29: *There is a remnant of Israel who must be considered in the conversation.*

In Romans 10:19, 20 and 11:11-15, Paul makes note that Israel was made privy to the gospel ... but ignored it and would not submit to its demands. He posits that the Gentiles serve as God’s prod to Israel. After all, the Gentiles also were made God’s people when they heretofore had not been God’s people. Romans 9:25, 26 is not Paul’s claim that the Lord God made the Gentiles His people instead of Israel. Paul is claiming that the Gentiles have become part of Israel ... probably because that is where His eternal, perpetual covenant is founded and confirmed by Jesus Christ. It is a prod to make rebellious, estranged Israel jealous so they will return to Him.

Then, there is the message in Romans 11:7: “Israel has not obtained that for which he seeks; but the election [of the remnant of Israel] has obtained it, and the rest [of Israel] were blinded” (see Isa. 6:8-13 and Matt. 13:9-17; emphases added). What does this mean? Simply this: From the 40 years in the wilderness to at least Paul’s time, there had existed a spirit-led remnant of Israel that was led by Jesus Christ ... and who maintained Israel’s status as heirs to the promises of the Lord God.

It is not beyond credibility that Stephen was connecting this remnant *ekklesia* among physical Israel ... among whom the Lord God dwelt as He continued to lead them to the “promised land” ... to the *ekklesia* that Jesus Christ is currently building. Did that remnant continue to consider herself “married” to the Lord God? Better yet, did Jesus Christ intend to be faithful to the promises that He had made to *physical* Israel? Evidence thus far indicates that He did.

## “Marriage”

Let’s understand what “marriage” means in this context ... because some might think of it only in terms of a “marriage” between a man and a woman and all that is implied in that relationship. Paul discusses this in Ephesians 5:22-33. His basic point is that “marriage” between a man and woman is *representative* (a *type* or *example* or *symbol*) of the reality of the relationship between Christ and His Church. This comparison would be just as true for the Lord God and

physical Israel as it would be for Christ and His Church.

The salient points Paul makes about the husband and wife situation are these:

1. Christ is the *head* of the Church (v. 23).
2. He is the *savior* of the body (v. 23).
3. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it (v. 25).
4. His purpose in doing that was so that He can *sanctify* it and *cleanse* it with the plain truth of His word ... to the point that the Church will not have spot or wrinkle when He “marries” her (vv. 26, 27; see also 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7-9).
5. The ultimate result of this relationship is to be *spiritual unity* between Christ and His “wife” (vv. 30-32).

Does Hosea 2:6-23 indicate in any way that ancient, physical Israel is going to receive any of these actions (like *sanctification* and *cleansing*) prior to being “re-married” to the Lord God? Is ancient, physical Israel called by Stephen the “Church” in the wilderness? Does Stephen indicate by that term that such an *ekklesia* represents “the congregation of the *faithful*”? Is there any indication that the Lord God will be the “*savior* of the body” ... that is, the *savior* of the remnant that was His “wife”? To what does the evidence point?

Now, what is “marriage” in this sense? One writer describes it as a “...paradoxical relationship: the complete abandonment of self in the complete conquest of the other” (*The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4; p. 234). That is the language of Romans 8:9, 14-17 and 1 Corinthians 2:6-16: A mutual melding/blending of “spirit” in order to achieve an indomitable spiritual unity. It is the language of Jeremiah 31:31-34: A spiritual comprehension of the righteousness of the Law that leads us to the “better covenant” with Christ (Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 3:23-25; Heb. 8:6-8).

Did the Lord God “empty” Himself in order to be the redeemer (see Phil. 2:5-11; John 1:1-3, 14)? Bet-

ter yet, read Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16; and Jeremiah 50:34. There is overwhelming evidence in those scriptures that the Lord God is Israel’s *Redeemer*. The sense of this is in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. This is the sense of Hosea 3. This unnamed woman (Hosea’s wife Gomer) is symbolic of the majority of Israel that was scattered to the four winds into obscurity. They will be “bought back” (that is: *redeemed*) in order to be “re-married” to the Lord God. In New Testament terms, the Lord God is the one who became Jesus Christ.

### Was There a *Testament* in the Old Covenant?

The Lord God’s “marriage” to Israel is best described as a *pact*, *compact*, *covenant*. In other words, it was “a *divine* constitution or ordinance with signs or pledges” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999; p. 136). What does all of that mean?

It means that the Lord God set up a *government* among Israel, based on a system of basic laws and principles, by which He would rule her. In effect: He established Israel as His *kingdom* – over whom He became the “Lord God.” In this way, Israel became the “Kingdom of God.” *She is the only nation in history ever to have “married” the Lord God in this manner.*

As “Lord,” He became her ruler, master, head, and provider. As her “God,” He became the Supreme Being to whom alone she would give her singular allegiance and fidelity. That is stated very succinctly in Deuteronomy 6:4, 5: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (*RSV*; alternate translation). The “provisions” He would give them (see Deut. 28:1-14) expressed His “love” for them, and their obedience to His commands expressed their “love” for Him (see John 14:15; 1 John 1:6-2-6; and Rom. 13:8-10).

Neither His “love” nor her “love” was intended to be void of affection and genuine feelings of intense attraction one for the other. In fact, the net result was supposed to fulfill the *mystery* of the unity of the “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” *symbol* of the physi-

cal marriage among humans (Gen. 2:23). It was not intended to be a “go-along-to-get-along” relationship.

We have already posited that the covenant made with Abraham was in *perpetuity* for him and his “seed” – applied both to the singular “seed” Jesus Christ and the multiple “seeds” that are to number as the stars of the heavens, the dust of the earth, and sands of the sea. In that covenant, was there any concern for a *testament* ... a *will* that declared who the testator’s *heirs* would be upon his death?

I raise this question because of the explanation some give that the Old Testament was a *covenant*, not a *testament*. The old *ACBCC* explains that the “Old Testament” should be called the “Old Covenant.” They say that a *covenant* does not require the *death* of the testator. Why would death be required? Hebrews 9:16, 17 says that a *testament* (a will) requires the death of the testator. The “new testament” is seen as being Christ’s *will* because He died.

What is the significance of the terms *covenant* and *testament*? Traditional Christianity has been accused of perpetuating a misnomer (a wrong name or designation) by calling the first division of the Bible a *testament*, instead of *covenant*. That supposedly causes much misunderstanding about the contents of what are called the Old and New Testaments. To call something by the wrong name is a mistake!

The argument about using *testament* instead of *covenant* is this: the first part of the Bible should be called the Old Covenant. Why? Because, they reason, when it was translated into Latin shortly after Christ’s death, it was called a *testamentum*. But, when it was translated into English, the translators incorrectly kept the Latin term and referred to it by the English term *testament*. What is the problem with that?

In English, they say, a *covenant* is not a will; it is a formal, binding agreement – a compact – that does not require anyone’s death. A *testament*, on the other hand, is an act by which a person determines the disposition of his possessions after his death – in other words, it is a will. Although the Latin word *testamentum* can mean either, the assertion has been that the English word *testament* does not. Is that true? No. In English, *testament* can mean either a covenant or a will. Its meaning is derived from the context in which the definition is used. The problem with calling the first division of the Bible a *testament*, the argument con-

cludes, is that doing so causes a skewing of the meaning of the contents, which does not contain such a will. Therefore, it should be called the Old Covenant. Since we become inheritors by the death of Jesus Christ, it is more proper, then, to call the second division of the Bible the *New Testament*.

I have come to see, however, that this conclusion is a product of flawed logic. Even though I reach about the same general conclusion about whether or not traditional Christianity correctly understands the contents of the first division, this teaching is flawed in its assertion that the first division cannot be a *testament*.

What if it can? What then? Would that validate traditional Christianity’s understanding? Well, I am not so naive as to think that people really pay that much attention to the names of the two divisions of the Bible. Do they really care one way or another? I am not convinced that they do. Nevertheless, I agree that misunderstanding the basic elements of something can affect your teachings – which can affect your awareness of and understanding of God’s revealed truth. It is precisely traditional Christianity’s *misunderstanding* of the significance of the contents and laws in the first division of the Bible that prompts them to declare that it has been abolished for the Christian. This misunderstanding perpetuates grievous theological errors that easily could be avoided!

It is not merely a problem caused by not understanding the difference between the meaning of the terms *covenant* and *testament*. It is deeper than that. We should ask ourselves the right kinds of questions in order to focus on the truth of the matter. Should it be called a *covenant* or *testament*? Is there an inheritance due to death contained in the first division of the Bible? What does Paul mean in Hebrews 8:13 when he says: “In that He [Jesus] says, a *new* covenant, He has made the first [covenant] *old*” (emphasis added)? Does this presuppose the existence of an old and new covenant? What does Jesus Christ mean in Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, and Luke 22:20 when He calls the cup of wine that He served at His last Passover “the *new* testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (*KJV*; emphasis added)? If there is a *new* testament, does this automatically presuppose the existence of an *old* testament? Could it be that Jesus and Paul are speaking of the same thing? These are important questions. And ... we must understand the truthful answers to them.

The original English language consisted of about 75,000 words. Because it is a borrowing language, it has swelled to its present size of more than 600,000 words. Words that have been borrowed have the same meaning, in most cases, as their original language source. For example, *beautiful* is essentially a French word, but it means the same in French and English. Is it possible, then, that the terms *covenant* and *testament* mean the same – even though they are not cognates? Is it possible to incorporate a word into the English language and use only certain applications of its definition(s) – and exclude others? Just as easily as adopting *testamentum* from the Latin because one of its definitions is the same as the English term *covenant*. In this way, they can be synonyms: two or more words in the same language that have the same or very nearly the same meaning.

So, it is not as though there was no *testament* involved in the old covenant. After all, the question of an *heir* for Abraham played a central role in the perpetuity of the Lord God's covenant with him. Genesis 12:1-3 begins the process. Genesis 13:14-18 opens Abraham's eyes to the magnitude of the promises. Note especially v. 15 where the Lord God promises this: "I will give it to you and your seed *forever*" (emphases added). In v. 16, He explains the magnitude of Abraham's future "seed."

Genesis 15 is where Abraham raises the question about an *heir* (his "seed"; vv. 2, 3). The Lord God promised him an heir from his own body (v. 4). Then there was the question about the "promised land" (vv. 7, 8). The Lord God's answer was the sacrificial ritual described in vv. 8-12 – the *oath* that He added to His promise (Heb. 6:13-20). In vv. 13-16, the Lord God prophesied about the future existence of some of Abraham's multiple "seed." Note that v. 15 tells us that Abraham will *die*. If he does, how will the covenant be perpetuated if there is no *testament* involved?

The question about Abraham's heir comes up again in Genesis 16. This time, Sarai tries to solve the problem (vv. 1-4). The Lord God gives His answer in vv. 15-21: Abraham would father a son with Sarai, name him Isaac, and the covenant would be *inherited* by Isaac (see Gen. 17:18-21; 26:1-5 and 35:9-12). We know by this abbreviated history that *death* and *heirs* figured prominently in the perpetuity of the covenant. That constitutes a *testament: a will*.

Now read Matthew 22:23-32. The question comes up about levirate marriage (marriage to a brother's widow). The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, posed a question to Jesus about the levirate marriage relative to the resurrection (v. 28). Jesus chided their ignorance of scripture (v. 29). Then He explained that God is the God of the *living*, not the *dead*. His comment about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob infers that *God will raise them from the dead in order to fulfill His promises to them*. In that, the perpetuity of the covenant is secured (see also Heb. 11:17-19).

There seems to have been a *testament* in place in the old covenant because there were heirs who inherited the promises. All of that was also done according the *will* of the Lord God ... the one who became Jesus Christ, the human sacrifice through whose death the perpetuity of the covenant was secured and the promises were confirmed.

### Did Israel Receive the Promises?

The ACBCC argument says that Israel *did not* receive the promises because she was disobedient. Is it possible to receive the promises without actually coming into possession of them? For the answer to that, we must consult Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 6:15 says: "...After [Abraham] had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." What did Genesis 15:15 tell us? Abraham would die at a good old age without *coming into possession* of the land that the Lord God had promised him. Does that make the Lord God a liar? No. Does it make Him duplicitous or double-minded or capricious? No. Hebrews 11:1-16 tells us that *no one* from Abel through Abraham received the promises the Lord God made to Abraham. In v. 39, Paul reveals that *nobody* has yet received those promises ... whether or not they were faithful. That fact seems to blunt the inference that Israel's *disobedience* kept her from receiving the promises.

Read carefully Galatians 3:6-18. While Paul admits that the Lord God's *covenant* with Abraham includes salvation for the Gentiles (part of the multiple "seeds"), he also makes it clear that the promises to Abraham (all of the things to which the covenant applied) were made to *Jesus Christ* (v. 16). Here is the "capper": The Lord God gave the contents of the covenant to Abraham by *promise* (v. 18).

Paul says two important things in Romans 4:14-17: (1) *The promise is not negated by the Law*, and (2) God calls the things that do not presently exist as if they exist already. Galatians 3:17 says that the Law *cannot* invalidate the covenant promises. Even if Israel was disobedient, *the Lord God made sure that the covenant promises were not tied to the consequences of the Law*. Some claim that they were because His covenant with Israel was *conditional*. They justify this by claiming that the covenant with Abraham was conditional only until he agreed to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:1-19).

Israel's disobedience, while it violated God's Law, was an egregious trespass against the covenant and the promises it contains. If you are concluded under *sin* (trespass of the Law; Gal. 3:22; 1 John 3:4), then you have the opportunity to be forgiven and receive grace, mercy, and redemption through Jesus Christ (v. 22).

We believe that such an opportunity exists between the crucifixion and the coming 1,000-year completion of the ministry of *reconciliation* and the Great White Throne Judgment. In other words, *God has made it possible for transgressors – even among physical Israel – to be returned to the covenant status based on promise, not Law*. This is reflected in Paul's argument in Romans 11:25-29. It is also reflected in what took place before the creation of the orderly universe when the Lord God divested Himself of His equality with His divine partner in order to become the *redeemer* and *savior* (see Eph. 1:4; Phil. 2:5-11; and 1 Pet. 1:18-20). That decision was predicated on the contingency that "sin" could and/or would occur among mankind because of being given an independent mind.

So, in answer to the question about whether or not Israel *received* the promises, the answer has to be "Yes." Romans 4:17 and Hebrews 11:1 make it perfectly clear that there is a difference between *receiving* the promises and actually *obtaining* the things contained in the promises. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the things contained in the promises were as good as done ... even though they were pilgrims and strangers in the world. We have the security of the Lord God's *immutable* promise and oath that He will not change His mind about the covenant promises (Heb. 6:13-20). Then there is Paul's statement in Romans 11:7 that the *remnant according to the election of grace obtained* what blinded Israel did not. Somewhere in scripture there exists an answer to this mystery.

By the way, those covenant promises were not to a single, temporal nation: Israel. They were also to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all who become participants in the covenant through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26-29). Converted Gentiles were able to become participants in the covenant community. By the same logic, they will become part of the new covenant as legitimate members of the spirit-imbued Israel.

## The *Ekklesia* Chosen by Jesus Christ

Please note that many translators do not use the term *church* in Acts 7:38. Some use *congregation* (*Modern Language; RSV*). Some use *assembly in the desert or wilderness* (*NIV; Moffatt; The Jerusalem Bible*). The *Good News for Modern Man* uses: "the people of Israel assembled in the desert." The Greek translation of 1 Chronicles 13:2 uses *ekklesia Israel*, which is translated by most versions as "the *assembly* of Israel."

This tells me that the term "church" is not the "magic button" that makes a distinction between ancient *ekklesia Israel* (Stephen's reference to "the *ekklesia* in the wilderness") and the *ekklesia* that Jesus Christ is building. We will learn how that plays in the relationship between Israel and the "Church."

Because of the events of the day, the problem centered upon the "Christians" and their claims about the *ekklesia* being built by Jesus Christ. Stephen was being accused of blasphemy because of his actions and teachings about the matter. Stephen was brought to trial before the Sanhedrin through suborned witness (Acts 6:9-15). Read his entire argument in Acts 7. What is his approach leading up to v. 38? What is his argument after v. 38?

When asked to defend himself, Stephen began with the experience of Abraham receiving the covenant promises from the Lord God ... and continuing with a history lesson from Abraham to Moses and the children of Israel. It was in v. 38 that he tied *ekklesia Israel* to the *ekklesia* movement in his own day and time. What was happening was a lesson in the Lord God's faithfulness to His promises and covenant.

Stephen's conclusion that ancient Israel was the Lord God's *ekklesia* in the wilderness was his attempt to tie ancient Israel to the Apostolic *ekklesia*. He was not making a distinction between a physical Israel and a spiritual Israel. He was establishing a *continuity* be-

tween what was promised to Israel through Abraham and Isaac and the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ.

He proceeded in vv. 39-50 to bring up God's accusations of infidelity and abhorrent idolatry against the "fathers" because they mixed their idolatry with God's truth and thought they could bring them together in a temple built with hands. God abandoned them and their temple.

In vv. 51-53, Stephen spoke like an Old Testament prophet to them and turned the tables on them: He brought God's indictment of them for being liars, murderers, and betrayers of the covenant. They would be as guilty for causing God to withdraw His name and spirit from among them as rebellious ancient Israel had been. They had killed God's Christ ... just like they had killed God's prophets.

This enraged the members present to the point that they grabbed Stephen and began biting him savagely (v. 54). After Stephen made his comments in vv. 55, 56, they grabbed him and threw him out of the city to be stoned under the supervision of Saul of Tarsus ... the man who later became the Apostle Paul (see Acts 9:1-31; 13:9).

Here are the pregnant questions to be answered:

1. For what reason would Stephen mention Israel as the *ekklesia Israel*?

2. Was his thought connected to 1 Chronicles 13:2?

3. Was it connected to Isaiah 1:9 and the *remnant of Israel according to the election of grace*?

4. Was he interpreting Jesus' claim in Matthew 16:18 with regard to Hosea 2:14-23 – alluring Israel to return to Him so He could "marry" her forever?

Somewhere in the mix of this mystery, there is a great truth that God has revealed in His word about the relationship of that remnant of physical Israel and the "Church" of the New Covenant/Testament. Can we find that great truth in Hebrews 8:8 where Paul says the fault of the old covenant was with the people ... not the covenant itself? Can we find part of the answer in that same verse where Paul calls the replacement a kainos (new in quality) instead of a neos (new in kind) covenant? Hebrews 8:9-13 makes it clear that there is going to be a fundamental difference between the "marriage" made by the old and new covenants. The kainos quality has to do with the spirit. We will continue with a study of Romans 11 and Ephesians 2.

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## Have God's Prophets Disappeared?

There is the idea that prophets disappeared by the time the book of Malachi was written – Malachi being considered by the Jews as the last genuine prophet in Israel – and that no such office exists in the Church which Jesus Christ has been building. One must remember, however, that the Lord God divorced Israel for her adulteries and turned her over to the punishment due her. Numerous prophets came and went who explained God's will to her, reminded her of her place in His covenant with Abraham, reminded her of her "marriage" to Him, and foretold future punishments and her eventual restoration after He has removed her sins from her. So, it has not been a case of divorced Israel not having a continuing prophetic message in the canonized Old Testament – or ... of there not being such an office in the New Testament Church. It is a matter of God's word being grossly misunderstood and, thereby, being wrongly taught. What difference is there between Old and New Testament prophets? Read Ephesians 4:11, 2 Peter 1:19-21, and Revelation. Let's see: prophets, a surer word of prophecy, and a prophecy. What do you think all of that means?

# What Romans and Ephesians Teach about Israel and the “Church”

We saw Paul’s reference to Isaiah 1:9 in Romans 9:29: The Lord God left a “remnant” of *Israel* and, thereby, avoided destroying *Israel* like He did Sodom and Gomorrah. In Romans 11:1-5, he returns to this scripture and compares it to Elijah’s experience after he had killed numerous prophets of Baal (see 1 Kings 18:17-40; 19:1-18). The Lord God told Elijah that He had 7,000 faithful Israelites who had not bowed their knees to Baal. In Romans 11:5, Paul reveals that God had left “a remnant according to the election of grace.” That *remnant* was the fulfillment of Isaiah 1:9. Who were this remnant of Israel?

That *remnant* came through history to be at least the 12 *Jewish disciples* chosen by Jesus Christ and charged with the maintenance of the “Church” He would build (Matt. 16:18, 19). However, it also included others from *Israel* – Paul and Barnabas were not out of *Judah*: Paul was out of *Benjamin*, and Barnabas was out of *Levi* (Rom. 9:3, 4; 11:1; Acts 4:36). If the “gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom. 11:29), then the Lord God’s promise to Abraham that *all nations* would be blessed in him *cannot* go unfulfilled (see Heb. 6:13-20 – which was addressed to Christians). But ... how does that affect the preservation of that *remnant*?

## Isaiah 8:16, 20: The Narrowing Effect

Isaiah 6:8-10 is the revelation about how the Lord God took away Israel’s ability to “see” and “hear” His truth. Matthew 13:9-17 occurs about 800 years later ... and Jesus Christ is pointing out to His disciples that they have been allowed to “see” and “hear” the truth of His teachings, while the vast majority of the House of Judah is still “blind” and “deaf.” Jesus quotes Isaiah 6. Isaiah 6:11, 12 says that their condition will remain in effect for a good, long time while He punishes them for their sins. Verse 13 is especially important to this discussion: (1) There will be only a “tenth” left to be the stump for “the holy seed” (Job 14:7-9); (2) He’s revealing more about the future of the *remnant*.

Isaiah 8 is a prophecy about the coming judgment of the House of Israel and the House of Judah for their “confederacies” with the nations of the world against one another (vv. 9-15). All but a *remnant* would “stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.” Who would be left? The *remnant* of His disciples among whom the “testimony” and the “Law” were *bound up* (v. 16). Those not speaking according to the Law and the testimony would be liars (v. 20).

Make note of the expression “bind up” in v. 16. This is something that will be done only among the -

Lord God’s *true* disciples. What does that mean? It involves a *restriction* that is imposed ... a restriction that allows only His true disciples to know and understand the Lord God’s Law and testimony. It is a *narrowing* of the participants in God’s truth. Those who worship Him and speak on His behalf will have to do so in *spirit and truth* (John 4:23, 24).

Do you begin to grasp the meaning of this prophecy? It means that there is to be a *remnant* of true disciples from that point in Israel’s history until the Lord God thinks it proper to return all of Israel’s “sight” and “hearing.” Matthew 13:9-17 is proof that it had not yet happened ... and the Disciples of Jesus Christ appear to be the continuation of that “holy seed”: a *remnant according to the election of grace who would constitute the only ones who would have true understanding*. How do we solidify the proof of such a statement? With evidence from scripture.

The Jews (Judah, Levi, and Benjamin) were the only tribes of Israel left in Jesus’ time from whom such a remnant could have been perpetuated. As stated above, Israel’s “blindness” and “deafness” was still imposed after Jesus chose His disciples and began to school them in His thoughts and ways.

There are several subtle hints of this in the New Testament. Jesus says in Matthew 10:6 and 15:24 that

His ministry was only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” In Luke 12:32, Jesus calls His disciples a “little flock.” In Matthew 20:16 and 22:14, Jesus said that “many are called, but few are chosen.” Then there is the parable in Matthew 25:1-13 about *half* of the “virgins” in the wedding party not being prepared for the coming Bridegroom. In John 6:44, 65, it appears that one becomes a disciple by being *invited* by God ... *drawn* (“figurative of the pull on a man’s inner life; attracted”; *BAG*, p. 251). John 6:66 says that many abandoned Him because they did not like what He was teaching. Finally, Acts 1:15 tells us that the number of His disciples after His ascension to heaven was “about an hundred and twenty.” *Many* are called, but *few* are chosen. The idea of a *holy remnant* must figure very prominently in those references.

### Romans 9-11: The “Holy Root”

Paul follows up in Romans 9:6-16 with his explanation that *physical* birth and circumcision as a child of Abraham and an Israelite do not automatically make you the kind of Abraham’s “seed” and Israelite whom God is looking to draw to Jesus Christ. It is God’s choice whom He will call and draw. In vv. 27-29, he references Isaiah’s comment about the *remnant*. He continues his thought in 11:1-5 ... but refers to it as “a remnant *according to the election of grace*” out of Israel (v. 5). This is from Isaiah’s prophecy.

In Romans 11:11-29, Paul lays out how the Gentiles will be *grafted into* the “holy root” – that is, into this “remnant” of Israel. Paul uses an analogy that many believe exposes Paul’s ignorance about the grafting process. He speaks of grafting “wild olive branches” into the domesticated olive tree. Many commentators reply that Paul does not understand that the wild olive branch is not capable of being grafted into the domesticated tree. In that, they seem to completely ignore that Paul says in v. 24 that it is done “contrary to nature.”

Some suggest that the “holy root” is not Israel; rather, they say, that name can only be a reference to the “patriarchs in the covenant-making period in the life of the Hebrew nation” (*The Interpreter’s Bible*; vol. 9, p. 571). They cite Jeremiah 11:15-17, Romans 9:5, and 11:28 as their proof. However, they miss the point in Jeremiah 11:15-17. About whom is the “green olive

tree” remark made? “My beloved ... The Lord called *your* name, a green olive tree” (emphases added).

For that reason, I posit that it is undeniable that *Israel* is the “holy root” from whom the “branches are broken” (Jer. 11:16) and whom the Lord planted (Jer. 11:17). Notice also in Jeremiah 11:17 the mention of the “house of Israel” and the “house of Judah.” That is the entire nation of Israel ... not the “fathers.” Jeremiah’s comment in v. 16 implies that *not all* of the “branches” of Israel were “broken off.” Paul specifically states that in Romans 11:17: “If *some* of the branches be broken off. ...” Have I made my point?

What does this “grafting” process achieve for the Gentiles? *They become “Israelites” because they begin to take their “life” from the holy root.* This is one of the reasons that it becomes *impossible* to segregate them from Abraham’s blessings. They become “spiritual Jews” because of their righteousness in Jesus Christ. They become “spiritual Israelites” because they are grafted into the “holy root” of Israel through Jesus Christ. Thereby, they become Abraham’s “seed.”

Hebrews 2:10, 11 lends its voice to this discussion. The “sons” who are going to be “brought to glory” (1 John 3:1-3) are *sanctified* ... that is, made *holy* for a specific purpose. All who are thus *sanctified* (Israelite and Gentile) are “all of one.” Some, like the *NIV*, translate this to say: “are of the *same family*.” If the Gentiles are grafted into the “holy root” (Israel), to which “family” do they belong? Are they an independent olive tree? Who is the “olive tree”?

This is also one of the reasons why the Gentiles become part of the “body of Jesus Christ” – His Church. This is how the majority of them will be saved along with that majority of Israel that was excluded from God’s plan because of rebellion (Rom. 11:25-27).

### The Lesson from Ephesians 2:11-21

We must also consider Ephesians 2:11-21. The gist of Paul’s instruction here is simple: (1) Gentiles were previously not allowed by the Jews to be citizens of Israel or partakers of the covenant promises (v. 12); (2) Jesus Christ made that possible by breaking down the “middle wall of partition between us” – the *Jewish* laws/ordinances that prohibited social contact with Gentiles (vv. 13, 14; see Acts 10:26-29); and (3) Christ’s plan is to make of the *two* (Israel and Gentiles)

“one new man ... one body ... one Spirit” (vv. 15, 16, 18). You understand that “one” in this case means “a unity.” Being one body would presuppose the description Paul gives in Ephesians 4:1-16: a body in which every “part” contributes its peculiar nature to the proper working of the entire body in unity.

Ephesians 2:19-21 is a most astounding conclusion reached by Paul. Verse 12 describes the Gentiles as being “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise.” Paul is providing linkage to all that we have discussed thus far. He is providing *scriptural evidence* that the Gentiles are being added to *Israel, the holy root* to whom the covenants and promises were given and secured through the *remnant according to the election of grace*. In v. 19, Paul calls the converted Gentiles “fellow-citizens ... and of the household of God.” They, too, will have been “adopted” in Christ as though they are natural-born citizens of the *kainos* (not *neos*) Israel that is now imbued with the spirit of God (a process that began on Pentecost A.D. 31).

### “Jews” and “Israelites”

With that, we should take another look at Paul’s comments about what constitutes a “Jew” and an “Israelite” in God’s sight. This will entail a discussion about Romans 2:17-29 and Romans 9:1-8. The insight of Paul regarding this subject cannot be avoided and ignored. Why?

Let me interject here a necessary observation of Paul’s motivation: He is approaching his argument from the point of the “spirit of the Law.” You can refer to Jesus’ magnification of the Law in Matthew 5-7 with His comments about “you have heard...but I say....” You can also include the principle that Paul includes in his discussion in Hebrews 9 related to figures (v. 9, 11) and patterns (v. 23, 24).

Romans 2:17 begins Paul’s argument about what constitutes being a “Jew.” He begins his instruction with the following: “You...rest [that is, find comfort or support] in the Law and make your boast of God....” If the “Jew” does not capture in his mind and heart the “righteousness” of the Law (Rom. 8:1-4; Psa. 119:172), then his resting in the Law and boasting of God has not achieved the purpose intended by God (vv. 17-24).

In order to explain that more completely, Paul chooses to use circumcision as an example (vv. 25-29). His point is that circumcision has a deeper meaning than the mere removal of the foreskin. There is a “spiritual intent” behind the removal of the foreskin as a requirement for entering “covenant” with the Lord God. Jews who merely follow the “letter” of the Law, therefore, are not true participants in the “covenant” because they either do not accept or do not comprehend the “spirit” of the circumcision.

Paul later discusses the “spiritual intent” in Romans 4:16-25. There Paul makes the following salient points:

1. Even though he had God’s Law (Gen. 26:5), Abraham exercised faith in the Lord God’s promise for all of mankind (v. 16).

2. Abraham believed that God will resurrect the dead (Heb. 11:19) in order to make good on those promised things that are already as good as done (v. 17).

3. Abraham hoped against hope and was not weak in faith because of his advanced age and the “deadness of Sarah’s womb” (vv. 18, 19).

4. He did not “stagger” (doubt, waver, hesitate) at accepting the truth of the Lord God’s promise because he fully believed that He was able to do exactly what He had promised (vv. 20, 21).

One can reasonably conclude the following from Paul’s discussion here: If Abraham understood and embraced the righteousness of God’s Law (which Gen. 26:5 strongly suggests), then his unfaltering faith in the Lord God’s promise would have been the “fruit” of his comprehension of that righteousness. Such righteousness in the Lord God would not allow Him to make any promise that He would not fulfill.

The same principle of the “spiritual intent” worked regarding sacrifices. According to Josephus, at Passover in Jerusalem during the days of Cestius (a Roman legate who marched into Judea with a force of over 30,000 men in September A.D. 66 in an attempt to

restore order at the outset of the Great Jewish Revolt) 256,500 lambs were sacrificed in the space of two hours (*Wars of the Jews*, Book VI, chap. IX, v. 3). Paul's assertion would have been that all of those lambs would have counted for nothing if they were offered only according to the "letter" of the Law (see Micah 5:6-8). Mounds and mounds of human foreskins would count for no more than that if the "spirit" of the circumcision was not accepted and/or comprehended.

Paul's conclusion in Romans 2:29 is not a novel deduction made by a man schooled in both the Greek and Rabbinic traditions. Paul was not going out on a theological "limb" or "branch" or "twig." He was following the argument made by Moses in Deuteronomy 10:12-16.

Israel had been chosen above all other nations on the face of the earth to be "married" to the Lord God by covenant – which involved "spiritual" requirements (see Lev. 19:1, 2). Every male had already been ceremonially "naturalized" into Israel by circumcision of the flesh on the eighth day after birth. Moses now reveals the "spiritual" element to all of Israel (males and females). As a result of the Lord God's choice of Israel as His "bride," they were to: "Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and no longer be stiff-necked" (emphases added). Verse 19 also imposed upon them the command to love the *stranger* because Israel had been *strangers* in Egypt.

Romans 9:1-8 brings another facet of Paul's argument to light: What makes a person an "Israelite." He begins his argument with a short declaration about what constitutes the heritage of *physical* Israel: the adoption, the *glory* (that is: the fame, renown, and honor given by God; see also 1 Sam 4:10-22), the covenant, the Law, the service of God, the promises, and the fathers (vv. 4, 5). Verse 6a is exceptionally pregnant with meaning relative to the forgoing explanation: "It is not as though God's word had failed."

Paul had already said in 3:3 that Israel's *unbelief* did not alter God's faith and determination in what He was doing. Why else would He have left for Himself a *remnant of Israel according to the election of grace*? Whatever else you can say about all of the Israelites who were not in that remnant, you cannot say that the Lord God abandoned physical Israel and took away all that constitutes her heritage. The remnant was still Israel! But ... Israel has to be changed *spiritually*.

In Romans 9:6b, Paul interjects an interesting thought similar to his argument about "Jews" in Romans 2: "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel." Does he argue here that *Israel* was *totally* abandoned by God? No. He posits by his statement that *there also are those in Israel that are Israel*.

Remember that he is leading up to his argument in Romans 11 about the *remnant* and the *holy root*. By virtue of the fact that a "spirit-led" portion of Israel still exists, that "spirit-led" portion thereby maintains its place in the covenant the Lord God made with Abraham (vv. 7, 8). Farther down in 9:11-13, Paul emphasizes that Jacob was elected above Esau by the Lord God to be put into that position. The net effect of His choice is simple: "Let God be true, and every man a liar" (3:4).

The choice of Jacob above Esau is reminiscent of Romans 5:6-11. How did *Israel* come into existence after the Lord God chose *Jacob* over Esau? "Jacob" literally means "he grasps the heel" (see Gen. 25:19-26). *Figuratively*, it means "he deceives." That was Jacob's nature and *modus operandi* until one fateful night at the Jabbock ford (Gen. 32:22-32). Jacob's tenacity in his wrestling match with the Lord God won him a name change from Jacob to *Israel* (see also Gen. 35:9-12). Why?

The Lord God explained it this way: "As a prince you have power with God and with men, and have prevailed." That is what the name *Israel* means. This was the beginning of Jacob's conversion to true faith in the covenant. He no longer tried to *deceive* his way into possessing it. He accepted the fact that the Lord God was his master and source of strength ... the true guardian of the covenant relationship. He, no doubt, began to accept his grandfather's and father's faith for what it was intended to be. So, while Jacob was yet a sinner, the Lord God rescued him from the outcome of being a deceiver and supplanter.

We can take from that a most powerful lesson: There are yet those of Israel who are to become overcomers with God and man. However, God also accepts the person who lives, thinks, and acts like a *true* Israelite ... so much so that He is willing to accept them into the spirit-led natural family of Israel and also make them Israelites who are led by His spirit.

Putting that alongside Galatians 3:26-29 makes a powerful statement that disagrees profoundly with the

*two callings* concept of Dispensationalism that places Israel on earth and Christians in heaven. That concept is one that changes God's truth into a lie. It is a concept that makes God a liar. Galatians 3:26-29 erases all of the barriers that have been imposed by God and man ... barriers that were punishment by God and prejudices/hatred by man. How does Paul frame his argument here?

Notice v. 26: We become *children of God* by faith in Jesus Christ. How does that connect the Gentiles to Israel? Verse 27 says that our baptism into Christ has opened the door for all of us to "put on Christ." Paul explains this very well in Ephesians 1:1-14 and Hebrews 2: All who are brought *into Christ* in this way and subsequently *put on Christ* are in the *same family*. Here are two great questions regarding *family*: Does Galatians 3:26-29, in any manner whatsoever, *change* Romans 11:29 (God's gifts and calling are without repentance)? Does it, in any manner whatsoever, change Hosea 2:14-23? If you answer "Yes," then *nothing* of the previous discussions matters in the least to you.

## Summary and Conclusion

Let's summarize:

1. The New Testament Church had its beginning with an elect remnant out of *Israel*.
2. That remnant is called by Paul the "holy root" into which Gentile converts are grafted.
3. This grafting process makes the Gentiles part of *Israel* because Jesus Christ intends to make of the *two bodies* ... *one body*.
4. God intends to save all of *Israel* through Jesus Christ.
5. The *kainos* covenant changes the *people* and brings its *temporary shadows* to *reality* through the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

In this chapter's part of the entire discussion, the expected outcome was for the reader to understand the purpose and importance of the *remnant according to*

*the election of grace*. It also included the determination of whether or not scripture supports the Lord God's "remarriage" to physical Israel. Part of the evidence posits that she has to be *allured* and *cleaned up* before any such "remarriage" can/will take place. That process began when Jesus announced His intention to "build up" His *ekklesia* ... presumably, Israel, who was His *ekklesia* in the wilderness.

It is important to understand Jesus Christ's comment in Matthew 16:18 about *building* His *ekklesia*. The Greek term for "build" in v. 18, *oikodomeo* (οικοδομῶ), includes the definition "to build up; to edify." It would indicate that His *ekklesia* already exists in the *remnant*. What He is going to be doing from this point forward certainly is *not* to start over from "scratch" and build a totally different *ekklesia*. He already has one. His task now is to begin to "allure" and "cleanse" the *ekklesia* He has and begin to edify (instruct; educate) it. There is another implied sense in the idea of "build up."

Ruth 4:11 is a reference for being *built*. Rachel and Leah, with the help of their handmaidens, *built* the House of Israel. Peter, in 1 Peter 2:5, assumes that Israel already exists and encourages his audience to "allow yourselves to be *built up* into a spiritual house." *BAG* suggests that Ruth 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:5 mean "built up" (pp. 560, 561). Peter's *inference* is that the "lively stones" also need to be "*edified*."

However, there is another necessary sense of the meaning of "build up" that also must be understood. Read Romans 15:20. Here, Paul speaks of building on "another man's foundation." He was not doing that himself, but the concept involved is valuable for understanding what is going on. While Peter had made the initial contact with the Gentiles (Acts 10), Paul had a specific calling from God to go to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:17-2:9). The reason I cite Romans 15:20 is to provide entrance into the fuller meaning of "built up." Paul gives the sense of this in 1 Corinthians 3:10 when he speaks of having laid *a foundation upon which others have built*. What am I suggesting here?

Ruth 4:11 can be understood in that sense when you understand a simple principle involved: *Israel* already existed in the person of Jacob. When he took Rachel and Leah as wives, the *foundation* of the *Israelite nation* was laid. Rachel, her handmaiden Bilhah, Leah, and her handmaiden Zilpah were the wives

through whom Israel fathered 12 sons and a daughter. They “built up” the nation of Israel on the foundation already laid. If you understand Jesus Christ’s comment in this sense of “build,” then you can more fully understand the truth about the remnant of Israel.

According to *BAG* (Ibid.), 1 Peter 2:5 can be understood in the same way. What happens throughout history when, one after another, true Christians are added to the ranks of the firstfruits? The *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ is being “built up.” It is being increased in size and power and spirit and understanding. Each “lively stone” is not added in one fell swoop; each is added across the ages in order to “build up” the ruling realm of God’s Kingdom: the firstfruits. The term edifice usually refers to a large, imposing building set upon the foundation. The term “firstfruits,” an ordinal number, presupposes the addition of at least “secondfruits” ... and possibly more up to *ad infinitum*.

Now read Ephesians 4:11-16 and understand why God provided His *ekklesia* with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. You will find the answer in the last part of v. 16: “...For the edifying of itself in love” (emphases added). *Edification* is for the purpose of instructing someone to improve them in knowledge and understanding ... to uplift them morally. Paul states the reasons for such edification in vv. 12-15. The *ekklesia* has to become wiser than the frauds and deceivers in order to be able to remain “in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God...” The edification is also the vehicle by which they will be “cleansed.”

Even in the narrowness of the evidence I have presented, it becomes more and more difficult to gainsay the thesis I am pursuing. Jesus Christ was going to begin a phase of “building up” His *ekklesia* ... at that point, the *remnant* of His *ekklesia* in the wilderness. When Jesus called out His Disciples (students; inner circle), He began to train them and build them up in God’s true thoughts and ways (see John 17:11-26).

In Matthew 16:18, He gave them a sense of what He was trying to achieve. The time had come for Him to begin to “allure” Israel and get her ready for their “re-marriage.” He knew that she could not remain *physical*. Why? John 3:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:50 say that she would have to be “born again” in the spirit (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thes. 4:13-18). After all, Revelation 19:7, 14 show a spirit-born *ekklesia*. You can read in John 3:5, Acts 22:16, 1 Corinthians 6:11, Ephesians 5:26, Titus 3:5, and 1 John 5:8 all the ways by which she will have been *cleansed* and *made ready* prior to her “rebirth.”

Before He was crucified, at His last Passover with His Disciples, He inaugurated the *new* (*kainos*, not *neos*) covenant with His *ekklesia* (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13; 10:15-17; Matt. 26:26, 27) – the prophesied *remnant of Israel* (Isa. 1:9; 8:16, 20). This was soon followed by the gift of the “firstfruits” of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, A.D. 31 (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:1-21; Rom. 8:23). The “alluring” and “cleansing” of His “Bride” has begun. This is not that difficult to understand if you have been piecing together the various puzzle parts up to this point. It will get even clearer.

## How did the Lord God “Marry” Israel?

In Jeremiah 3:14, the Lord God proclaims that He is “married” to Israel (see also Jer. 31:32). The Lord God’s “marriage” to Israel was by covenant (Ex. 19:5, 6; 24:3-8). In the process, He became her Lord/God (Deut. 6:4). Above all other nations, He would devote His considerable resources to her upkeep and preservation (Ex. 19:5, 6; Psa. 24). It was to be a holy institution of divine origin. She was responsible for “children” and fidelity and being a “mate” suitable for His holy needs (Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2).

He intended for there to be an everlasting “marriage” with her beyond the “flesh-and-blood” state in which He “married” her to Himself (Ex. 15:11-18). As a matter of fact, even death would not separate Israel from Him (Heb. 11:17-19; Rom. 4:17; 8:35-39; Hos. 2:14-23; Ezek. 37; Matt. 16:18). Israel was supposed to learn His thoughts and ways (Deut. 4:25-40; 5:29) so she could be in spiritual unity with Him (John 17:11-26). When He finally “marries” Israel again, she will have been cleaned up and made suitable for Him (1 Cor. 15:50-54; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9).

# Whom will Christ “Marry”: *Israel or the Church?*

## What the Prophets Reveal

Little regard is given to several key Old Testament prophecies regarding the Lord God’s relationship with Israel. If the significance of the relationship between the Lord God and Israel is *misunderstood* ... so is the question about the promises the Lord God made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation of Israel. Be assured of this: Heaven was not one of them.

It is also very important to postulate that if the relationship between the Lord God of the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ of the New Testament is *misunderstood*, then it is because of a gross *misunderstanding* of John 1:1-3, 14; 17:5; Ephesians 1:4-14; and Philippians 2:5-11 ... all of which reveal that two divine partners set forth a plan *before the creation of the orderly universe* to create a “family” that would begin in a flesh-and-blood state and be brought into a spirit-composition state (Gen. 1:26-28; John 3:3-8; 1 Cor. 15:50-54). Israel figures very prominently in that plan (Matt. 19:27, 28; Luke 22:28-30; Rev. 21:9-12). *We can understand this better if we know what the Old Testament prophets reveal about whom Christ will “marry.”*

### Pre-Creation History

There is much that we can learn from pre-creation history about who/what “God” is and what “God” has planned for the future. It is for that reason that I contend that the Bible is 100% prophecy ... simply because it chronicles the activity of “God” from before the creation of the orderly universe to what is called the “consummation of the ages.”

This ability of “God” is graphically described in Isaiah 41:21-26 in a challenge against the “gods” of other nations to show their power to investigate former things in order to derive information about their ultimate results and foretell things to come. Verse 26 is particularly important in understanding my point:

Who has declared from the beginning, that we may know? And beforetime, that we may say, he is righteous? Yea, there is none that shows, yea, there is none that declares, yea, there is none that hears your words (*KJV*).

Let’s look at some of that pre-creation history in order to set the “stage” for the discussion that follows. If you can wrap your mind around the concepts I will discuss and follow the “trail” of evidence I present, then you will be better able to understand the thesis of this article. With that understanding, you will know precisely whom Jesus Christ will “marry” when He returns.

We know that Genesis 1:1 is pre-creation history; but, it is incomplete in what it tells us of the fuller history of that creation. Isaiah 45:18 adds information to the history by adding four vital points:

1. The Lord God created the heavens and earth.
2. The Lord God established the earth (that is: made it a permanent fixture in the heavens).
3. The Lord God did not create the earth in tohuw (that is: to lie in space as a worthless,

uninhabitable, desert wasteland – void and without form.

4. The *Lord God* formed the earth to be inhabited.

In v. 19, the Lord God says that He speaks righteousness and declares things that are right (Isa. 41:26). All of this is in keeping with His word in Isaiah 55:10, 11 that His word does not come out of His mouth and fall uselessly to the ground. *It accomplishes the purpose for which it is uttered.* Even so, we still have an incomplete picture of pre-creation history.

John 1:1-3, 14 brings us closer to the “beginning” by showing us that there were two divine individuals who accompanied with one another. They are described as being “God” and “the Word.” The definite article *the* makes the reference to the *Logos* a reference to a Spokesman who is also known as “God” (v. 1). The fact that the Word became flesh (v. 14) indicates two things: (1) He is a separate, independent personage from His divine partner, and (2) His divine partner *did not* become flesh. Hebrews 10:5 indicates that the God-in-flesh (Matt. 1:20-23) Himself admitted that His divine partner had “prepared a body” for Him to assume at a specific time for a specific redemptive and sacrificial purpose.

It is shown in 1 Peter 1:18-20 that the Word was assigned the position of “Christ” in order to be a sacrifice for mankind. That office was not immediately executed because it was assigned *before the creation of the orderly universe*. The larger question here is this: Why did this responsibility fall upon *the Word*, instead of upon His divine partner?

We find this piece of “history” in Philippians 2:5-11. Paul points out very definitively that the Word was, in fact, the one who came in the flesh as Jesus Christ (v. 5). In v. 6, Paul says that He was originally the equal to the divine partner called “God” by John. However, v. 7 points out that *He* made Himself subservient to His divine partner by divesting Himself of His equal status. Verse 8 says that He did it specifically for becoming a redemption sacrifice. This is how His divine partner became both His “God” and, later, His “Father” (Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3; Rom. 1:4).

The divine partner did something astounding as a response to this voluntary action by Jesus Christ: He

vested Him with a name above every name (vv. 9-11) and gave Him all the power of the godhead to administer, during the coming ages, the pre-creation plan they had created (Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:3-20). This is how the Word became the *Lord God* (*Yahweh Elohim*; Gen. 2:4). At no time has Jesus Christ had authority over the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28). When His mission is finally completed, He will return the authority to the Father.

Since Paul is writing specifically about *Jesus Christ*, then it is not difficult to understand that the *Lord God* and *Jesus Christ* are the *same* personage. It was the Lord God who became flesh and dwelt among us! This helps you to understand Jesus’ statement in John 5:46: “Had you believed Moses, you would have believed me: *for he wrote of me*” (emphasis added). There you find the *Old Testament* connection between Jesus Christ and His *ekklesia*. We will understand how that is connected to the New Testament *ekklesia*.

That brings us to Ephesians 1:1-14. In v. 4, Paul explicitly says that “us” was chosen in Christ *before the creation of the orderly universe*. That is the meaning of the *KJV* translation: “before the foundation of the world.” The term *foundation* can apply all the way back to the point that the idea of “us” being “chosen in Christ” was *conceived* by these two divine partners. Refer back to 1 Peter 1:18-20 and Philippians 2:5-11. *BAG* defines “world” (Greek = *kosmos*) as meaning: “the sum total of everything here and now, the orderly universe” (p. 446).

So, we have here a *predetermination* that “us” has to be brought into existence in order to have that relationship with *Christ*. The larger question at this point is why the one who is presently the “God” and “Father” of Jesus Christ made this choice. Verse 5 tells us that “us” was chosen to be the children of “God” through Jesus Christ. It is here that we must pay attention to the term *adoption*. It is here that we can leave the pre-creation history and study the execution of this marvelous plan conceived by these two divine partners.

### What is Involved in Adoption?

Earlier teachings in the Worldwide Church of God militated against the doctrine of *adoption* in favor of the doctrine of *spiritual impregnation ... begetting by*

*God's spirit.* This concept was based on the idea that human reproduction is a type of God's reproduction of Himself. John 3:1-8 was used as the foundational scripture for *spirit begettal*.

I was told in one situation that my mention of "adoption" in a Bible study I gave was unacceptable because Mr. Armstrong taught "spirit begettal." Such an assessment challenged me to accept Mr. Armstrong's insistence that we follow him only as he followed Jesus Christ. I have spent many years since studying this concept so that I can follow God's word more completely. If Paul uses the term *adoption* five times in his letters, then there must be some significance to the meaning of the term relative to why the God and Father of Jesus Christ chose "us" in Him to be *adopted*. If Paul's writings are scripture, then they were inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

I could wax elegant on the subject, but I will use one simple quote from Mr. Armstrong to make my point clearer:

But, just as in human reproduction, the impregnated embryo, which later becomes the fetus, is not yet BORN, but still being nourished through the human mother; so the begotten Christian is *not yet BORN* into the God Family. The divine life has merely been begotten (*The Incredible Human Potential*, 1978, p. 79)

Having spent 15<sup>+</sup> years teaching English and German in the public schools, I am well aware of how *analogies* work. An analogy infers that certain resemblances imply further similarity. It is well-known that analogies can also "break down" when carried too far. I understand very well the point that is being made about spirit begettal ... but I question whether or not it satisfies what Paul calls *adoption*. In the following, you might see similarities between my explanation and Mr. Armstrong's and possibly ask what the big deal is. Patience, Grasshopper. Follow the definition of *adoption* before you get too far into the "weeds."

The Greek term *uios* (*υιος*) is translated to mean "a *direct* male issue ... *immediate* offspring" (*BAG*, p. 841; see Rom. 9:9) That is not the term Paul used. "Immediate offspring" is the term applied to the human reproduction process. There is a male and female

union that produces such "immediate offspring." "God" has no female counterpart with whom He can unite to reproduce the natural-born, immediate offspring of the "God kind." Because of this definition and explanation, the *spirit begettal* analogy breaks down. Why? Because the "spirit" part of the equation is said to impregnate the *individual* Christian ... not a divine consort.

Even when it is said that the "Church is the mother of us all," the *Church* is not an individual, divine consort. In fact, the Church has not even been completely formed. First Peter 2:5 should be read to show that Christians are *being built* into a spiritual house. So, Paul does not intend to use that kind of analogy when he uses the term *adoption*.

Paul uses the Greek term *uiothesia* (*υιοθεσια*). Let's break it down into its component parts: *uio* and *thesia*. The *uio* part comes from *uios* and means "sonship." The *thesia* part is descriptive of how the "sonship" part is brought into being. Note this definition from Wikipedia: "the suffix '-thesia', which is obtained from the word 'aisthesia' (*αισθησια*), which means 'perception/feeling by the senses.'" It is here that the *spirit begettal* analogy breaks down and the *adoption* analogy is made clearer.

What does Paul say in Romans 8:15? He says that the Christian has received the "Spirit of adoption." In the *KJV*, the term *Spirit* is capitalized to indicate that Holy Spirit has been given to the individual Christian who has repented, been baptized, and had hands laid on him/her for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. Through the ages, the true believer has received the "Spirit of adoption." As a matter of fact, Paul indicates that the *adoption* also pertains to Israel (Rom. 9:4). *BAG* cites Exodus 4:22 and Isaiah 1:2 to confirm that Israel (the O.T. *ekklesia*) had been accepted by the Lord God as His *adopted* son (*uiothesia*; *BAG*, p. 841).

Galatians 4:1-5 is a repetition of Paul's conclusion in Romans 8:14-17. Please note the repetition of the *Spirit's* involvement in the adoption process ... with the understanding that this is not a reference to *immediate offspring* – natural children born through reproductive processes similar to the human process. The adoptive child must come to accept his/her position as a child that is "naturalized" into the adopting family.

*BAG* also underscores that the definition of *uiothesia* pertains to a *legal process* that makes a child to

become as though s/he is a natural-born child, with all of the rights, benefits, and privileges of the natural-born child. Clearly, that is not a resemblance to the human reproductive process. Therefore, we can give the term *uiothesia* the following definition: “the perception, or feeling by the senses, of *sonship*.” The “Spirit of sonship” is the presence of God’s guarantee by various means that the convert is *being* moved from the human family into the Family of God. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the first step in that process (Rom. 8:16, 17).

Finally, we have to harmonize Ephesians 1:14 with Romans 8:23. We do this by understanding the term *redemption*. The Greek term is *apolutrosis* (απολυτροσις). This explains the adoption process in a way that the resemblance to the human reproduction process really does not do. *Apolutrosis* involves two different actions covered by the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ: (1) Every sin ever committed by the convert is forgiven and forgotten by God in order that s/he can appear before God as being sinless and without spot or wrinkle; and (2) the true Christian will be totally and irrevocably freed from the limitations of the flesh by being “born again” in the spirit in the future. How do we know this to be true by scripture?

Ephesian 1:13, 14 say that the gift of the Holy Spirit is merely a down-payment on the purchased possession (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). It is not the full-blown gift of the Spirit of God. There is coming a time when the purchased possession will be *fully* redeemed. What does that mean?

Paul says in Romans 8:23 that those of us who have the firstfruits of the Spirit are “*waiting* for the *adoption*.” This means that the adoption has not been presently concluded. Something could go wrong in the process, as is indicated by Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26 (“falling away”). The Holy Spirit is part of the *naturalization* process (Isa. 55:8, 9) ... the time during which the adoptee takes on the nature of the family into which s/he is entering (Gal. 5:22-25). The last part of v. 23 explains that the *adoption* is “the redemption of our bodies.” *BAG* makes it clear that neither Israel nor Christians can enter into the full enjoyment of their *uiothesia* until they are released from their earthly bodies.

Now the floodgates open! Paul covers this in 1 Corinthians 15:12-54 and 2 Corinthians 4:6-5:9. In

both cases, it is explained that we presently exist in *bodies from the earth* (Gen. 2:7; 3:19). Since we cannot enter the Family of God as temporary, fleshly bodies, we must be “born again” into spirit bodies (John 3:5, 6; 1 Cor. 15:50-54). This is accomplished by a resurrection from the dead or spontaneous change for the living at the time of His return. It is not an action of being *naturally* born from a “womb” as *immediate* offspring (John 3:4) ... similar to a human reproductive process.

## Why did the Lord God “Marry” Israel?

We can understand from Matthew 25:34 that the idea of a “Kingdom of God” was conceived of and put into motion *before the creation of the orderly universe*. Generally speaking, in philosophical and theological language, that is the meaning of the expression “*the foundation of the world*” (*BAG*, p. 446). The term *foundation* can include even the *conception* of the idea (*New Strong’s Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Inc., 1995; #2602, p. 46).

From Matthew to Revelation, there is only one Greek word that is translated into English as *kingdom*: *basileia* (βασιλεια). Whether it means the royal power and rule of a king or the kingdom itself ... or the territory that constitutes the boundaries of the kingdom ... or the ruling realm (all of the levels of power and authority in the kingdom itself), *basileia* is the word that is used. We know from John 3:3 and 1 Corinthians 15:50 that the “kingdom of God” that was conceived of before the creation of the orderly universe *cannot* be inherited and occupied by flesh-and-blood humans.

We also know that it makes little difference if it is called “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 3:2) or “kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14) because the emphasis of both expressions is that this “kingdom” is of divine origin and nature. The expression “kingdom of heaven” does not name the place where the “kingdom” will be located (see Matt. 6:10). Therefore, one can rightly conclude that those who are flesh-and-blood must become “divine beings” in order to participate in it.

Genesis 1:26-28 expresses two ideas that are central to the concept of the “kingdom of God”: (1) Man was created in the *image* (Hebrew = *tselem*: resemblance, likeness) of *Elohim*, and (2) man was to be

given dominion over the earth and all that is in the earth. When man was created, he was made from the dust of the earth. It was *Yahweh Elohim* who conducted the creation of man (Gen. 2:7). This was the initiation of His responsibility of producing “children” for God ... children who would have to be made acceptable through Jesus Christ to enter the divine family (Eph. 1:6).

Paul captures the significance of this in Hebrews 2:6-18. In vv. 6-9, he draws a conclusion from David’s words in Psalm 8:4-6: Although God is mindful of His purpose in the creation of mankind, the time for putting all things under the feet of mankind has not arrived ... except in the case of Jesus Christ – who became flesh and dwelt among us.

In actual fact, the “kingdom” itself has not yet come in its full-blown, intended manifestation (see Dan. 7:13, 14 and Rev. 11:15). Its power is “among” us in the form of the Holy Spirit ... leading us into God’s thoughts and ways as we are “naturalized” toward the completion of the adoption process (John 14:26; 16:13-15; 1 Cor. 2:6-16).

Even Jesus Christ has not yet been crowned “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Revelation 11 describes the point in time when that will occur. Revelation 20:4-6 is a description of that time when Jesus Christ will have returned and bestowed offices upon the first group to have been resurrected from the dead or instantaneously changed (Rev. 20:5: “This is the *first* resurrection”; Rom. 8:23; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4). Notice that they will be given power and authority as judges, priests, and kings under Jesus Christ (see Rev. 5:9, 10; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Luke 22:24-30).

All that being said, we have to understand a statement made to Israel by the Lord God in Deuteronomy 7:6-11. I will cite only v. 6 as a prelude to the others:

You are a holy people unto the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be a special people unto himself, *above all people that are upon the face of the earth* (emphasis added).

Make note of the following: “chosen ... to be a special people unto himself, above all people ... upon the face of the earth.” What does this mean?

*Chosen* describes a divine prerogative that is exercised toward *Israel*. In Deuteronomy 32:15 and a few other places, Israel is called *Jeshurun*. The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* defines it as a poetic name that reflects Israel’s *ideal* character (p. 449; see also Ex. 19:5, 6). It is a name of endearment and special favor.

So, we can understand from this discussion that *no other nation in earth’s history* has ever had a “marriage” proposal from the Lord God or a covenant of “marriage” with Him. That scriptural fact drives the narrative from this point forward. It not only tells you that He did such a thing; it also tells you *why* He did such a thing. He knew from the beginning of the relationship that she was not already a holy people, but He was intent on *making* her a holy people with His laws, statutes, testimonies, and spirit presence (compare Gen. 26:5 with Rom. 3:2).

Some claim that Israel was not given the Holy Spirit like the Church was ... basically to discount the true significance of Yahweh Elohim’s “marriage” to Israel as being important to the New Covenant. Such a claim leaves out a very important principle posited by Jesus Christ Himself.

Psalm 19:5 is the first mention of the term *bridegroom* in scripture. It is descriptive of the sun’s daily emergence from the night. Isaiah 61:10 is from a prophecy related to Jesus Christ (see Luke 4:17-20). It is, probably, a reference to the Lord God being the Bridegroom ... as are Matthew 25:1, 5, 6, 10. That said, Matthew 9:14, 15 contains the principle used by Jesus Christ that explains why Israel was not given the Holy Spirit: “Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, *as long as the bridegroom is with them?*” (emphasis added). Yahweh Elohim was in the midst of His *ekklesia*. John 14-16 is Jesus Christ’s departure speech regarding the receipt of the “Kingdom” that is prepared for His Bride. He gave the Holy Spirit to be present in His absence from them. Make note that in A.D. 70 the Temple was destroyed (see Jer. 7:8-20).

Deuteronomy 7:9-11, therefore, is also central to this discussion. The Lord God is faithful to His covenants (Rom. 11:29), and He will punish breaches of the covenants to whatever degree it is necessary in order to get compliance restored. It is best to show unfeigned love toward Him by obeying His commandments, statutes, and judgments. The comment in v. 9

about “a thousand generations” is built into Commandment #2 (Ex. 20:5, 6), which is part of the legal bases of the “marriage.”

Now pay attention to Deuteronomy 4:1-9. Make note of the reminders about the Lord God’s statutes, commandments, and judgments and the benefits to be derived from them. Make note of v. 5 where they are reminded of the “promised land.” Verses 6-8 are of great importance in this discussion because they reveal why the Lord God “married” Israel: They were to be an example for all other nations ... an example of a righteous relationship between the Lord God and His people. The other nations would witness the wisdom, understanding, and great blessings given by the Lord God to His people and would desire to be included in such a great relationship. Israel was to be a great, shining example of holiness and righteousness to all other nations so they could be converted and brought to Him under the umbrella of “Israel.”

His covenant with Israel was the “marriage.” Jeremiah 3:14 is a specific statement that the Lord God was, indeed, “married” to Israel. What does that mean? I will explain this from the *BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon* so as to state what the term “marriage” means in the scriptural context of the Old Testament. In this way, the definition is not my creation; it is the creation of the scholars who render it. Jeremiah 3:14 is one of several scriptures to which this definition is applied. I will include other scriptures in order to make my point clear.

The first part of *BDB*’s definition is this: “**vb.** [verb] **marry, rule over.**” They show that a related term from the *Aramaic* language means “*own, possess ... to take possession of a wife or concubine*” (ex. = Mal. 2:11). In definition #1, it simply says: “*marry.*” Genesis 20:3 is an example. At the end of the examples given, there is an additional part of the definition: “*be Lord (husband).*” In definition #2, it says: “*rule over ... be married.*” You can get a sense of this from Genesis 3:16b where the Lord God tells Eve: “You shall be subject to your husband, and he shall rule over you.” This was after she had been created to be a mate suitable for his needs. First Peter 3:6 admits that Sarah called Abraham “lord.”

You should be able to apply this definition to Exodus 19:4-8. This was a proposal by the *Lord God* to be Israel’s *Lord* and to take her to Himself as an inher-

itance. Read carefully Exodus 15:1-19. This is a song celebrating the Lord God’s victory over Israel’s captor, Egypt. Notice the verses that praise Him for taking Israel to His holy habitation (v. 13) ... purchasing her (v. 16) ... planting her in the mountain of His inheritance (v. 17) ... ruling over her for ever and ever (v. 18). This is *pre-nuptial language*. He did this with the intention of being her Lord God and ruling over her in righteousness.

Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 is called the *Shema* (“Hear O Israel”). It is largely believed among Judaism and mainstream Christianity that this is the great evidence for the doctrine of *monotheism* (one God). It is not ... at least not in the way they interpret it. It is the *language* that demonstrates that the *Lord God* alone is “married” to Israel. How can we know this to be true?

What is the context of vv. 1-3? Is Moses reminding Israel of the *Lord God’s* commandments, statutes, and judgments? Would that include Exodus 20:1-17? What is the context of vv. 5-25? In v. 6, does He exhort Israel to put His commandments (His laws) into their *hearts* (Jer. 31:31-34)? Would that make her fulfill in any manner the symbolism behind the “bone of my bones ... flesh of my flesh” part of the first “marriage” among humans? How far can you extend this analogy into the concept I am teaching you?

Now note commentary about v. 4 from *The Interpreter’s Bible*: “As is evident from 4:19-20, the *Shema* was not in its original context monotheistic.” Whatever else *TIB* adds to that comment, it cannot erase their claim that it was not originally *monotheistic*. Then *TIB* adds *RSV* footnotes to the *Revised Standard Version*’s translation of v. 4:

1. The Hebrew is enigmatic and lends itself to various possible translations.
2. It consists of four words: “Yahweh, our God, Yahweh, one.”
3. Israel’s attention ... is confined to one definite being whose name is Yahweh.
4. Yahweh alone is sovereign *Lord*, the sole object of reverence and obedience for Israel.

5. The following are alternate translations shown in *RSV* footnotes: (a) the Lord our God, the Lord is one; (b) the Lord is our God, the Lord is one; and (c) the Lord is our God, the Lord alone (vol. 2; pp. 372, 373).

One could reasonably infer that the message is this: Israel, as the “wife” of the Lord God, should believe and understand thoroughly that “The Lord God is our only God.” No other such relationships are allowed.

Have you been convinced yet that the Lord God is the one who became Jesus Christ? If so, then Jesus Christ, in His pre-human form, was the Lord God who “married” Israel. Have you been convinced yet that the Lord God is a separate divine being from the one who is known as the “God and Father of Jesus Christ”? If so, then it is obvious that the “God and Father” did *not* “marry” Israel; the *Lord* God (Yahweh Elohim) “married” her.

If you are convinced that the 10 Commandments are the legal bases for Yahweh Elohim’s “marriage” to Israel (see Ex. 34:27, 28), then you should see a direct relationship between Exodus 20:1-7 and Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. Israel “married” only one member of *Elohim*. *In that sense*, she practiced “monotheism.” However, one must not discount the “Father’s” interest in and blessings toward that “marriage.” That “marriage” concluded a *perpetual* relationship between the Lord God and Israel. By it, she became His *ekklesia*. He “married” her to provide righteous “children” for the “Father God” – “children” who are made in the *spiritual* image of *Elohim* (1 John 3:1-3).

### What do the Prophets say about the Perpetuation of that “Marriage”?

It is very easy to determine that the Lord God divorced Israel for her promiscuous adulteries with other “gods.” She was warned not to do so (Ex. 34:10-17). It is easy to conclude that the death of Jesus Christ freed Him to “marry” whomever He chooses. That is a simple lesson found in Romans 7:1-3.

Consider this question in light of Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16: *Are the righteous told that they cannot forgive their divorced, unrighteous mates if the divorced mates repent and turn again to righteousness?* No. If we consider the impact of Romans 5:6-

12, we should be able to easily see that Jesus Christ is willing to practice what He preaches. In fact, He inspired His prophets to tell that very story regarding His undying love for Israel.

I do not intend to inundate you with a long list of prophecies. My reason is simple: Even one, well-placed prophecy can confirm the truth of the matter if God’s word is truth (John 17:17). That would be sufficient to enable us to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). I will not restrict myself to one prophecy, but I will not be exhaustive ... even though I could be. After all, Jude 9 is the *only* scripture that reveals that Michael had a showdown with Satan over the body of Moses. If that scripture was inspired by God, then we only need one to verify the record.

First, let’s consider Isaiah 1:16-20. What is Isaiah’s point in this message? The Lord God calls upon Israel to repent and become cleansed of her filthiness. He admonishes her to return to learning His thoughts and ways. He explains that her willing repentance can result in the most thorough cleansing possible.

Now read vv. 25-31. In simple language, the Lord God again speaks of a thorough cleansing and refinement ... mixed with restoration of a righteous relationship and all of the blessings that appertain to it. However, the recalcitrant among Israel will be destroyed. Note vv. 28-31 where He says that the strong of Israel “shall be as *tow*.” *Tow*, in this case, refers to the part of flax that is shaken off when beaten. It is very flammable. So, the incorrigibly wicked of Israel will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and destroyed (43:17; Jud. 16:9).

Jeremiah 3 is also an invitation to an apostate wife to return to the husband against whom she egregiously sinned. In this, you should see that He is not willing to let His *ekklesia* perish into oblivion like Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa. 1:9). Jeremiah 4:1, 2 is another invitation for her to repent and swear her undying allegiance to Him. The entire chapter is a continuation of this invitation. In fact, much of the book is such an invitation ... a proclamation that it will happen according to His will (ex.: Jer. 31:31-34; 33:17-26).

Jeremiah 16:14-16 is very revealing about the Lord God’s intentions regarding Israel’s return. He declares that He will bring them again to the land that He gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 15). It is not

an unreasonable stretch of theological logic to harmonize v. 16 with Matthew 4:19 (“fishers of men”) and Matthew 10:6 (“lost sheep of the house of Israel”). That harmony would demonstrate a determined effort to reach out to Israel and bring her to repentance.

Read Jeremiah’s prophecy in 50:4-6. Note the comments about Israel and Judah returning to Him ... weeping as they attempt to find their way back to Zion. They will seek to be re-joined to the Lord in a “perpetual covenant” ... which will be realized according to the type of covenant stated in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Ezekiel 16:1-59 is a summary of the Lord God’s failed “marriage” to Israel. However, vv. 60-63 is a declaration that He will establish an everlasting covenant with Her (v. 60b). If His words do not fall uselessly out of His mouth (Isa. 55:11), then it is as good as done (Rom 4:17b).

All of these major prophets’ declarations are in keeping with Paul’s theme in Hebrews 8:6-13. It is simple: There will be a new covenant with Israel (v. 8). The fault in the first covenant was not the covenant itself; it was the people. How do you correct that problem? *Change the people*.

In Hebrews 8:5, Paul alludes to the fact that the first covenant was a *shadow* of a heavenly reality. If you have understood at all Ephesians 1:1-14 and the concept of the adoption, then you understand, as did Paul in 2 Corinthians 3, that the first covenant had a “fading glory” that would be replaced by a more excellent glory. The “naturalization” process in the “adoption” proceedings would require a permanent covenant with a “wife” who is capable of living forever. After all, flesh-and-blood cannot enter the Elohim Family (John 3:3; 1 Cor. 15:50). Israel, the Lord God’s *ekklesia*, would have to be changed – first, while in the flesh; ultimately, from flesh to spirit.

All of that information, as brief as it is, brings us to the point made in Hosea 2:14-23. Verses 1-13 cover the transgressions and discipline meted out. However, the Lord God makes an about-face by declaring His undying love for Israel. He says that He will “allure her” and “speak comfortably to her” (v. 14). In simple language, “comfortably” means that He will speak with the sincerest of feelings from the depths of His great heart. To what purpose?

Verse 18 raises the proposition of a new covenant and the blessings to be derived from it. Verse 19

declares that he will take Israel as His “wife” forever “in righteousness ... judgment ... lovingkindness ... mercies ... and faithfulness” (vv. 19, 20).

The last part of v. 20 is exceptionally important to this discussion: “And you shall know the Lord” (emphases added). The Hebrew word yada has many definitions. *BDB* gives Hosea 2:22 as a reference when it should have been 2:20. That notwithstanding, the word describes deep, intimate, intelligent, and wise knowledge of the Lord God. That is the kind of longing He expressed in Deuteronomy 5:29 when He said plaintively:

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

It involves knowledge and understanding of even the most intimate, personal thoughts and ways of the Lord (Isa. 55:8, 9). It is almost akin to Genesis 4:1 where Adam is said to have “known” Eve before Cain was born. It smacks of *nuptial* language – you know, the consummation part. It is reminiscent of Jeremiah 31:33 where Israel will be given the Holy Spirit so that His law can be put into their hearts and minds for the “naturalization” process that will change her and make her fit to “marry” the Lord God. She will acquire knowledge like that in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. It will make it possible for the Lord God to be able to finally take Israel to Himself forever (v. 19a).

Based on just these few scriptural references, I know of no good, sound reason to make any claim that there is a fundamental difference between the nation Israel and the New Testament Church – the *ekklesia* that Christ is presently building up and edifying. It is being formed with the “holy root” remnant of Israel to which status Gentiles are being added by being grafted into the “holy root” to become part of the “olive tree”: Israel. That being the case, then it is the utmost folly to claim that God has a plan for Israel on the earth and a plan for the Church in heaven.

Get this idea firmly fixed in your mind and heart: Jesus Christ did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. He came to fulfill the purpose for which they came to exist. Not one “jot” or “tittle” will be taken out of them until everything they stand for is ful-

filled. Anyone who teaches otherwise is on very thin ice (Matt. 5:17-19). That is a declaration by Jesus Christ of His fidelity to the work He began under the Old Covenant and will bring to completion under the New Covenant. The Law was the legal basis of the marriage. He did not come to destroy that.

### Just One More Thing....

I admit that my understanding of God's truth is a work in progress. In times past, I sometimes uncritically accepted the things I was taught because I trusted the leaders who taught me. But there came a time when I determined, because of time and circumstance, that I should do an in-depth inventory of what I believe and re-study those beliefs. That has been going on since 1986.

At one time, I did believe and teach that the Church is "spiritual Israel" as though Jesus Christ (having divorced physical Israel and died) had chosen to "marry" a partner other than His former wife, Israel. In effect, that He started over from "scratch."

Significant changes in the "truth" I now understand have been the result of that 30<sup>+</sup>-year journey. This study is one such example. So, I am giving notice that God can correct one's religious paradigm as He progressively reveals His "mysteries" to you as you become more educated and spiritually mature in His thoughts and ways. In my experience, this change came about by paying more attention to the "details."

I began this study with an introduction of the problem presented by the existence of the "New Testament Church" relative to the Lord God's covenants, calling, and promises to His "Old Covenant Wife," Israel. If God's Church is the "pillar and ground of the truth," (1 Tim. 3:15), then it is important to pay close attention to the character of this Holy God (the Lord God) who was "married" to Israel and says that He is not a liar, is not double-minded or duplicitous, and will not change His mind about His gifts and calling. Part of the "details" is that His choice of Israel as His wife, therefore, will not change. The problems with that "marriage" will be fixed and the relationship will be resumed forever.

In order to understand the *distinction* between Israel and the Church, we must first understand the basic claims made by the Dispensationalists and others

and compare them to the scriptural record. Are there *two callings* made by God: (1) earth for the *Jews* and (2) heaven for the *Christians*? Has prophecy been *suspended* until Christ returns ... in essence suspending His relationship with Israel?

It is as important to ferret out the details of such a claim as it is to ferret out the details about how the Lord God will vindicate His "marriage" vows to Israel – His eventual death notwithstanding. It has not been established that His death was for the specific purpose of freeing Him from Israel. In fact, one could easily argue that His death, in part, provided the redemption that Israel needs as part of His vow to cleanse her of her sins and "re-marry" her (Hos. 2:14-23; Rom. 11:25-36). He will not accomplish that amazing feat of His deep, abiding love for Israel by starting over from "scratch."

Then I pursued the concept of "standing on the promises of God." Are we founded upon those promises so that we do not hesitate to believe them as being God's truth? I pursued an explanation of the theological paradigm that drives the Lord God's fidelity to His promises, oath, gifts, and calling, and showed how the concept of the distinction between Israel and the Church must be compared to scripture for verification. Why? Isaiah 55:10, 11 and Matthew 5:17-19 are key scriptures in this discussion.

Next, I demonstrated how Stephen made the connection between what Jesus Christ was doing in "building" His Church and with ancient Israel in the wilderness. It is an examination of Stephen's claim in Acts 7:38 that Jesus Christ was in the "church in the wilderness." It is a discussion about what Stephen meant by that statement. He was asserting a *fundamental* and *permanent* relationship between Israel and the "New Testament" Church – both of which are referred to in the Greek as being Christ's *ekklesia*. It is important to understand Stephen's comment if you want to know whom Christ will ultimately marry at His return.

You should have noted my repetition of the concept of the "remnant of Israel according to the election of grace" referred to by Paul's reference to Isaiah 1:9 in Romans 9:27-29 and 11:1-6. Jesus began to "build up" His *ekklesia* (Israel) by choosing His first followers from out of a "remnant" of Israel. This began the "alluring" process, as well as the edification process

of cleansing His estranged “wife.” In fact, His disciples will be future kings of the 12 tribes of Israel when Jesus sets up God’s Kingdom on the earth (Matt. 19:27, 28; Luke 22:24-30). By this very fact we know that members of each of the 12 tribes will be known and gathered together on the earth following His return. We can see the evidence of the “ruling remnant” in Revelation 7, including a great number of Gentiles who were grafted into Israel to become part of the firstfruits and qualify to reign on one level or another under the 12 Apostles and Jesus Christ (see also Rev. 5:9, 10; 20:4-6).

Stephen accused the religious and political leaders of Judaism of following the same path of destruction that ancient Israel followed. They were responsible for killing Jesus Christ ... who was actually the Lord God that had “married” Israel. That’s how he connected Jesus Christ to living among Israel in the wilderness. These men had never considered that there was a relationship between Jesus Christ and the Lord God. One could logically infer that Israel had actually killed her “Husband”!

Heavily implied in that great prophetic accusation was that they would be dealt with by God and lose His presence among them ... leaving only the “remnant of Israel according to the election of grace” to complete the job that ancient Israel had been chosen to do. They would not have to wait very long for Titus to come to Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to destroy it and the Temple. It has not been rebuilt to this day (see Jer. 7).

Finally, I discussed Paul’s teachings in Romans and Ephesians that establish God’s plan to incorporate the Gentiles into Israel – to make them Israelites by a spiritual “naturalization” process. In essence, it is the same process of which Paul speaks regarding the “adoption of children” in Ephesians 1:4-14. I used Ephesians 2:10-22 to demonstrate that God’s plan is to make one body from the Israelites and Gentiles. The “holy root” in Romans 11:16 is the “remnant” of Israel into which the Gentiles are being grafted. They do not become a separate tree; they become part of Israel and receive their “life” from the “holy root.”

I have taken a long, drawn-out path to get you to this piece of understanding: Jesus Christ will “marry” Israel as He promised He would. Israel is His ekklesia. He is not creating a new ekklesia from “scratch” – starting over with a combination of Israelites and

Gentiles in order to form a new “spiritual Israel.” He is presently “alluring” His “fiancé” (divorced “wife”) and cleaning her up so He can make her a “spiritual” wife by conversion and rebirth ... which is what He would have had to do with her anciently before He could have finally set up the Kingdom of God on the earth. To prod her to action, He’s including Gentiles.

I admit that this is a deep, deep mystery. I do not pretend that this explanation will clear up the matter for all who read it and thoroughly study through it. It will not. You cannot change decades of thoughts, convictions, and habits of thought and reason overnight. You must do due diligence to search out God’s truth “line upon line ... precept upon precept ... here a little; there a little” (Isa. 28:9, 10). It is not revealed to the casual hobbyist. My quest is to teach you the truth of God’s word and to increase your faith in it ... with straight talk and plain truth.

By the way, pay close attention to Romans 9:4 where Paul asserts that one of the several things that pertain to Israel is the covenants. Why did Paul use the plural form? Before I give you the answer, I want you to read the following scriptures without any “coloring” from me: Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; Genesis 48, 49; Deuteronomy 32:6; Hosea 11:1. Why should you read them?

*Sonship* is a legal status that denotes the *right of inheritance* – which includes a *will* and *the death of the testator*. Sacrifices, even though they are not the reality, symbolize the reality. Those symbols were set into place in Genesis 3:15, 21.

Expressing the plural covenants, Paul is not making a distinction between an old covenant and a new covenant; rather, he is making the point that the Lord God either renewed an original covenant again and again, or He made and maintained several covenants between Himself and others. While both assertions are true, we know that there was the repeated renewal of an existing covenant that was made between the Lord God and Adam: Being created in the image of God and ruling the earth as the Kingdom of God (Gen. 1:26-28). The responsibility for and the preservation of the covenants (whether it is the repeated renewals or the multiple covenants) eventually was laid upon Israel ... the Lord God’s son, His firstborn, His wife. We have learned that He has not changed His mind about that. He will not change His mind about that. Stand on it!