

WORSHIPPING GOD IN

SPIRIT AND TRUTH

a magazine for learning god's truth

PRINCIPLE-CENTERED THEOLOGY:

HOW DOES GOD OPERATE IN REVEALING
TO US HIS TRUTH?

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RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

LESSON ONE: SEVEN SIMPLE LESSONS IN STUDYING THE BIBLE

LARRY E. FORD

This 100+ page book is the first lesson in a “new generation” of our *free* 12-lesson Bible Study Course series. It is packed with eight chapters of valuable and powerful information about how to study God’s word of truth. The student will be guided through each lesson to appropriately read and understand how God operates in revealing His truth to the person who truly desires to know it. Begin your journey today. Take the seven simple lessons that will change your life.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Know the *Real* Issue

Understand the Entire Matter

Learn the Role of God’s Law

Pay Attention to the Self-Evident

Prove the Truth of God’s Word

Develop a Method for Examining God’s Word

Ask God for Help



From the Desk of ... the Pastor

In 1990, Stephen R. Covey published a book titled *Principle-Centered Leadership* (A Fireside Book published by Simon & Schuster). The premise of his book is that there are various *principles* of leadership that, if followed correctly, will improve one's personal and interpersonal effectiveness ... as well as his/her managerial and organizational abilities and effectiveness. I dare say that Covey tapped into an essential concept for business and personal development that can, indeed, enable one to become a more effective and productive leader. Here is a snippet from his 333-page tome:

... Natural laws, based upon principles, operate regardless of our awareness of them or our obedience to them.

The only thing that endures over time is the law of the farm: I must prepare the ground, put in the seed, cultivate it, weed it, water it, then gradually nurture growth and development to full maturity (p. 17).

When correctly understood, such “farm” principles can be applied to a variety of situations in life. Our ability to comprehend them and navigate our lives with them can be improved markedly if we follow the principles faithfully and with determination. That said, this issue of *Spirit and Truth* is dedicated to the premise that God reveals to us what I call *principle-centered* theology. *Theology* is often simply defined as being “the study of God and His relation to man and the world.” I like a more specific definition that is derived from the construction of the word itself: *theo* (Greek = “God”) and *logy* (Greek = “correct reasoning”). I will discuss in this issue various *principles* about *correct reasoning* about how God thinks and acts ... as well as the “correct reasoning” by which God executes His thoughts and deeds (Isa. 55:8-11).

A God of Laws

Isaiah 33:22 reveals three characteristics of the Lord God to which we should pay attention: (1) The Lord God is our *judge*; (2) the Lord God is our *lawgiver*; and (3) the Lord God is our *king*. From those three characteristics, we should derive three

principles by which we regulate our relationship with Him: (1) He is the Being who has the power and authority to decide the relative worth of anything; (2) He is the one who has the power and authority to legislate proper thoughts and actions relative to Himself and among His creatures; and (3) He is the Being who has the right and authority to

rule and enforce His laws ... which are indicative of His thoughts and ways.

Psalm 100:3 says: “You should know that the Lord is God: He is the one who made us; we did not make ourselves. We are his people...” (author’s paraphrase). Now, let’s follow up on that thought with a few appropriate Scriptures:

Isaiah 64:8: “But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter, and we are the work of your hand.” (This declaration is predicated on Genesis 2:7; 3:19; and Eph. 1:3-14).

Romans 9:21: “O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing that is formed say to him that formed it: ‘Why have you made me in this fashion?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay ... to make from the same lump a vessel of honor, and another with no honor at all?”

What does this teach you about the Lord God being our King, Lawgiver, and Judge? What does it teach you about the source from which and the basis upon which He derives His power and authority? What can you understand about what His reaction can and will be toward those who question His power, authority, laws, and expectations?

Read Philippians 2:10, 11 about Jesus Christ having been given “all power in heaven and on earth” because He volunteered to be the sacrifice for sin (see 1 Peter 1:18-20 and Col. 1:19). Read Colossians 1:17 (“...by Him all things consist” – *KJV*; emphases added) and Hebrews 1:3 (“uphold- ing all things by the word of His power” – *KJV*; emphases added). What do these comments reveal about the one who became Jesus Christ?

Together they tell us that all of the natural laws were created, supported, and perpetuated infinitely by the power and authority of Jesus Christ. How does this fit into Covey’s observation about natur- al laws that are based upon principles? How does it impress you that they “operate regardless of our awareness of them or our obedience to them”? Two Scriptures provide us insight into this situation that is most important for our understanding of this subject. Pay close attention to the definitions given and the conclusions to be drawn from them.

In 1 John 3:4, we see a definition for “broken” law: “Whoever commits sin transgresses the Law [of God].” With that transgression, there is a judg- ment that is issued toward the guilty individual. Paul covers this in Romans 6:23: “The wages of sin is death.” In this, you should be able to see the consequence of questioning the power and authority of the Lord God to legislate our behavior ... our thoughts and ways (see Gen. 2:15-17).

Here is another Scripture that reveals God’s truth about His power and authority: “He that says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His command- ments [laws], is a liar and the truth is not in him.” All of this should reveal to you a very important piece of principle-centered theology: *The Lord God is a God of Laws*. Once you begin to know and understand that important principle, you should begin to order your life in such a way as to practice that principle of understanding God’s thoughts and ways. Your ultimate success depends heavily on your daily success in doing so.

A God of Holiness

What is holiness, and why is it important for you to be aware of its existence in creation? If you are to gain a logical understanding about who and what “God” is and how He operates in His crea- tion, then it is necessary for you to understand what holiness is. Why? Leviticus 19:2 gives us an example: “You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (emphases added).

Paul reveals in Ephesians 1:4 that, before the creation of the orderly universe, God planned how He wanted mankind to be in their hearts and minds: holy, blameless, and loving ... all three being attributes of God Himself. What is meant by this expectation of holiness? From what you have seen thus far, what has impressed you about that?

The Hebrew word holy involved in Leviticus 19:2 is from qaduwah and qadosh. Both forms have to do with being spiritually pure in mind and heart, without sin, and deserving of deep respect, awe, *et cetera*. There is not any trace of evil to be found in such a Being. To say that God expects the human to ultimately become holy in mind and heart implies that holy actions must follow. The process of the human becoming holy, blameless, and loving is built into the plan of God to create

man “in [His] image, after [His] likeness” (Gen. 1:26).

This is the intent of Jesus Christ’s instruction in Matthew 5:48: “Therefore, you are to be [that is: *become*] perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect” (author’s paraphrase; emphases added). The Greek term for “perfect” is teleios, which means that the Father has full, complete enlightenment. This is the basis for describing Him as being omniscient – having unlimited, unimpeded ability to know ... which implies that He also has unlimited, unimpeded ability to learn.

What is involved in this process? You should read Hebrews 12 in its entirety ... paying very close attention to the last part of v. 10: “...That we might be partakers of His holiness” (emphases added). Peter says basically the same thing in 2 Peter 1:3, 4:

...His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that has called us to glory and virtue ... that by [God’s great and precious promises] you might be partakers of the divine nature (emphases added).

Both statements explain that we are being trained by God to become holy and perfect as He is holy and perfect. That is the short version of why God wants us to be “...holy and without blame before Him in love...” so we can be adopted into His family through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3-14).

While He might accept us just as we presently are, by no means does He intend to allow us to remain just as we presently are. That is the root and core of Peter’s admonishment in 2 Peter 3:18: “...Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (emphases added).

There are two different translations to this verse: **Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord** (*KJV*); and **Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ** (*RSV*). The difference between the translations might not be clearly apparent. In other words, is this statement by Peter focused on action by the Christian ... or action by God and/or Jesus Christ? The most evident question, perhaps, focuses on the admonition

to grow in grace. Why does this beg the question about how a Christian can grow in grace?

It should be obvious that the reason that God is gracious is because He is holy. If the Christian’s goal is to be holy as God is holy, then the Christian must also become gracious as s/he grows into holiness. A proper answer will enable us to understand the full force of Peter’s admonition. Make note of the following comments.

With only one exception, every mention of grace in the New Testament is derived from the Greek term charis. As is true of many Greek terms, charis has several definitions that give information about the writer’s intended meaning. In this case, we can find out whether this is: (a) an admonition for the Christian to expand his/her own use of grace toward others, or (b) if it is an admonition for the Christian to grow in spiritual knowledge and understanding because of the grace God and/or Jesus Christ have exercised toward him/her in the salvation process.

Of the five definitions given in the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; 1957; pp. 885-886), the “b” part of the third definition begins with this: “b. on the part of God and Christ.” Then BAG offers a potpourri of Scriptures to demonstrate why this is an appropriate application. They cite such Scriptures as 1 Peter 5:10 (“the God of all grace”) and John 1:14 regarding God-in-the-flesh, Jesus Christ (“full of grace and truth”). Without citing numerous Scriptures and comments, suffice it to be said that BAG concludes that Peter’s admonition is aimed at grace exercised by God and/or His Christ relative to mankind – especially the Christian.

Whether this grace has been dispensed by God and/or Christ as: (a) a source of blessings, or (b) a state of unmerited, unearned favor, or (c) a deed of grace that allows the Christian to grow in holy knowledge and understanding depends upon the circumstances involved. The point is simple: While you have the advantage of this marvelous, holy charity (favor, grace, gracious care or help, goodwill), take full advantage of your opportunity to spiritually grow and develop your spiritual gifts and skills in service to God through Jesus Christ (Ibid; pp. 885, 886). This piece of understanding

will be important knowledge to be applied to the lessons in this issue of *Spirit and Truth*.

The “Point-of-the-Day”

As one man I knew was accustomed to saying: “I said all of that to say all of this.” I set out in the introduction with the goal of acquainting you with what I call “principle-centered theology.” What do I mean by that expression? It is very simple to explain.

A principle is a fundamental truth, law, *et cetera upon which other truths are based*. With the knowledge of such principles, one can explain both the method of operations involved, as well as the actions carried out according to the method. Why is this important relative to the first two principles: God’s laws and holiness?

Let me use one example from the New Testament that pretty much encompasses the direction of the discussion that follows: Matthew 5:17:

Do not think [and, therefore, believe] that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets: *I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil* (emphases added).

This statement by Jesus Christ is based on a fundamental principle that enables us to logically understand how God thinks and acts as He carries out His original “plan” through Jesus Christ. As stated above, if you understand this fundamental principle, then that understanding should enable you to understand various other truths that are based on the principle involved.

For example: If I were to read Colossians 2:14 in conjunction with Matthew 5:17, could I logically conclude that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ nailed God’s law to the cross and, in effect, did away with God’s law? What would the principle that is embedded in Matthew 5:17 dictate? What would you conclude if God’s law were done away with despite Jesus’ comment in Matthew 5:17? Would you conclude that He is either a liar or duplicitous (saying one thing but doing another)? Or, would you conclude that you did not rightly interpret Jesus’ comment relative to Colossians 2:14?

Such is the complexity of man’s approach to Scripture and dispensing their conclusions via per-

sonal opinions and/or doctrinal traditions, rather than truth. If you do away with God’s law, how, then, do you explain Romans 3:31; 4:15; 7:5-7, 11-14, 25; 13:8-10; and 1 John 3:4 with regard to Romans 6:23? The law of God operates to define sin. Faith in God through Jesus Christ makes it possible for God to be gracious and merciful so we can be made acceptable to Him through Jesus Christ and, thereby, treated as though we were newly created (Eph. 1:5-8; 2 Cor. 5:17).

With that in mind, let’s read Isaiah 55:10, 11 with the understanding that the Lord God is the Divine Being who came in the flesh as Jesus Christ. What does He say about how trustworthy His word is? Does He say that His word does not go out of His mouth without accomplishing the purpose for which it was intended?

What relationship does Isaiah 55:10, 11 have to Jesus’ statement in Matthew 4:4 ... which He quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3? What is so important about living by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God? Does it have anything to do with God’s truth (John 17:17; 8:31, 32)? Does it have anything to do with 2 Timothy 2:15: “rightly dividing [correctly interpreting and rightly handling] the word of truth”?

The “point-of-the-day” in this introduction is that there are principles revealed in Scripture that enable us to logically understand how God thinks and acts (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Rightly understood, these principles show us the interpretational boundaries that divide God’s truth from man’s interpretations. This is important understanding.

Martin Luther made a grave mistake in his theological paradigm when he posited that “Every believer is a priest under Jesus Christ and has the right to read and interpret Scripture for himself as the Holy Spirit leads him.” How can we know whether or not this is true? How are 32,000+ different “Christian” denominations, that disagree with and oppose one another, proof that the one Holy Spirit of God led every single individual to so many opposing theological conclusions? How would that agree with 1 Corinthians 14:33 and Ephesian 4:1-16?

Ephesians 4:1-16 suggests that all True Christians will follow the same truth of God as a unified body. I demonstrated that in the introduction: (1) God is a God of laws and (2) God is a God of

holiness. If we are led by His *Holy Spirit* into *His truth* (John 14:26; 16:13-15), then we will not be *denominationalized* by so many different, opposing, conflicting traditions, doctrines, practices, and theologies. We will be *one* with God (John 17:17-23).

Are you beginning to get the point? If so, the following articles will help build your spiritual knowledge, correct reasoning, and proper understanding. Once you have learned those lessons, you can begin to “rightly divide the word of truth” and become a profitable servant of God.

**I
N**

Principle #3: God Does Not Lie 6

T

Scriptural Support 8

H

Practical Applications 12

I

The “New *Spiritual* Israel” 18

S

“Scholarly” Problems 24

I

Numbers 11:24-29 34

S

Lawlessness 40

S

U

E

Principle #3:

God Does Not Lie

Numbers 23:19 is a classic Scripture that lays out a most important principle in God's character: *He does not lie*. There are two possible definitions for this word *lie*: (1) to make a false statement, and (2) to speak deceptively (duplicity). Here in Numbers 23:19, Moses writes that:

God is not a man, that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent: has He said, and shall He not do it? Or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?

Notice how *lie* and *repent* are set in apposition to one another to assist the explanation. This is interesting because Exodus 32:14 says specifically that the Lord God *repented* of His decision to destroy Israel and make a great nation from Moses' lineage (vv. 9, 10; *KJV*). Read the entire chapter in order to understand the context in which this is revealed. What should we think of this *apparent* inconsistency?

This kind of problem in Scripture is exactly the kind of problem that requires an understanding of the *logical nature* of God ... and the *correct reasoning* we should exercise. Would He be "logical" if He allowed such a glaring *contradiction* to stand in His word of "truth" (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17)? Somewhere in the grand design of Scripture, there must be a *logical explanation* for what *seems* to be such a glaring contradiction (Prov. 14:12). Sorting out this kind of problem relative to Principle #3 is the objective of this lesson.

Where to Begin?

After understanding Principles #1 (God of laws) and #2 (God of holiness) in the introduction article, the most logical place to begin Principle #3 is with the definition of terms. My first question would be whether or not the term *repent* in Exodus and Numbers is translated from the same Hebrew word. If it is, then my second question is whether or not there is something in Numbers 23:19 that is remarkably different from Exodus 32:14. Can we rely on the "face value" of the

term *repent* in either or both Scriptures ... if we know that *God does not lie*? Why would Moses say in one place that God does not lie or need to repent; yet, show in another place that He, in fact, *repented* of something?

At this point, I consult a reputable *concordance* and its dictionary to find out if the same Hebrew word (*repent*) is used in both Scriptures. *It is: nacham* (#5162 in *Strong's*). I then consult a reputable Hebrew-English *lexicon* to see if there is a difference in definition between the word's *usage* in the two references. *There is*. This is where you can come

understand how Principle #3 is a legitimate principle relative to understanding all of Scripture ... as well as to how God's word does not contradict itself. There are numerous situations in Scripture that *seem* to present contradictions; but, indepth searches can give the proper answer.

The word *repent* in Exodus 32:14 has to do with *a change of mind* relative to a punitive action that is proposed against others. When the Lord God saw how Israel was acting so soon removed from their exodus out of Egyptian slavery, He was infuriated against them. In fact, He was in the process of "marrying" Israel and giving her a "most-favored nation" status (Ex. 19:5, 6). His immediate response to her idolatry, resistance, and sexual abandon (which included numerous other previous incidents) was to *destroy* them and give the most-favored nation status to *Moses'* lineage instead. Moses was an Israelite from the tribe of Levi, so a covenant with *part of Israel* would be made in order for the Lord God to continue His plan with that portion of Israel.

Moses persuaded Him to *change His mind* (vv. 11, 12; *Modern Language Bible*). So, the Lord God *changed His mind*. This was not a case where God had *sinned* or was about to *sin* (that is, violate His own law and holiness) and needed to confess it and do penance for it.

So, Numbers 23:14 must be understood to say that God *does not sin or act duplicitously*; therefore, there is *no need* for Him to confess any such transgression and do penance for it. Moses' message in Numbers 23:19 follows the comment about repentance with a verification of God's trustworthiness. It is important to understand the reason to pursue this question because of situations that arise that question God's trustworthiness:

Has He said [it], and shall He not do it?
Or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good? (See also Isa. 55:10, 11.)

In the context of this Scripture, there is no implication that there also has been any *sin* on God's part – in addition to *lying* – for which confession and penance are necessary. Rather, Numbers 23:19 reveals a *principle* by which we can understand God's *logical* and *righteous* (morally right and justified thoughts and deeds) character relative to *lying* and any other sin that could exist. That principle can be summed up as follows: *Whatever God says is as good as done because He is not a liar who sins in any way at all and needs to repent.*

He can, however, *change His mind* about any punitive measures of discipline that He might think to pursue. After all, His grace and mercy are witnesses to this truth. If you are a true Christian, then you have been the recipient of such grace and mercy relative to your own sins.

Consider also Isaiah 55:11:

My word ... that goes out of my mouth ... shall not return unto to me void [that is: be devoid of sense or purpose], but shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper [that is: succeed] in the thing whereunto I sent it.

That is the sense of Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:17. Such language is a frank demonstration that God is not a *liar* ... nor is He *duplicitous*. We will learn in the articles that follow how great a truth this really is and what a great benefit it is to the true Christian.

That said, it should be evident that you must pay attention to the conditions under which any given Scripture occurs, as well as the *meaning* that words have in the context of other similar Scriptures. Practice this with the various meanings of *love*. You know, like in the difference of meaning among "making *love*" and "*loving* chocolate" and "*loving* [someone] to death." Do you understand this point? If so, then you are ready to study more important principles. May God bless your understanding.

PRINCIPLE #4: GOD DOES NOT CHANGE

JAMES 1:17

Searching the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-12)

We should search Scripture for more evidence that Principle #3 is valid. Embedded in the Lord God's Law of Ten Commandments (that was, in fact, the covenant law providing the legal bases for His "marriage" to Israel) is one that addresses the concept of lying: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16; emphases added). It is logical to understand that this law intends more than the mere "letter." If one merely refrains from lying against his neighbor, is there any other way by which s/he can become a liar? How about what s/he does in the secret places of heart and mind? Then there is the part the word witness (that is: testimony) plays in this law. Does this merely apply to something like a court case? Or, if Frank asks Joe a question, and Joe evades the true answer, does that count as false testimony? What about "white" lies? What is the "spirit" of this commandment?

This is part of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 42:21 that the Lord God will magnify His law and make it honorable. According to Jesus Christ's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, there is a "spirit" of the law that governs more than the mere "letter," or "face value," of the law (Matt. 5:27-48; Rom. 8:1-4). For example: Would it be logical to understand that it is as wrong to tell your neighbor any kind of lie as it is to lie about your neighbor in court?

Compare Exodus 24:7, 12 to Exodus 34:28 in order to understand that the Ten Commandments were the legal bases of the "marriage" covenant. Why is that important information for Principle #3? Lying, whether by the Lord God or His people, is a violation of the covenant agreement. Based on the "if ... then" premise in Exodus 19:5, it is grounds for "divorce." In other words, Israel also would have had a legal basis to divorce herself from the Lord God if He had ever lied to her!

So, the objective of this part of the study is to demonstrate how you find scriptural support for Principle #3. There are 39 "books" of the Old Testament and 27 "books" of the New Testament. Is there anywhere in all of those 66 "books" and among all of those authors anything that suggests that Principle #3 is, itself, a lie? Or, is there any suggestion that such a law is not presently useful in shaping Christian character ... and was deleted by the death of Jesus Christ? All who desire to worship God in spirit and truth need to know the answers (John 4:23, 24).

Asking the Right Questions

Read Jeremiah 3:1-14 in conjunction with Exodus 19:8. What do you perceive as being the problem between the Lord God and Israel? Did someone lie about being faithful to the covenant agreement? Read Hebrews 8:7, 8. Can you tell who was at fault in that covenant disagreement? Was there something wrong with the contents of the covenant itself? Or, were the people found to be liars when they swore to be obedient ... but were not? The answer makes a difference in the interpretation of the Hebrews 8:7, 8.

Read Matthew 22:34-39. In this conversation between Jesus Christ and the lawyer, Jesus Christ (who was the Lord God of the Old Testament) divides God's "Law" into two major parts: (1) su-

preme love of God and (2) love of one's neighbor equal to love of oneself. Exodus 20:1-17, shows that the first four commandments focus on loving God supremely and the last six commandments focus on loving your neighbor equal to your love for yourself. Who broke either or both of those laws? God ... or Israel?

Now, go to Matthew 22:40. How important are these two divisions of God's law? "All the law" is found in Moses' writings in the first five books of the Bible. "All the prophets" are contained in all of the books from "Joshua" to "Malachi." If "all the law" and "all the prophets" depend on those two fundamental laws for their existence and the truth they represent, then you face the results described in James 2:10 if you break any one of the 10 laws. James makes it plain that breaking one law breaks

all of the laws. That might seem to be a "hard pill to swallow," so to speak, but it is true.

Did Israel *love* the Lord God supremely as she had sworn herself to do (John 14:15)? Hebrews 8:7, 8 tell us that she did not. *She* was the problem because she did far more than verbally lie to the Lord God about being obedient to all He said (Ex. 19:8; 24:3, 7; Deut. 5:27). She lied in her thoughts, words, and deeds.

Matthew 5:17

With that in mind, what would you say is the point of Jesus Christ's statement in Matthew 5:17? Had He come to *change* or *discontinue* His Ten Commandments and the prophecies that He proclaimed relative to His relationship to Israel ... just because *she* lied? Think seriously and deeply about that question because it helps to determine if *He* is also a liar ... or, the God of Truth (see Rom. 3:3-7). After all, the Lord God claims in Isaiah 55:10, 11 that His words do not come out of His mouth for vain purposes. In fact, they *will* accomplish (*fulfill*) the purpose for which they are spoken. *Those 10 commandments were spoken in order to provide a legal foundation for His "marriage" relationship with Israel. They are prophetic* (Ex. 19:5, 6).

In that context, consider the truth of John's remark in 1 John 2:3, 4:

Here is how we know that we know God: *we keep His commandments.* He that claims to know Him, but does not keep His commandments, is a *liar* and the truth is not in him (emphases added).

How *righteous* would God be in His relationship with *us* if *He* was found to be a liar? *The Giver of the laws must also be subject to His own laws.* What happens to the Lord God's *truth* if He prophesies that He will resolve His *divorce* from Israel by punishing her, cleaning her up, refining her, and "remarrying" her *forever* (Hosea 2:1-20) ... and then allows such promises and prophecies to fall to the ground *unfulfilled*?

As you reason through that question, begin thinking about Paul's comments in Romans 11:1-5 about whether or not God has cast away His peo-

ple Israel. Paul has a fundamental reason for asking such a question ... and it is based on the determination of Jesus Christ to protect the integrity of the Law and Prophets. Understand that you need to ask the right questions in order to find God's truth. Supposition is not enough; tradition is not enough. *The answer must be found in God's truth.*

Hebrews 6:13-20

Before studying the *truth* found in Hebrews 6:13-20, let's consider the situation from which Paul is able to draw his conclusions. This is found in Genesis 15 where Abram is told by the Lord God that He is Abram's protector and provider (v. 1). Leading up to this point, the Lord God has sworn to Abram that he will give him the land of the Canaanites and make his *offspring* to be a great nation (Gen. 12:2-7). In fact, in Genesis 13:14-17, He promises Abram and his descendants to give *forever* all the land he sees as he walks its length and breadth. Such promises represent the Lord God's *truth*.

Abram is about 75 years old, and his wife, Sarai, is barren and beyond child-bearing age. Yet, the Lord God's promises presuppose that Abram will father a male child with *Sarai*. Read Genesis 16 and 17 ... paying careful attention to Genesis 17:15-21. Genesis 13:16 presupposes a great deal more: *innumerable* descendants as plentiful as the dust of the earth. Abram/Abraham fathered sons with three different women (see Gen. 25:1-6: Hagar, Sarah, and Keturah).

In Genesis 15, the Lord God takes His covenant with Abram to a whole 'nother level. The Lord God does not allow Abram to adopt his steward, Eliezer of Damascus, as his son through whom the descendants would come (vv. 2-4). The Lord God tells Abram to look at the stars in the night sky as an example of the *innumerable* "seed" that would "...come forth out of *your own body*" (v. 4; emphases added). This, of course, means that *Abram* will be the sperm donor of at least one son through whom he will ultimately have innumerable descendants.

What then? The Lord God repeats His promise about the land grant (v. 7). He defines the borders of that land grant in vv. 18-20: all of the land between the Nile and Euphrates Rivers. Abram is

bold enough to inquire: “How shall I know that I shall inherit it?” That question is the basis for the action taken by the Lord God in vv. 9-11.

What we see here is that the Lord God makes a promise to Abram about property and descendants. The ritual ceremony in vv. 9-11 represents an oath that will verify and solidify the promise He had made – land forever and innumerable “seed.” In essence, this ritual ceremony amounts to the sealing (the formal validation) of a perpetual, irrevocable covenant between the Lord God and Abram and his descendants.

The ancient practice was that the weakest of the covenant-makers was required to walk among the dead carcasses. The idea behind this oath is the solemn penalty of death imposed on whoever violates it. The violator would die a similar death. Verses 12 and 17 indicate that the Lord God was the only one who walked among the carcasses. Abram, the weakest of the two, was asleep.

This also indicates, therefore, that the Lord God took upon Himself the validation, preservation, and penalty of the covenant. The preservation of the covenant did not depend upon Abram’s finite ability to preserve it beyond his lifetime. He also prophesied to Abram, as he slept, that the future “seed” of Abram would be in captivity in a strange land for 400 years, after which they would be released to take possession of the land. That “seed” was Israel. That “strange land” was Egypt.

Consider this eternal, perpetual covenant in relationship to Isaiah 55:10, 11. If the Lord God is a liar, then at some point in the future all of this will fall apart. The question for you at this point is simple: Would it fall apart because of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (see Col. 2:14 re: “nailing it to the cross”)? Jesus Christ was the Lord God of the Old Testament who made this covenant with Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s 12 sons (Israel). The 12 tribes of Israel were Abram’s legal heirs.

What does Hebrews 6:13-20 reveal about this matter? You must understand that Paul addresses this to Christians. As such, it is a powerful piece of theology based on the powerful principle that God does not lie. Let’s sort through what Paul says about this covenant that the Lord God made with Abram. You must remember that he gets his information from Genesis 15. Make note of Paul’s language in his explanation.

In Hebrews 6:13-16, he covers the importance of the covenant agreement:

v. 13. The Lord God swore His oath on His own name because there is no greater name (see Phil. 2:9; Col. 1:19; Matt. 28:18).

v. 14. Paul repeats the “blessings” part of the covenant.

v. 15. Paul recounts Abram’s faith in the Lord God’s promises. His unwavering faith was rewarded by the gift of the promise (read also Rom. 4:13-25).

v. 16. Paul reminds us that the oath is sworn on the greater name in order to confirm (give formal approval and verify the truth of) the covenant. That accomplished, there should never be any future strife about the covenant and the things upon which it is based.

In v. 17, Paul points out that the promise itself should have been sufficient. You should remember that it was Abram who asked the Lord God by what means he could know that he would acquire what the Lord God had promised. Paul basically shows that the Lord God was not bothered by that question ... that He was not offended by it. In the KJV, Paul says that the Lord God was “willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel [advice and recommended action] by confirming it with His oath.” What does that mean?

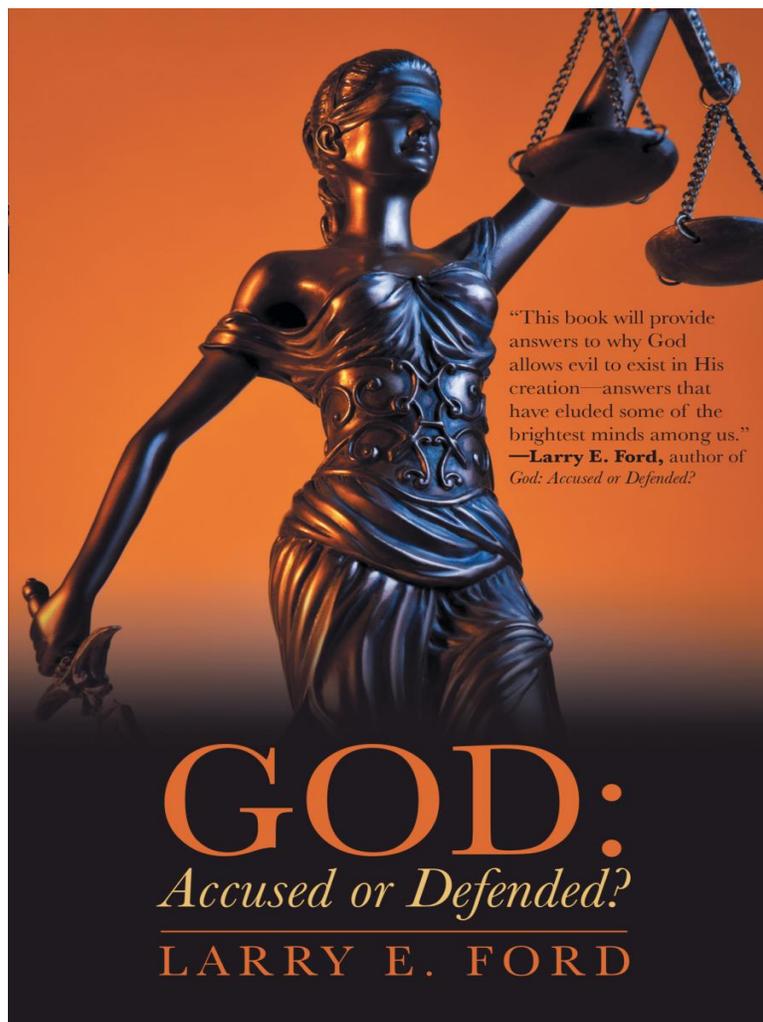
The Greek word from which we get the English translation immutable is ametathetos. In the entirety of the Bible, Hebrews 6:17, 18 are the only two places where this word is used. Its definition is used in several places. Ametathetos means that it is not capable of or susceptible of change (BAG; pp. 44, 45). In other words, there is no ability, skill, or competence capable of changing it ... including God Himself (remember Num. 23:19 and Isa. 55:11).

There is no admission of error or allowance of error in either the promise or the oath or the attendant contents of either. It boils down to the

simple fact that the promise and the oath *will not be changed* in any manner whatsoever; indeed, *neither of them can be changed* by any power known or unknown ... without penalty.

Do you get the full sense of this matter? This *oath* was a powerful move on the Lord God's part. Paul says in v. 17 that He did this in order to show the *heirs* [those who would subsequently inherit the promises from Abram: Israel] that His decision to enter this covenant with Abram would *never* be made void or rescinded or altered in a way

that would decrease it in any manner. Paul wrote that to *true Christians*. *That is the basis of Jesus Christ's statement in Matthew 5:17*. Was this covenant specific enough that we should expect it to be what it is and nothing other than what it is and is proposed to be? Can the Lord God have in mind to later show His intention to have been *metaphoric* and transfer the covenant to *non-Israelite* parties? Would such a move be *duplicitous* on the Lord God's part? We must know God's truth about this. And ... we will as we study farther.



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Practical Applications

The existence of 32,000+ “Christian” denominations poses a problem for those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). Why? Because they have run the risk of changing God’s truth into a lie (Rom. 1:25; *KJV*; emphases added) by teaching their opposing, contradicting doctrines and “gospels.” Some translations render Romans 1:25 to say that they have “exchanged the truth about God for a lie” (*RSV*; emphases added). Either way, it is a grievous error to fall into.

You should consider the problem Paul points out to the Corinthians about those who teach another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit (2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15). Your responsibility, if you want to worship God in spirit and in truth, is to learn the rest of Paul’s commentary in Hebrews 6:18, 19.

Here, Paul says that “two immutable things” make it impossible for God to lie: His promise and His oath. The rest of this is addressed to the heirs – presumably, the true Christians. Paul also says that we should have “strong consolation” in the covenant because we have fled to it as a refuge as we seek to lay hold of the hope set before us. Hope in what? The promises of the Lord God to Abram and his heirs ... and the oath He took to secure it for us forever. Paul calls it an “anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.” What does all of that mean?

The objective of this part of the study is to demonstrate how true Christians have become involved in this promise and oath scenario discussed by Paul in Hebrews 6:13-20. It is really quite exciting!

The “Strong Consolation”

The expression “strong consolation” in Hebrews 6:18 is interesting. Its Greek source is the term paraklesis, which has to do with encouragement – the process of instilling courage (bravery), hope (a feeling that what is wanted will happen), and confidence (trust, reliance, assurance). This term paraklesis is important because of the term “Comforter” in John 14:16-18, 26; 16:7-15. Why so? Because the term “Comforter” comes from the Greek term parakletos – a related word.

As it is stated in the context of these Scriptures, this is a reference to the Holy Spirit that God gives to His true people as a helper and intercessor. Why? To instill in them spiritual courage, hope,

and confidence through their faith. It does this in three important ways:

1. It gives important, needed support because it is grounded in God’s truth.
2. It gives strong support, or foundation, in order to reinforce and uphold one’s faith as it provides assistance for any deficiencies in faith that occur.
3. It causes one’s faith to be increased in intensity and certainty as knowledge and understanding of God’s thoughts and ways are increased. This is Peter’s recommendation in 2 Peter 3:18: “Grow in

grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (emphases added).

If you are paying close attention to the term *immutable* and the definition associated with it, then you should be able to apply it to numerous Scriptures that involve laws, prophecies, and promises. In a sensible, useful, and realistic manner, you should become more confident of the principle that “God does not lie.” This should give you a better foundation for understanding John 8:31, 32:

...If you adhere to My teaching, you will truly be My disciples; *you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (MLB; emphases added).

Let’s use a couple of examples of traditional “Christian” teachings as practice for this theological principle. Isaiah 55:10, 11 proclaim that the Lord God does not speak His words in vain; rather, *He causes them to achieve the purpose for which they were spoken*. Since the Old Testament was the only Scripture available to Paul (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17), we must consider that fact in our reasoning processes. Apply that reasoning to the following situations.

If Isaac inherited the promises from Abraham (Gen. 26:1-5) ... and Jacob (Israel) inherited them from Isaac (Gen. 32:24-29; 35:9-12) ... and the nation of Israel (the 12 tribes descended from Jacob) inherited them from their father Jacob/Israel, *what is the purpose of Paul’s comments in Romans 9:1-14?* Read vv. 1-5. Paul discusses the things which *belong to Israel* according to God’s word from the Old Testament. Now read vv. 6-8. This is a short discussion about the *trustworthiness* of God’s word.

Paul says that God’s word has *not* been *ineffectual* (that is: unable to produce the desired effect) ... but he explains that there are *some* Israelites who have been *disqualified* because of their actions and lack of faith. Also, there are “children of Abraham” to whom all of those things *do not* belong because they are not descended from *Isaac* (read again Gen. 17:15-21). All of this is important to the continuing discussion.

Read Genesis 25 as a scriptural reference for this truth. There you see that *Isaac* inherited from Abraham, but Ishmael and the sons of Abraham through his second wife, Keturah (after the death of Sarah), did not inherit any portion of the things that pertained to the *covenant*. This is Paul’s point in Romans 9:1-8. If you do not understand that *truth*, then you miss a major thesis revealed in Scripture about the inability of God to lie.

Is it God’s *truth* that He chose the *Israelites* to inherit His promises through Abram (Abraham; Gen. 17:1-8) *forever*? If so, how *confident* can *you* be that He will fulfill His prophecy in Hosea 2:9-20 that He will: (a) punish Israel for her sins, (b) clean her up, and (c) *remarry* her *forever* (read also Lev. 26:14-46)? Do you find “strong consolation” in God and His truth regarding this matter?

What, then, would you understand Paul’s point to be in Romans 11 relative to Hosea’s prophecy? How about Amos’s prophecy in Amos 9:9-15? How would you then interpret Revelation 19:7-9 relative to that? *Can you now understand how one application of Principle #3 affects so many contiguous parts of Scripture?* What does this mean for the *Christian*? The truth of all of that is built into the nature of the “strong consolation.”

A Practical Test of the Principle

Let’s make a sensible test of the *contiguity* (the connectivity) in the relationship between the “Church” in Acts 7:38 and Matthew 16:18. In Acts 7:38, Stephen is defending his own faith in Jesus Christ ... which includes his membership in the *Church* that Jesus Christ is presently building (Matt. 16:18). In Acts 7:38, Stephen refers to *Israel* as having been the “*Church* in the wilderness.” In both references, the word *Church* is translated from the Greek term *ekklesia* ... which also has a more general definition of “gathering, assemblage, meeting” (BAG; pp. 240, 241).

In Scripture (OT and NT), it applies both to the “congregation of Israel” and to “the Christian church or congregation.” Here is the question for this exercise: *Is there any connection between the “Church in the wilderness” and the “Church” that Jesus Christ is building?* If so, what is that connection? If not, why not? It is simple: Either there is a connection ... or there is not.

As a preface to this exercise, I want to quote a source who makes a distinction between “the Church in the wilderness” and “the New Testament Church.” This distinction is based on the importance of the name of the Church in the New Testament Scriptures: *Church of God*.

In his book *Mystery of the Ages* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company; 1985), Herbert W. Armstrong makes the following distinction:

In the New Testament Greek, the Church is called the *ekklesia*, a Greek word meaning “called-out-ones—an assembly, a congregation,” a gathering, a group. There is no sanctity to the word *ekklesia*. The name of the Church, however, used 12 times in the New Testament, is “Church of God,” which denotes that it is God’s Church—which name attaches sanctity. The Old Testament Church was the “Congregation of Israel,” a human man [which, supposedly, attaches no sanctity to that OT usage of the term *ekklesia*] (p. 207; emphases added).

On the surface, this distinction seems to be grounded in truth ... if the comment about the name “Church of God” being the only official and acceptable name for the *ekklesia* of God is true. It is a fact that the name “Church of God” is used 12 times in the New Testament. It is equally true that Paul makes reference to “the Churches of Christ” in Romans 16:16. And ... the “Church” is referred to several times as “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). Does the name of Jesus Christ add any sanctity to the name “Churches of Christ”? Do those facts, in and of itself, prove that the name “Congregation of Israel” is unacceptable as the identification of Israel as also being God’s true Church?

In those 12 mentions of the “Church of God,” there is not one, single indication that it is meant to be the sole identification marker for identifying the true Church. The conclusion that it is indicates that such a meaning is read into the 12 mentions ... not that it is derived from those mentions.

Mr. Armstrong adds John 17:11 to his body of “proof”: “Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they

may be one, as we are one” (emphases added). This Scripture is used to support the claim that God’s *ekklesia* is supposed to contain the name “Church of God” so that He could “keep” us (that is: perpetuate the identity) “in His name.” In His prayer to the Father, Jesus said that He had revealed the Father’s name to the disciples (John 17:6, 26). The Greek term is onoma ... which has a variety of meanings to which we should pay attention. We need to know the truth about this.

I consulted my *Strong’s* concordance to find the scriptural references to the term name and located the Greek term in the dictionary (#3686). Once I found the Greek term, I consulted a Greek-English lexicon to find out what John 17:11 means according to a specific definition. Every reference to name in the New Testament is the Greek term onoma. But ... every use of that word does not mean the same thing in all contexts. That is why I check these references.

The *BAG* lexicon shows that definition #4 contains the information for which I am looking. It speaks of “the very nature of the personality whom it designates ... his qualities ... his powers” (p. 574). Under definition 4b, it references John 17:6 and says that it “appears nearly as the representative of the Godhead, as a tangible manifestation of his nature” (Ibid; p. 575; emphases added).

Under definition 4cβ, it says the following:

Through baptism the one who is baptized becomes the possession of and comes under the protection of the one whose name he bears; he is under the control of the effective power of the name and the One who bears the name (Ibid; emphases added).

Whose name do we bear when we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18)? Some argue that it is the name of God. Others argue that it is the name of Christ (Christian). That would be okay if Scripture reveals anywhere that the Holy Spirit is known as God ... rather than God’s power. How would you explain Acts 2:38 and 8:16 in that regard? Would that problem indicate that John 17:11 means something other than the appellation God? Let’s consider the possibilities. Pay close attention to the speci-

fics of the definition given in *BAG* because they are clues to the meaning that Jesus attached to His request.

The specific explanation for John 17:11 (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου) is found in definition 4cγ:

The effect brought about by the name is caused by the utterance of the name [by mentioning, naming, or calling upon] (Ibid; p. 576).

If you associate all that I have shown in this definition for God's name, you should be able to see that Jesus is asking for more than the preservation of the appellation of God's ekklesia. In this context, the name of God has to do with His thoughts and ways, His power and authority, His character and holiness, not his personal appellation.

Individual Christians, as members of the corporate body of Jesus Christ, have become the possession of God through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). As such, they have come under the protection and control of God. When they utter that name, God's power and control are brought to bear to keep them (that is: to fulfill promises and covenants, guard, preserve, provide for, hold for the future, *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*). All of that and more is what Jesus Christ is asking of the Father in John 17:11. It is a request to maintain the integrity of His name and all for which it stands in the lives of His people ... His ekklesia.

The oppositional argument about the name relies on the condition that the name "Congregation of Israel" disqualifies Israel from being the "Church of God." It is an attempt to draw a distinction between the human Israel and the Spiritual Israel of God. It posits that any human reference to an ekklesia automatically removes the sanctity of the name. Is that true?

Let's go to one Scripture that is very well-known in order to establish some measure of "sanctity" to the name "Congregation of Israel" (2 Chronicles 7:14):

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their

wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (emphases added).

Here you have an interesting revelation: the Lord God admits that the Israelites are His people and are known by His name. This argument would follow the conclusion laid out by Mr. Armstrong that the name of "God," therefore, attaches sanctity to the Israelites ... *even though He admits that they are wicked and sinful and need to repent*. The Lord God admits here that the Israelites were called by His name. Indeed, the expression "ekklesia of Israel" can be translated to say: "the assembly of the soldiers of God" (*Smith's Bible Dictionary* under "Israel"). Read Exodus 9:1 and ask yourself who calls Israel His people.

Mr. Armstrong goes on to explain that Stephen's referral to Israel as the "Church in the wilderness" was to a group named for a human man. Therefore, in Israel's case, the name "Church" is different, and Israel's *raison d'être* (reason for existence) was entirely different from that of the New Testament Church. He bases that conclusion on the assumption that neither *the preaching of the gospel* nor *the gift of the Holy Spirit* could have been achieved until: "Jesus a) had qualified to be King of the Earth by overcoming Satan, and b) had been glorified after His ascension to heaven (John 7:37-39)" (*Mystery*; p. 208).

Here is where you have to execute a test of Principle #3 found in the framework of Romans 3:4:

God must be true though every man is a liar, as it is written, "That You [that is, God] might be vindicated in Your sayings and might triumph when You are tried" (quoted from Psa. 51:4; *MLB*).

Even the best and most loyal of men are subject to mistakes. I am, by no means, exempt from this human flaw. So, it is not wrong to correct misperceptions among men when they occur. After all, Nathan corrected King David, and Paul corrected Peter. Moses was even bold enough to tell the Lord God to change His mind about the action He was about to execute against Israel. So, let's allow Scripture to give us the correction we need in this

case. Doing so is not a denigration of the person who drew a faulty conclusion.

Galatians 3:8 reveals that Abraham was knowledgeable about the gospel. In the context of vv. 1-9, one might very well understand that some measure of “holy spirit” was available to Abraham as he was taught by the Lord God about the promises He was making to him. In fact, one of Stephen’s arguments in Acts 7:51 strongly suggests that some measure of the Holy Spirit was available to at least some in Israel – some saying it was available only to priests, kings, and prophets.

In accusing the leaders of Israel in his time, Stephen says: “You always resist the Holy Spirit: As your fathers [a reference at least back to ancient Israel under Moses] did, so do you” (emphases added). This statement suggests that it was not that the Holy Spirit was not available to those who followed God’s truth; it was not available to those who resisted it ... which happened to be all but a remnant of Israel. *We will discuss Numbers 11:24-29 in a later context.*

Paul adds some clarity to this question in Romans 10:14-21. Pay close attention to how Paul frames his argument about “calling upon the name of the Lord” (v. 14). People have to be taught by men whom God sends to them for such instruction (vv. 14, 15). Verse 16 is crucial in this discussion: “Not all of them have obeyed the gospel.” That statement suggests that the gospel was also preached to ancient Israel through Moses and others. *It also suggests that there were some who did obey the gospel.* Verse 18 suggests that this gospel was not restricted to a small area of the world where the Israelites might have been. In fact, the House of Israel was later scattered far and wide across the globe (see Jer. 30:10, 11; 50:17-20).

With that in mind, let’s begin this test with this observation: The Israel that the Lord God is going to punish, clean up, and remarry (Hos. 2:14-20; Amos 9:9-15) is the Church that spent some part of its history in the wilderness (read Num. 13, 14). It is safe to say that Israel belonged to Him as His covenant people. (Ex. 3:10; 5:1; 24:10; 32:27; 34:23). Read Isaiah 63:7-16, 64:6-8, and Jeremiah 31:1-9. *His name was upon them.*

How much sanctity do you suppose is attached to Israel by the Lord God? Who is their Father? How much different have 32,000+ “Christian” de-

nominations been compared to the 12 tribes of ancient Israel? There has to be a reason why Exodus 20:7 tells Israel not to take His name in vain. That is a warning about ignoring the sanctity of having His name attached to them in their “marriage.”

Next, we find in Isaiah 1:1-9 that the Lord God reserved for Himself, from among rebellious Israel, a remnant of those “children” He raised who kept faith and covenant with Him. In Isaiah 8, we discover that He has elected to make His thoughts and ways available to only this faithful remnant from among all of Israel (see especially vv. 16-20).

These Israelites were the descendants of the Israelites who were called “the Church in the wilderness.” They are spoken of in Jeremiah’s prophecies in Jeremiah 23:1-4; chapters 30 and 31; and 50:17-20. Read all of this information before you proceed to the next part of this test. Remember Matthew 5:17.

Question: Who were the Israelites from among whom Jesus Christ called His disciples? The House of Israel had been scattered among the nations and not allowed to return to their land (721-718 B.C.; see 2 Kings 17:5-23). Only the House of Judah remained ... but many of the Jews also never returned from their exile into Babylon (see Jer. 25:1-13; Dan. 9:1-19). Thus, only a remnant of the House of Judah made up the Jewish Israelites (Judah, Levi, and Benjamin) of Jesus’ day. From that population, He called only 12 disciples to begin what is known as the “Christian” era of the Church -- the New Testament (“Covenant”) ekklesia. Thus, Christ’s disciples amounted to a remnant of Israel with which Jesus Christ began rebuilding His ekklesia. (Matt. 16:18) ... as the prophets proclaimed He would do.

How is this related to Isaiah 1:9; 6:8-13; 8:16-20? Matthew 13:11-17 shows that the injunctions of Isaiah 6:8-13 and 8:16-20 were still in force over 800 years later. That being the case, does this have anything to do with Matthew 16:18?

The Purpose of the Test

What is a reasonable, sensible conclusion relative to whom the New Testament Church represents relative to the Israel represented in the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:22-37? Consider the implications of Matthew 26:26-28. Is this related

to Jeremiah 31:22-37? Remember: God does not lie.

I know that the material presented is probably a bit more complicated than that to which the average Christian is accustomed. That notwithstanding, I want you to be impressed with the complexity of investigating God's word in order to understand His truth. It is not simple "devotional" material. Most of that kind of material does not involve such depth and harmonization of Scriptures. "Devotional" studies are more for inspiration than for the complexity of investigation and research. Investigation and research are complicated pursuits.

If I were to pose the basic outcome of continued study along this line, you might very well be shocked at what is revealed from the simple principle that God does not lie. If I tell you that Matthew 26:26-28 is the point at which Jesus Christ (the Lord God of the Old Testament) began the process of fulfilling Jeremiah 30 and 31, would it make a remarkable difference in what you presently believe about Jesus Christ and His Church? Would it make a remarkable difference about what you believe happened to the Law of God relative to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ?

Let's suppose that you came to understand that Matthew 5:17 means that obedience of the 10 Commandments and Leviticus 23 are still required of Christians. Would you begin to obey Exodus 20:8-11 and Leviticus 23? If so, then you would be demonstrating that you understand more deeply the principle that God does not lie ... so much so that the understanding would require a change in your practices because you will have admitted your own mistake and are willing to accept the

truth that has been in God's word all along. Maybe you will have become one of those whose "eyes" and "ears" have been opened.

One Last Thing

Let me set in place a quote from the eminent biblical scholar, John Bright:

The New Testament announces with one voice and with unshakable assurance that all the hope of Israel has become present fact in Jesus Christ. It makes this assertion because it believed that in him the Messiah had come ... [and] because Jesus Christ so believed and so claimed (*The Kingdom of God (The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church*, Nashville: Abingdon Press; 1953; p. 215; emphases added).

Would it surprise you that these words cannot be taken at "face value"? At "face value," they seem to suggest that the Israel of the New Testament is, in fact, the new Israel that so many prophecies indicate to be the Israelite race. Do they?

The next question I will pursue from this point forward will concern itself with Bright's later conclusion that the "true Israel" of the New Testament actually has nothing to do with "those who are Israelites by race" (Ibid; p. 220; emphases added). If it does not, has God been made a liar? We will explore in the next article the ramifications of this thought by Bright and others.

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,
Ye ransomed from the fall,
Hail Him Who saves you by His grace,
And crown Him Lord of all!

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" – Edward Perronet, 1779-80 (emphases added)

The “New, Spiritual Israel”

When the intended meaning in communication is made confusing, willfully ambiguous, or harder to understand or interpret, *obfuscation* occurs. It may be *intentional* or *unintentional*. It can result from using a “roundabout way” of saying something (this is referred to as *circumlocution*). It can occur from the use of specialized vocabulary that is unfamiliar to people who are not in the same *professional* circle of people as the speaker (doctor, lawyer, mechanic, etc. – this specialized vocabulary is referred to as *jargon*). It can even be a specialized vocabulary of a particular *social group* (like criminals, gangs, clubs, churches, charity groups, etc.; this is referred to as *argot*). The last part of that definition also can be an example of *obfuscation* due to the use of certain words or phrases with which the average reader is unfamiliar (examples: *circumlocution*, *jargon*, and *argot*).

The main idea here is to call your attention to the presence of *obfuscation* that occurs in the explanations of religious thoughts, concepts, and ideas. I might be *unintentionally* guilty of it due to my efforts to explain things in detail. This can easily occur if the reader is a *novice* ... or, if the reader has been schooled in a more traditional explanation of a concept ... as opposed to the unfamiliar explanation I might give to the same concept.

My objective, however, should *not* be confusing: My goal is to educate you in the “meat” of God’s word and to call into question those teachings that go astray from God’s revealed truth ... *intentionally* or *unintentionally*. What follows are some examples of theological *obfuscation* and how to sort out God’s truth from the tangle and confusion that occurs.

Laying the Groundwork

In my research, I have found what seems to be a common scriptural explanation of how we go from “the *Church* in the wilderness” to the “New Testament *Church*” that Christ is presently building. The premise from which I draw my conclusions is based on the principle-centered theological concept that *God does not lie*.

We discussed that from Numbers 23:19 and Hebrews 6:13-20. Let me make something very plain to you in order to prevent intended or unintended confusion and/or lack of clarity. *This principle must hold true in all things, or it is a useless*

principle unworthy of our attention. In what kind of esteem do you hold God? Do you think that He does not always mean what He says, or that He does not say what He actually means? Do you believe that Scripture is simply the theological concept or theory of religious humans who *invented* their own “God” and their opinions about what He is up to? If so, then you are not prepared to objectively approach this study. In effect, you will have to be willing to change your religious paradigm. Why?

Your present paradigm will be an element that will cause you to be *confused* in your heart and mind about God’s truth. It will be very difficult for

you to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Let’s discuss some things that will help lay more groundwork for your thoughts.

In Bright’s comment about this matter (refer to “One Last Thing” on p. 17 above), he points out four important facts that he had derived from his studies:

1. The New Testament is described as having “one voice” and “unshakable assurance” relative to the hopes of the race of people known as Israel.
2. “All the hope of Israel [the race] has become present fact in Jesus Christ” (emphases added).
3. Many among the Israelitish Jews of Jesus’ day believed Jesus to have been Israel’s Messiah.
4. In fact, Jesus believed it and claimed it to be true.

Bright ended the preceding chapter with this comment: “... We must ask what sort of Kingdom it is that this Messiah has come to set up, and who is the Remnant to whom it is given” (Ibid; p. 214; emphases added). Indeed! He then makes two comments on p. 219 that are also worthy of our attention.

First, he stresses that the term Kingdom is not descriptive of “...so many square miles of territory with geographical frontiers – it is people” (emphases added). In the context of that remark, it appears that he is making reference to Israel as being the people known as the “Kingdom of God.” If not, why not? It is crucial to understand this.

Second, he follows this with a comment about the Messiah not ruling over empty space – Messiah rules over His people. It is scriptural fact that Israel was known as God’s people. I have cited above numerous Scriptures that verify that claim. Now the pregnant question by Bright: “If Jesus, then, be the Messiah, where is the Remnant?” (emphases added). So, he is aware of the remnant.

On what is that question based? It is based on Isaiah 1:9 where the prophet Isaiah was inspired to write that the Lord God (the divine Being who be-

came Jesus Christ) had saved for Himself a remnant of Israel (the race) in order to keep from completely destroying her like He did Sodom and Gomorrah. It is also based on the scriptural fact that numerous Old Testament prophecies speak of His dealings with a remnant of Israel as He moves to clean her up, refine her, and woo her to be His wife again forever (see again Hos. 2 as one example).

My first impression was that Bright opened up for discussion the idea that this remnant of Israel (the race) is important in the construction of the New Testament Church. But, subsequently, Bright turns away from that discussion.

What would you think in the face of this follow-up question by Bright: “If [Jesus] be a new Moses to give a new law, where is the new Israel to receive it?” (Ibid.). In the follow-up comments, he intimates that Jesus had to begin calling a new people to become His Kingdom ... and not burden them with the demands of the Law that He had revealed to old Israel, but (simply put) “to point men the way to be better men” (Ibid.). Does that comment cause you to think that Jesus Christ has completely severed His relationship with ancient Israel (the race) and begun His “Church” with a “new” people? “Men” is a race-neutral expression.

George Eldon Ladd, in his *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), draws a similar conclusion in “Part III: The Primitive Church” (pp. 342-356) by saying that the Jews rejected Christ’s gospel, so they were disqualified as the true people of God. Ladd makes no mention of the “remnant” theme involved with His disciples (Acts 1:15). He bases his conclusion on the following:

[The book of] Acts closes with the sober announcement of God’s judgment on Israel and the assertion: “Be it known therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it” (28:28). Thus the church, which began as a Jewish sect in Jerusalem, became a Gentile fellowship in Rome, completely freed from Jewish associations (p. 356; emphases added).

At face value, it appears that Ladd is saying that the Gentiles became the “new people” and Is-

rael was abandoned by God because the Jews rejected the gospel of Christ. He makes no reference to the remnant of Israel in the 120 Jewish disciples ... or to the fact that God does not lie – so, He would not have abandoned Israel and left her for a “new people.” He also does not address the division of Church missions to the “circumcised” (that is: all of Israel) and “Gentiles” undertaken by Peter and Paul (Gal. 2:7-9) respectively.

Important Prophetic Pronouncements

Isaiah 54, 55

Read Isaiah 54. This is a contrast between the large number of Gentiles as opposed to the small number of Israelites (v. 1). What is Israel encouraged to do in the future (v. 2)? Why (v. 3)? What is meant by the expression: “Your seed shall inherit the Gentiles”? Do you think that this is the basis of Paul’s comment in Romans 11:7-29? What is the Lord God’s promise in Isaiah 54:4-10? Think that through thoroughly before you go any farther. It is the groundwork for the rest of our discussion about whether or not God lies.

Let me also remind you of something from the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 13:15-17; 15:18-21. The Lord God promised Abraham that He would give Abraham and his seed the land forever. All that his eye could see was to be Abraham’s and his seed’s forever. Genesis 15:18-21 represents the intended boundaries of the “Promised Land.” Genesis 17:18-21 shows that the Lord God counted only Isaac’s seed as the one who would inherit the covenant (see Gen. 25:5, 19-26; 26:1-5, 24). Jacob, the younger of Isaac’s two sons, inherited the covenant after Isaac’s death (Gen. 32:24-30; 35:9-12). Make note that his name was later changed to Israel by the Lord God.

Genesis 48, 49 recounts the death of Jacob (Israel). He names Joseph (his firstborn son with Rachel) as his heir (Gen. 49:1-4). He adopts Joseph’s two sons (who are half Israelite/half Egyptian) as his own sons (vv. 5, 6). In Genesis 49, Israel blesses the rest of his sons. Verse 28 says: “All these are the twelve tribes of Israel” (emphases added). The families that were produced by those 12 tribes make up the nation of Israel with whom the Lord God entered the “marriage” covenant (Ex. 19:5, 6).

Imagine, please, how that elect family was reduced in size because of her sins against the Lord God and His covenant with them. Those “cut off” from the Lord God were treated as though they were Gentiles. Their modern-day descendants do not know any differently. Only a faithful remnant remains at present. But ... Isaiah 54 teaches us that the Lord God is going to reclaim Israel as His people and effect an amazing thing among “the children of the married wife” (v. 1). In v. 2, He admonishes them to be prepared for an unimaginable spurt of growth because her population is going to be greatly increased. Remember His comments in Genesis about descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, the stars in the heavens, and the sand upon the seashores. *This prophecy signals a time when the fulfilment of those promises will come to full bloom* (see Heb. 11:13, 39).

Verses 4, 5 are a message about redemption – a time when Israel will be cleaned up through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: her Husband and Messiah (who was the Lord God of the OT). Now read Isaiah 54:6 through Isaiah 55:13 because it is all the same “fabric” in Isaiah’s prophecy. What does this have to do with Israel inheriting the Gentiles?

According to *Strong’s* #3423, the Hebrew word is yarash, which *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, 4th Printing) defines in definition 1b as:

take possession of. esp[ecially] by force, have as a possession, often with the col-lat[eral] idea of taking in place of others, succeeding to, inheriting (p. 439).

What does this mean? There is coming a time when the Lord God is going to specifically identify the “lost tribes of the House of Israel” to the world. *Israel never possessed forever all of the land Abraham walked upon and saw*. That is the point of Hebrews 11:13, 39. Many of the Israelites (example: the Jews) have been sorely mistreated as a result of their rebellion against the Lord God (see Deut. 28:15-68).

Notice especially Deuteronomy 28:37 where the Lord God says that Israel “will become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all the nations” if she was not obedient to the covenant

requirements. In other words, she will be held in contempt, ridiculed, and used as the butt of people's slurs and jokes. That is not just for the *Jews*.

He continues in v. 65 to say: "Among these nations you shall have no ease, neither shall the sole of your foot have rest." He intends that Israel will repent of her rebellion so she can be redeemed and made whole again. Isaiah 54, 55 is a prophetic signal that such will be the case (see Isa. 55:11; Matt. 5:17). All of this portends the types of punishment found in the Lord God's warnings in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Ezekiel 36

Now read Ezekiel 36 in its entirety. It is an answer by the Lord God to Isaiah's prophecy in 54 and 55. Make note of this basic account of what happened to Israel as punishment for her sins ... and what the Lord God has planned for her in the future. *If you leave out this information from your "scholarly" theology and push a theological agenda that denies or contradicts this prophetic information, then you will change the truth of God into a lie, or exchange it for a lie!*

Note in vv. 1-5 that the Lord God speaks against the heathen, Gentile enemies of Israel. They will have taken Israel's holy places and claimed them for their own – including the land that He had promised to Abraham and his "seed" through Isaac. They will have enslaved portions of Israel and treated them with great prejudice and dishonor. The Lord God vows retribution (punishment for evil done) upon them.

All of this is the prelude to what Isaiah had earlier prophesied to Israel about preparing to:

Enlarge the place of your tent[s], and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitations: spare not, lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes; for you shall break forth on the right hand and on the left; and *your seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited*" (Isa. 54:2, 3; emphases added).

In vv. 6-11, Ezekiel prophesies essentially the same thing Isaiah had prophesied as much as 100

years before. The Lord God laments the fact that Israel has "borne the shame of the heathen" (v. 6), but He says that the heathen will bear their own measure of shame for the way they have treated Israel (v. 7). In vv. 8-11, Israel is told that her "enlargement" is coming, and they shall understand from it that He is the Lord God of Israel. Notice how He uses the term *inheritance* in v. 12. He is telling Israel that the Gentiles will take possession of her land. *But* ... He tells Israel that there is coming a time when the taunts and derisions of the heathen will no longer be heard against her (vv. 13-15).

In vv. 16-20, the Lord God recounts how Israel *defiled* the land He had given her (read Lev. 18, especially vv. 24-30). Pay close attention to v. 20 where He charges Israel with having *profaned* His holy name (also ... remember our previous discussion about Israel having been called by God's name). This verse sets up an explanation about why the Lord God is so intent on reclaiming Israel for Himself as His "wife."

Now read aloud to yourself vv. 21-24. He says that His actions, according to this prophecy, are *not for Israel's sake, but for His own name's sake*. Why? Because of what that name *means* as far as His *holiness, blamelessness, and lovingkindness* are concerned (Eph. 1:4). The Gentiles came to *despise* Him because Israel *pretended* to be as "holy" as He is holy. Their actions actually showed gross disrespect and contempt for sacred things (that is: *profanation*). Verse 23 says that He not only will recover the *sanctity* of His holy name, but both Israel and the Gentiles will come to *know* that He is the Lord. How?

BDB shows that the term *sanctify*, in this context, means that He will show Himself to be *sacred* and *majestic* (p. 873). Of course, that could happen if He merely revealed Himself in all of His glory and splendor. That is not what He is saying in this context. Verse 24 explains how this will happen: "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and *I will bring you into your own land*" (emphasis added). Present-day "Israel" is *not* the fulfillment of this prophecy.

This prophecy involves finally giving to *all* of Israel *all of the land promised to Abraham* in Genesis 15:18-21. You might well remember Bright's claim (on p. 19, col. A, 3rd para. above) where he

stresses that the term *Kingdom* is *not* descriptive of "...so many square miles of territory with geographical frontiers – it is *people*" (emphases added). Ezekiel 36 plainly states that it *does include territory* ... contrary to what Bright wrote.

It also reflects the Lord God's claim in Isaiah 55:11 that He does not speak His words in vain. That being the case, He could not be made a fool of by *divorcing* Himself from Israel because He had spoken the words of Exodus 19:5, 6, Isaiah 54, 55, and Jeremiah 31:22-37. Why? Beyond the divorce there is forgiveness and grace and a determination to return "to the work of [His] hands" (Job 14:15). The *divorce* was purposeful and instructive for Israel about that very thing. They have to be *taught* that He means what He says.

Instead of using the term *sanctify*, some translations other than the *KJV* use the word *vindication* in Ezekiel 36:23 (examples = *Modern Language*: "I will *vindicate* My great name," and *RSV*: "I will *vindicate* the holiness of my great name"). *The Jerusalem Bible* says: "I will display the holiness of my name." *Moffatt* says: "I will uphold my high honor."

Vindication is the act of clearing someone of blame or suspicion. His *name* has been blasphemed among the heathens because of Israel's disobedience. A good example is found in Exodus 32:7-14. When the Lord God threatened to destroy all of Israel except Moses' family because of their idolatry and sexual abandon so soon after the exodus from Egypt, Moses warned Him of the *ridicule* that would be brought against His holy name if He were to do such a thing (vv. 12-14). The Lord God avoided the blame and suspicion by changing His mind about His proposed action against Israel.

In Psalm 74:22, the psalmist implores the Lord God to stand up for His own cause. Read the entire psalm for the context. When men *change* God's truth into a lie, or *exchange* God's truth for the lie (Rom. 1:25), they violate a central concept revealed to Moses and supported by Jesus Christ (who had only the Old Testament Scriptures to which to refer): "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of Lord" (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). Why? Because all things are held together by the power of His *word* (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3), then He must vindicate His *name* because it represents the su-

preme power in all of creation. It is important to understand Exodus 20:7 in this context.

Changing His word about a specific piece of territory *on the earth* into a metaphor for *heaven* is a grievous mistake because it causes men to accept the *lie* in place of God's *truth*. The process supplants God's truth with *another* gospel (2 Cor. 2:4; Matt. 24:4, 5). We can ill afford to make God a liar through such misdeeds. Israel was guilty of this when she sought out knowledge about how the pagans worshipped their "gods" (Deut. 12:29-32; Jer. 19:1-5; 32:26-35).

Read very carefully Ezekiel 36:24-31. The salient points of these verses are plainly evident: (1) He will gather Israel from all the nations to which she has been dispersed through the ages; (2) He will cleanse her from her filthiness and idolatrous ways; (3) He will give her a "new heart" and put His *spirit* in her so that she can walk in His statutes and judgments (see also Jer. 31:31-34); and (4) He will take her back as His people; she will accept Him as her God to whom she will be "re-married."

Give grave consideration to this prophetic revelation, as well as to Jeremiah 31:27-34. These prophecies reveal the process by which Israel (the *race*) will become *spiritualized through Jesus Christ!* Make no mistake about this: the Israelite *race* will be washed clean by the waters of baptism as she repents and returns to the Lord God. As a result of that spiritual cleansing, she will be given the gift of His Holy Spirit and once again take upon herself His holy name. She will be a *new, spiritual Israel* (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6; 11:1-29) who will be instrumental in bringing the Gentiles who have remained unconverted into the true faith (Deut. 4:1-13). God is *not* calling out an *amorphous* group of people whom He will subsequently name the "new, spiritual Israel."

As a result of this great *reconciliation* (see 2 Cor. 5:17-21), Israel will understand the shame that she brought upon herself and her "Husband" through her "iniquities and ... abominations" (Ezek. 36:31). Verse 32 is the capstone of this revelation: *The Lord God is not going to do this for Israel's sake*. It will be an act of *vindicating His holy name* (Ex. 20:7). The *punishment, conversion, and spiritual cleansing* are for Israel's sake (read Hebrews 12). The remainder of this part of Ezekiel's prophecy shows the *fulfillment* spoken of

by Peter in Acts 3 – words that he and John spoke to the Israelitish Jews at the Temple in Jerusalem. Read Peter’s comments in Acts 2:14-40. To whom was he speaking (vv. 14, 39, 40)? *There’s your clue!*

Ezekiel 37

You would do well to read Ezekiel 37 in its entirety. The salient points of this chapter are rather plain-spoken. *First*, the Lord God is going to resurrect Israel (the *race*) from the dead into physical, *human* bodies – not the *spirit* body that will be given to the firstfruit Christians at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:50-54; Rev. 7).

This Ezekiel 37 resurrection will take place at the end of the 1,000-year completion of the reconciliation of all things through Jesus Christ and His firstfruit saints (Acts 3:19-21). The effects of this 1,000-year ministry can be seen in the prophecies in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 11:15; Daniel 2:44, 45; 7:13-27; Zechariah 14:1-16 (note especially v. 9); and Isaiah 2:1-5. This is a chain of events from the return of Jesus Christ, the so-called “Battle of Armageddon” (Rev. 16:16), and the beginning of the 1,000-year completion of the ministry of reconciliation.

Second, all of these prophecies refer to the victory of Jesus Christ and His firstfruit saints over the kingdoms of the world. Jesus Christ will become the King over *all the earth* (Zech. 14:9; Isa. 2:2, 3) and rule over a *human* population (see Zech. 4:16 re: the *survivors*). During that 1,000-year period of time, Jesus Christ and the saints will deal with any surviving Israelites (from all the tribes of Israel). This is when the expansion of their numbers and their return to the “Promised Land” will truly begin ... as well as the continuing vindication of the Lord God’s cause and name. *None of that is the subject of Ezekiel 37.* However, you must understand something very important relative to that first resurrection. That is the third salient point.

Third, in Matthew 19:23-30, Jesus Christ appointed His 12 Jewish disciples to sit as kings over the 12 tribes of Israel (the *race*) *in His Kingdom*. David will have been resurrected in the *first* resur-

rection at the return of Jesus Christ (see Acts 2:22-34; Psa. 17:15) – along with a representative number of *Israelites* from the 12 tribes who had already been “Christianized” (see Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5). At the *end* of the 1,000 years (Rev. 20:5, 6), the remainder of the Israelites (Ezek. 37) will be raised from the dead in a *physical* human body.

David, long since changed from flesh to spirit at Christ’s return, will be their king under Jesus Christ, and the 12 Disciples will be kings over individual tribes of physical Israel under David. They will have ruled with Jesus Christ for 1,000 years and helped Him to achieve the great victories described in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28: the destruction of all of God’s enemies and sin and death (see also Rev. 20:14, 15). It will be into that kind of world that these *remaining* Israelites in Ezekiel 37 and others will be raised from the dead at the end of the 1,000 years.

Finally, there will be a period of time before the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17-25; 66:22, 23; Rev. 21:1) during which all involved in this second resurrection will be able to learn God’s unmitigated truth and have an opportunity to become part of the salvation process through Jesus Christ (see Rev. 20:11-13; we have plenty of material on our website that explains this). The fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:22-34 and Ezekiel 36 will have long since begun (see Matt. 26:26-28).

The continuing ministry of reconciliation after that second resurrection will mark the *completion* of the process of cleansing Israel (the race) so she can once again be the Lord God’s people. She will have been returned to her place as God’s true *ekklesia* and re-married to Jesus Christ (Rev. 19:7-9). The “Christianized” Gentiles will have been “grafted” into that “holy root” (Rom. 11:12-29) and will have become citizens of the *new, spiritual Israel*. The Gentiles, indeed, will have been blessed by the “seed” of Abraham: Jesus Christ!

If you do away with God’s plan, as many have done, then you will make Him a liar and besmirch His holy name. If you have fallen for such “theology,” then you might want to re-think what you have done and consider another path.

“Scholarly” Problems

There are “scholarly” problems about which we must be made aware. Many of these problems derive from not following the principle-centered theology revealed in Scripture. When that is combined with a spiritual “blindness” that has been imposed by God, then the effects of such a combination increase exponentially. In short, it causes there to exist “a way that seems right, but the ends of it is death” (Prov. 14:12; author’s paraphrase).

Now let’s go to the next step in Bright’s reasoning. I mean no disrespect or animus toward the scholars I quote in this discussion. I will simplify the discussion so as to cut down on the confusion. Compare the following two quotes by Bright in his book *The Kingdom of God*:

“The New Testament announces with one voice and with unshakable assurance that all the hope of Israel has become present fact in Jesus Christ” (p. 215; emphases added).

The true Israel – the true people of the Kingdom – are not those who are Israelites by race... but those individual men, however lowly and weak, who have in heart and deed signified their obedience to the calling of God (p. 220; emphases added).

What are we to make of these comments? How does Scripture answer their claims? The objective of this article, therefore, is to use some of these “scholarly” problems to demonstrate even more in depth that God is not a liar. Unless and until you come to understand the full force of the truth behind that principle revealed in God’s word, you will work with a very limited understanding of God’s truth.

The “Salient” Points

Note again the salient points made by Bright: (1) the “one voice” of the New Testament; (2) the “unshakable assurance” involved; (3) “all the hope of Israel” (presumably: the race); and (4) “present fact in Jesus Christ.” At “face value,” these four points would agree with Matthew 5:17 because they posit, in so many words, that nothing changed in the Lord God’s plan when He sealed the “new” covenant during His last Passover with His disciples (Matt. 26:26-28), which has Jeremiah

31:22-37 as a prophetic antecedent. It is extraordinarily important that you give grave regard to such Old Testament prophecies. How can the Lord God fail to fulfill them?

However, the “face value” is a bit deceptive when you learn “the rest of the story.” Pay very close attention to these conspicuous, prominent claims made by theological “scholars” and others. Many unquestioningly cling to mainstream “Christian” religious traditions. Many are spiritually “blinded” and are led astray from God’s truth due the God-imposed inability to understand it. Continue to remind yourself that God is not a liar.

It is important to understand that Matthew 26:26-28 was Jesus Christ's notice that Jeremiah's prophecy (31:22-37) *was now going to begin to accomplish the purpose for which it was uttered*: Israel (the race) is now going to be the recipients of the long-planned new covenant. How was this "new covenant" going to affect this race of people?

Bright's comments show preference to an amorphous Church (without definite form ... as compared to a specific race of people). That concept is not congruent with the expression "Church in the wilderness" spoken of by Stephen (Acts 7:38). The amorphous concept is common among 32,000+ "Christian" denominations because Scriptures like John 3:16 refer to "whosoever." Stephen's expression is not an indication that God has abandoned all that He promised Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Israelite race. It demonstrates His plan to also bless other nations, races, and ethnic groups through Abraham's "seed." So, there is more to consider in the "mix" of this discussion than mainstream, denominational, theological traditions. Some "Christian" voices, in their opinions, believe that they have figured out the "secret" to the "mystery." Note the following.

Harry Allen Ironside, a Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, pastor, and author who pastored Moody Church in Chicago from 1929 to 1948, published his book *The Mysteries of God* in 1906. He was part of a movement called *Dispensationalism*. I wrote an article about this movement in the July – September 2017 issue of *Spirit and Truth* to which you can refer on our website www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org for further information.

The Dispensationalists put a peculiar "spin" on this issue that has infiltrated mainstream Christianity. If the mish-mash of 32,000+ "Christian" denominations is not enough obfuscation, then H. A. Ironside's dispensationalist theology adds more than enough to that theological confusion.

In the chapter "The Great Mystery of Christ and the Church" (pp. 50-60), he cloaks his information in a statement made by the Apostle Paul in Romans 16:25, 26 regarding "the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest..." At this point, I want you to read v. 26 and note to whom this mys-

tery was made known "by the Scriptures of the prophets." Watch the following discussion for signs of obfuscation setting in on Ironside's remarks.

Ironside says that this "mystery" was directly revealed to Paul by Jesus Christ and not learned "from the former Scriptures" (that is: not from the Old Testament; Ibid; p. 52). In fact, he uses an alternate, unnamed translation that reads: "through prophetic writings." Then, Ironside changes the sense of this Scripture to mean: "the mystery is made known *in the prophetic writings of the apostle himself*" (Ibid; emphases added). That statement radically changes the meaning of this Scripture. Does this verse indicate that Paul was the intended "prophet" to whom this mystery was revealed? No.

I read several translations that I have in my personal library, and none of them makes reference to the source of the alternate translation used by Ironside. These include: *KJV, MLB, RSV, NIV, Jerusalem, Moffat, Living Bible, Good News for Modern Man*, and *Luther*. In his *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1957; p. 242), William Barclay translates the expression as follows: "...as the writings of the prophets said it would be..."

The exegesis portion of *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954; vol. 9; pp. 666, 667) discloses that scholars express "common recognition" that Paul did not write this information in his doxology ... based on the claim that "Romans" was originally composed of 14 or 15 chapters ... and definitely not 16 chapters. That is still disputed among scholars ... along with the idea that Romans 16, *in toto*, was written pseudonymously – that is: by someone using Paul's name.

Arguments get even more difficult when you understand that there is not simply a single canonization (a generally agreed-upon official list of the books) of the Bible. The following list represents several different canonizations in our world today: *Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Coptic Orthodox, Orthodox Tewahedo Traditions*, and *Syrian Christian*. They do not contain the same "books" or translations of the same "books." But ... they are similar ... you should know that differences make a difference. That is not difficult to understand.

“Mainstream” Christianity uses several translations derived from a set of “official” books of the Bible set out by the Roman Catholics in the mid-to-late 300s AD. However, over the next several hundred years, several different “Church” councils amended that “official” list according to more sectarian preferences. Those sectarian preferences add considerably to the obfuscation problem.

As it presently stands in most “acceptable” translations, Romans 16:26 indicates that the prophets of the Old Testament were made aware of this “mystery” ... but its fuller understanding had been “kept secret since the world began.” Paul was prepared by God to discuss its fuller meaning. Paul understood it to have been derived from Old Testament prophecies. It was not new information revealed only to him. It is not difficult to understand that ... if you are able to read and understand plain statements in several prophecies.

Samples of “Prophetic” Writings

Read Genesis 17:19-21; 26:1-5; 35:9-12. The Abraham-Isaac-Jacob-Israel succession of the covenant was to also be a blessing to all nations! Now read Deuteronomy 4:1-13, 20. Israel was to be that “light upon a hill” that brings “light” to the nations around her so that they, too, would come to worship God in spirit and in truth. This was the gospel that was preached to Israel through Moses, the greatest prophet before Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:11-21). Galatians 3:8 confirms that this gospel was preached to Abraham by the Lord God when He told Abraham that all nations will be blessed through his “seed” ... a responsibility which ultimately fell upon Israel (the race) to accomplish.

That said, there are many points made by Ironside that must be considered in this discussion. The following is a sample from among them:

That a doctrine so clearly revealed in the Scriptures could have become so utterly lost is only to be accounted for by the Judaizing of the Church, and the consequent minding of earthly things that beclouded the heavenly ones. (Ibid; p. 51; emphases added).

The “doctrine” of which Ironside speaks as being “so clearly revealed in the Scriptures” has to do with the claim that the moment Jesus Christ died on the cross caused “...all the glories of the kingdom spoken of by Old Testament prophets [to be held] in abeyance [that is: temporarily suspended]” (Ibid; p. 54; emphases added). This follows his assertion that “...the prophetic clock stopped at Calvary” (Ibid.). This is a serious claim!

From there, he makes the giant leap to conclude:

He [God] takes out from Jew and Gentile, who united to crucify Him [Jesus Christ], a [united] people who shall be so near to Him forever as to be called His body and His bride! (Ibid; emphases added).

In this, he tacitly makes of the Church an amorphous body of “Christians” who will inherit all of the Lord God’s promises in place of (instead of) the Israelite race descended from Abraham. If that is true, then it appears that God is a liar because He has said one thing and will do completely another. Do you believe that God is a liar?

That kind of “shell game” is the subject of Malachi 3:6: “For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed” (KJV; see Isa. 1:9; emphases added). The Hebrew word translated into English as “change” (machalatsah; BDB, p. 323a) means that He does not change His mind like one changes his wardrobe (see also James 1:17; Heb. 13:6). If He does, then Israel (the race) would have been destroyed instead of having the opportunity to repent and return to Him as His chosen people: His Body and Bride.

Ironside also “muddies the waters” when he brings the “Judaizing of the Church” into the discussion. His accusation makes the Church no different from ancient Israel because she lost God’s truth when she tried to mix it with pagan trash – contrary to the “marriage covenant” laws (Ex. 20:1-7; Deut. 12:29-32; 1 Cor. 10:1-22). What is the problem here?

There are many forces that have brought to bear pressure against “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). One of the most prominent in the New Testament was Gnosticism, which is a mixture of God’s revealed truth with

pagan religious concepts. Paul discusses this problem in I Corinthians 15:12-54 ... as does John in his three letters. The other was “false Christianity” in its many different forms (see 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15; Gal. 1:6-9; and Col. 2:8-23). These refer to “Christian” *heresies* that *masqueraded* as true Christianity. Note in 2 Corinthians 11:4 Paul’s warning about *another* Jesus, *another* gospel, *another* spirit.

It is true that the Jewish Sect known as *Christians* originally had a decidedly *Jewish* character (see Acts 15:5; 24:5; 28:22). That is not a strange thought. It is also true that God was still dealing with all of *physical* Israel (the *race*), through Jesus Christ, according to her sins wherever she might have been scattered throughout the world (Jer. 30:11; 31:10). For what purpose? To *continue* to bring her (all of her *descendants* throughout their future generations) to repentance so she can be cleaned up, purified, and made acceptable as the Bride of Jesus Christ (Hos. 2; Eph. 1:6). Revelation 7:1-8 and 14:1-5 are evidence of this.

Ironside also shows his ignorance when he conflates the terms “Israel” and “Jews.” His grossly mistaken assumption is that *they are one and the same*. Here is a simple statement that should help you to understand the difference: “Israel” is the *whole* nation (*race*) descended in 12 tribes from Jacob (read Genesis 49). Those 12 tribes were broken up into two “houses” after the death of Solomon: the “House of Israel” and the “House of Judah” (read 1 Kings 11, 12). Here is the statement: *All Jews are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews*. Read 2 Kings 16:5, 6 and all of chapter 17. It is equally true to say that all *Georgians* are citizens of the United States of America; but ... not all citizens of *the United States of America* are Georgians.

The “Jews” of the New Testament were composed of the tribe of Judah and two other tribes from Israel: *Benjamin* (Paul: see Rom. 11:1) and *Levi* (Barnabas: see Acts 4:36). The “Letter to the Hebrews” was written primarily to those who were “Jews” ... but the term *Hebrew* does not exclude other tribes of the nation of Israel. Read Genesis 11:16 (*Eber* is the father of the *Hebrews* ... from whom the nation of Israel is also descended). All the other tribes of Israel composed the “House of Israel.” Read James 1:1. To whom does he address

his letter? Now, read Ezekiel 37. What do these things tell you?

No one born before Jacob’s fourth-born son, Judah, with his first wife, Leah (read Gen. 29 – especially vv. 31-35), was a “Jew.” Not Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. The “Jews” are the descendants of *Judah*. Jesus was from the tribe of *Judah*; so, He was a *Jew*. Paul and Barnabas were *ethnic* Jews because they were members of a group of people who had similar beliefs and customs – and Judah was the dominant tribe of the three. Even Gentiles can be “Jews” when they adopt the beliefs and customs of the Jews (example: Sammy Davis, Jr.).

In addition to that, it cannot be denied that the pagan Gentiles had an equally detrimental effect on the commission of the Church to preach and teach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15; Matt. 24:14). The New Testament is full of examples! Read, for example, 1 Corinthians 10:21. Paul wrote this because the *Gentile* Christians were not *totally* removed from *their* pagan past. The “mystery” would not have been totally revealed to them until they had repented and grown up spiritually.

Read Paul’s comment in 1 Corinthians 2:6: “We speak wisdom among them that are *perfect*” (*KJV*; emphases added). The Greek term is *teleios*. This word describes those who are *spiritually mature* ... not *beginners* and *novices* (see 1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:13, 14). Such comments by Paul imply that you can be a Christian and still not understand God’s “mysteries” ... even when they are explained to you. You have to be spiritually mature.

Take a lesson from Isaiah 6:8-13 and Matthew 13:9-17. Over 800 years later, the “eyes” and “ears” of these Israelites were still “blind” and “deaf” by the *judgment* of the Lord God. *Judaizing* would have had a limited effect on the *teleios* Jewish Christians. But, Jesus shows that a *remnant* of Israel had been preserved: His 12 disciples and a small group of others (see Acts 1:15).

Ironside disagreed with the commentators and expositors of his day who taught that:

God is extending to the Gentile the same grace He offers the Jew, so that the former, by closing with His offer of grace, becomes a sharer in the kingdom promised to Israel (Ibid; p. 56).

Here, Ironside admits that the Lord God promised the kingdom *to Israel* (in his mind: the “Jews”). The above comment seems to amount to what he calls “Judaizing the Church.” However, he begins to offer a “yes ... but” condition that is ridiculous in so many ways:

Paul was the chosen vessel of God to make known that ... Israel’s blessings are *earthly*, and *for time* [author comment: presumably: until the “dispensation of the fulness of time” in Eph. 1:10 when, as Ironside claims, His “mystery” will reveal otherwise]. ... The *mystery*, on the other hand, is *spiritual*, and *belongs to heaven*. A *break in God’s ways* having come in, He now makes known His *hidden* purpose to take *out* of *Jew* and Gentile a people for *heaven* who are to be one with Christ for eternity (Ibid; pp. 56, 57; emphases added).

This is a masterpiece of *obfuscation*. Ironside finds a way to avoid making God a liar in His relationship to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation Israel (the *race* whom he calls “Jews”). His solution is to interpret God’s word so that there will be a *division* of God’s “blessings” into *earthly* and *heavenly* blessings (“a *break* in God’s ways”) so that God can still be true to His spiritual character.

Therefore, the calling of the Gentiles into His Church can be neatly dealt with by putting the “Christianized” *Jews* and Gentiles into *heaven* forever with Christ as His *Bride* and *Church* and putting *Israel* (the *race* he calls “Jews”) on the *earth* with the Gentiles who did not qualify to go to *heaven* with the “Christianized Jews.” Here is what he says was revealed to Paul: “Israel’s blessings are *earthly*, and for time. When they enter upon them, the Gentiles shall bow before the Jew, and own [acknowledge] his [the Jew’s] superior place (Ibid; p. 56; emphases added). He does not discuss the *inviolability* of the Abrahamic covenant ... possibly because he believed Abraham to have been a “Jew.” He was not.

Ironside makes the following charge against “Christianity” in general: “The *heavenly* calling has been lost sight of, and practically given up for an *earthly* one” (Ibid; p. 17; emphases added). What is wrong with this picture? The failure of

“Christianity” in general, in his mind, was that they were not privy to this “secret mystery” that, supposedly, was revealed only to Paul. What does he believe that “secret mystery” revealed to Paul to have been?

His following comment tells us a great deal about his concept. Note this:

When “the dispensation of the fulness of times” has come in, *all God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled*. They [Israel] will be *blessed on earth*. The Christian will be *blessed in heaven*. Christ will be the centre [sic] of a redeemed universe, and His bride the sharer of all His acquired glories (Ibid; p. 57; emphases added).

Here he patently says that the “promises” to Israel were *never* intended to be in *heaven*. In that, I agree with him because the reward of the “saved” is *nowhere* in Scripture designated to be in *heaven*. If it were, why did Jesus teach Matthew 5:5: “The meek shall *inherit the earth*” (emphases added)? Is it a bad thing to be meek (see Num. 12:3; Matt. 11:29; 1 Pet. 3:4)?

Whether it is from Bright, Ladd, or Ironside, there is a “scholarly problem” that infects various teachings that ultimately make God a liar. How ... and why? They pay little attention to what the Old Testament reveals as *God’s plan for Israel through the Abrahamic covenant*. They consider that various factors have arisen that *cancel* the Lord God’s covenant with Abraham and Israel. They do not understand the role that God’s *grace* and *mercy* have played in the continued relationship between the Lord God (the One who became Jesus Christ; see Heb. 2:16 *KJV*) and Israel, the *race*.

A Simple Solution

Let me attempt to make it simple from Paul’s letter to the Galatians. The solution is contained in one verse in Galatians 3:29: “If you belong to Jesus Christ, then *you are Abraham’s seed*, and heirs *according to the promises*” (emphases added). Promises to whom? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the nation Israel (the *race*). Gentiles inheriting *with* them does not make God’s *ekklesia* an amorphous body. It does not make the “Promised Land” a *type* of

that which it represents – that is: *heaven*. *Heaven* is not the *spiritual reality* of the “Promised Land.” *There is no metaphoric comparison involved.*

Let me introduce you to the term *syncretize*. If you remember how to identify word parts for guessing the meaning of a strange word, then you will pick out *sync* (happening at the same time or in the same manner) and *ize* (to make). Note this definition of the noun form *syncretism* that applies to this discussion:

Flagrant *compromise* in religion or philosophy: eclecticism [selected from various sources] that is *illogical* or leads to *inconsistency*: *uncritical* acceptance of *conflicting* or *divergent* beliefs or principles (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc; “syncretism”; emphases added)

Why do I introduce this term to you at this point in the discussion? Read the following carefully:

As Christianity spread throughout the Hellenic world, an increasing number of *church leaders* were educated in Greek philosophy. The dominant philosophical traditions of the Greco-Roman world then were Stoicism, Platonism, and Epicureanism. *Stoicism and, particularly, Platonism were readily incorporated into Christian ethics and Christian theology.*

Christian assimilation of Hellenic philosophy was anticipated by Philo and other Greek-speaking Alexandrian Jews. Philo’s blend of Judaism, Platonism, and Stoicism strongly influenced Christian Alexandrian writers like Origen and Clement of Alexandria, as well as, in the Latin world, Ambrose of Milan.

One early Christian writer of the 2nd and early 3rd century, Clement of Alexandria, demonstrated Greek thought in writing, “Philosophy has been given to the Greeks *as their own kind of Covenant, their foundation for the philosophy of Christ* ... the philosophy of the Greeks ... contains the

basic elements of that genuine and perfect knowledge which is higher than human ... even upon those spiritual objects.” (Miscellanies 6. 8)

The Church historian Eusebius suggested, essentially, in his preparation for the Gospel that *Greek philosophy, although in his view derivative, was concordant with Hebrew notions.* Augustine of Hippo, who ultimately systematized Christian philosophy, wrote in the 4th and early 5th century, “But when I read those books of the Platonists I was taught by them to seek incorporeal truth, so I saw your ‘invisible things, understood by the things that are made’” (Confessions 7. 20). (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_and_Hellenistic_philosophy; emphases added)

This is a frank admission that the post-Apostolic “Church” turned to *pagan* religious and philosophical concepts and *syncretized* them into the truth that God had revealed in His word. What is the difference between that and Deuteronomy 12:29-32 and Jeremiah 10:1-16? The difference should be very obvious. This act by the post-Apostolic “Church” made her no different from sinful, rebellious Israel (see Jer. 19:5; 32:35). The relationship of Greek religion and *philosophy blended with* Christian religion and philosophy was an illogical, inconsistent, uncritical, conflicting, and divergent *compromise* with paganism (see 1 Cor. 10:20-22).

Part of that compromise was the use of *metaphoric* interpretations of Old Testament Scripture by which “Israel” became a *metaphor* for the *Christian Church* and the “Promised Land” became a *metaphor* for *heaven*. An example of this is found in the old hymnal standard “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks” by Samuel Stennett:

On Jordan’s stormy bank I stand and cast
a wistful eye to Canaan’s fair and happy
land where my possessions lie. I am
bound for the promised land ... who will
come and go with me? I am bound for the
promised land.

This is a blended “Christian” *metaphor* for going to *heaven* ... not actually crossing the actual Jordan River to possess *Canaan*, the actual “Land of Promise” (read Joshua 4).

Romans 11:11-29 reveals four more important parts of the solution: (1) the *Christianized* Gentiles are being used by God to make Israel jealous; (2) the Gentiles are being *grafted into* the “holy root,” which is the “remnant [of Israel] according to the election of grace” of whom Paul speaks in vv. 1-5 – which will, in fact, make the Gentiles to become citizens of Israel (the *race*); (3) whatever “blindness” Israel presently has will be taken away when the “*fulness* (Greek = “full number”) of the Gentiles has been reached” (v. 25); and (4) Jesus Christ has a covenant with Israel (the *race*), that is “without repentance,” *to save them and deliver them from their sins* (vv. 27-29).

In vv. 11, 12, 30-32, Paul specifically says that the *Gentiles* enjoy their access to salvation through Jesus Christ because God “*concluded* Israel in unbelief in order to have mercy upon *all*” (see also Gal. 3:22; emphases added). The Greek word is *sugkleio*, which means that God has presently “imprisoned” them in disobedience for instructional and redemptive purposes and has allowed their sinfulness to reap the consequences involved (Rom. 11:32; see also Rom. 1:24, 26, 28 with reference to Lev. 26:40-46). In Galatians 3:22, it means that God has imprisoned *everything* under the power of sin so that the consequences of being sinful will be suffered (see Rom. 6:23; 8:20-23). Of course, Jesus Christ came to *redeem* all of creation from the power and imprisonment of sin (*BAG*; p. 781; see Phil. 2:9-12; Col. 1:20; 1 Cor. 15:24-28)).

The Gentiles, therefore, are to exercise mercy toward Israel – especially toward the “holy root” *remnant* into which they are being grafted – because such great mercy has been shown to them. Nowhere in the promises of God did He plan to give *heaven* to the Christians and the *earth* to Israel (mistakenly identified as “Jews” by Ironside and other Dispensationalists). Such a notion is neither theological nor “scholarly.

Doing Away with God’s Law (Col. 2:14)

One area in which people are accused of *Judaizing* the Church is with reference to keeping

God’s Law. Without very much serious consideration for Jesus Christ’s comment in Matthew 5:17-19, they prattle on about how Colossians 2:14 *proves* that God’s Law has been abolished for the New Testament Christian (whether or not they are Gentile). Why? It is commonly referred to as the “Jewish” law and “Mosaic” law. There, too, is a *conflation*: the blending of two or more things as though they are equal, or the same thing.

Moses was not from the tribe of *Judah*; he was a *Levite* (Ex. 2:1-10). Exodus 20:1 and Leviticus 23:1 show that the *Lord God* gave Moses *His Law* as part of the “marriage” covenant with the nation of Israel (12 tribes). The *Law* upon which that “marriage” was based is *the 10 Commandments*. So, that Law was neither “Jewish” nor “Mosaic” in origin. It is the Law of *God*. If you believe that anyone who obeys the 10 commandments and the seventh-day Sabbath and Holy Days is *Judaizing the Church*, then you have a serious problem in understanding Matthew 5:17-19, Mark 2:27, 28, Romans 3:31; 7:7, 12-14; and 1 Cor. 5:6-8; 11:20-29.

Understand this completely: *The death of Jesus Christ did not nail the 10 Commandments to the cross and annul them!* If it did, why did Paul write Romans 13:8-10? He mentions five of the last 10 Commandments and adds: “If there be any other commandment” (v. 9). He sums up his commentary by saying: “Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law” (v. 10). Is this any different from what Jesus Christ said in Matthew 22:34-40?

Even though Jesus summed up the 10 Commandments in two “great” commandments, He is plainly referencing the 10 because the lawyer’s question was: “*Which* is the great commandment *in the law?*” (emphases added). Jesus concluded His remarks by pointing out this: “On these *two* commandments hang *all the law and the prophets*” (v. 40; emphases added). Just in case you do not grasp the gravity of that statement, He was saying that the 10 Commandments, the statutes, judgments, and prophetic messages *depend on* man’s *unfettered* love for God and man’s *unfettered* love for fellow man relative to God’s love for mankind through Jesus Christ (John 3:16). That is not language that anticipates the *cancellation* of either the Law or the Prophets. In fact, His death did not ... at that moment ... fulfill the intentions of *all* the

Law and Prophets. Almost 2,000 years after His death, we continue to see both Law and Prophets active among mankind. For example: Christ has not yet returned to establish God's Kingdom on the earth. Zechariah 14 has not occurred. God still does not allow us to sin (1 John 3:4; Rom. 6:23).

If the *unfettered* love of God and fellow man, commanded in that Law, is *dissolved* or *nullified*, then there is *nothing* left that binds us together. If God's Law defines *sin* (Rom. 7:7) ... and the absence of God's Law produces a state-of-existence in which no thought or deed can be called a *transgression* against God or fellowman (Rom. 4:15) ... then we are left to the onslaught of anarchy, a lawless state of existence in which disorder and violence can run free and only the strongest survive.

I agree with Harold J. Berman, former Story Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, when he posits the following in his book, *The Interaction of Law and Religion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974):

...For St. Paul grace involved not a rejection of the values of the Mosaic law but, on the contrary, *an internalization of those values*. "The [Mosaic] law is in itself holy ... and the commandment is holy, just, and good" (Rom. 7:12).

The concept that grace excludes law no more withstands analysis than does the concept that *the law is dissolved in love or made irrelevant by faith*. All three concepts err in understanding the God-giveness of such basic legal values as equality of treatment, impartial adjudication, reciprocity of obligations, social responsibility, and many other values which Jesus summed up in the words justice, mercy, good faith. *Without them, love and faith and hope are deprived of their social context; they are up in the air* (pp. 98, 99; emphases added).

Berman makes a veiled reference to the new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31:22-37 when he explains that Paul spoke of the *internalization* of the holy, just, and good values of God's Law. Berman inserted "[Mosaic]" in Paul's Romans

7:12 comment. The Law has been shown to have been given *by the Lord God*; Moses was His scribe (Ex. 34:27) and messenger, not the originator (see Ex. 20:1 and Lev. 23:1 for examples). He also uses a veiled reference to Romans 3:31 in his comment about grace and faith not excluding law.

There is a *righteousness* in the Law that is fulfilled in the true believer as s/he grows in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (Gal 3:22-25). The *internalization* of the righteous values of the Law in no way whatsoever makes that Law void. If you think of the ramifications of Hebrews 8:8, Israel's refusal to live by and *internalize* the righteous values of God's Law was the equivalent of doing away with it – *nullifying it by default*. Refer to Deuteronomy 4:1-13; 5:29, and 6:25. What real value did the Lord God put upon the 10 covenant laws that He gave to Israel in order to bind Himself to her? Jeremiah 31:22-37 states His intent to make another effort to get Israel to comply with the demands of the covenant of "marriage."

Who Is the "New, Spiritual Israel"?

It should be plain by now that the Lord God is the divine being who became Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Peter 1:18-20). If Jesus Christ announced the "new covenant" during His last Passover observance with His disciples before His crucifixion (Matt. 26:26-28), then it follows that *Jeremiah 31:22-37* was on His mind. It also makes sense that Matthew 16:18 is an announcement that He is about to initiate measures by which He and His former "wife" ("the *ekklesia* in the wilderness": Acts 7:38) will be reconciled and ultimately remarried. By the same reasoning, it makes sense that the Pentecost observance in Acts 2 ... described by Peter as being a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 ... is the *beginning* of making the Holy Spirit available for Israel and Gentile believers to *internalize* God's Law (Acts 2:16-21). In all of this, you have clues to who the "new spiritual Israel" is, and ... it is *not* an *amorphous* body of believers (Rom. 11:1).

If the Law of God is to be *internalized* into the hearts and minds of *Israel* (Jer. 31:31-34), then she will become a *spiritual* people instead of a *carnal* people (Rom. 8). If Joel's prophecy shows the Lord God giving to Israel His Holy Spirit (Joel

2:21-32), then He plans to cause her to become a spiritual people. The Gentiles will be “grafted” into the “holy root” if they, by faith, also enter the “new covenant” with Jesus Christ ... a decision that will make them citizens of the Kingdom with Israel – in effect: “Israelites.”

Israel, in essence, will become a new people because, according to Acts 2:38, she will have to accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that will redeem her and make her acceptable in His sight. Coincidental to that profession of faith, she will have to repent of her sins (express sorrow and regret and change her mind about the way she thinks and acts). All of that sets the foundation for a new relationship with her God and Lord and “Husband.”

Finally, she will have to be baptized with water and spirit (John 3:3-8; Acts 1:5-8). Paul says in Romans 6:1-7 that water baptism symbolizes the death of the old person, as well as the resurrection of the new person (see also 2 Cor. 5:17). All of that is initially evidenced by the thoughts and actions of a spiritual-minded person who is still mortal. Remember that Jesus also spoke of being born again from flesh to spirit (John 3:6-8).

Paul addresses this matter in 1 Corinthians 15:50: “Flesh-and-blood cannot enter the ruling realm of God” (author’s paraphrase). In order for the new, spiritual Israel to be re-married to Jesus Christ (the Lord God and “Husband” of the OT), she must be changed from flesh to spirit in order to inherit an eternal position at the side of her Lord and Master and “Husband.” Otherwise, it would continue to be an “unequal yoking” as it originally was because temporary flesh is unequal to eternal spirit (see 2 Cor. 6:14). Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 the process for Israel and all others who desire to enter that ruling realm.

The salient points in Paul’s teaching should be plain: (1) the body that goes into the grave is not the body that will be resurrected; (2) the human body is mortal and corruptible (subject to death, decay and putrification); (3) there is a difference between the natural body and the spiritual body ... the natural body came first; the spiritual body will come with the return of Jesus Christ (for the first-fruits from the grave – v. 23); and (4) the spiritual body will be incorruptible (incapable of dissolving) and immortal (incapable of ever again dying).

You see the accomplishment of this goal for Israel in Revelation 19:7-9. We know that this is Israel because she is the only “wife” Jesus has ever had ... and He intends to bring her to repentance, clean her up, and re-marry her (Hos. 2:14-20; Isaiah 9:6, 7 and chapter 65). God is not a liar!

What is meant by the term “newness” in the Romans 6:4? The Greek term is kainotes, which is taken from the term kainos. Romans 7:6 gives a partial idea about the meaning in pointing out the “newness of spirit” as contrasted to the “oldness of the letter.” Paul’s point in Romans 6:4 is that water baptism should be followed by an entirely new spiritual approach to thought and deed. Kainos and kainotes, therefore, describe a condition that renders the old to be obsolete and replaced by a spirit that is qualitatively superior. In effect, it should issue forth as a completely superior new life (2 Cor. 5:17).

This is expected of the mortal human who undergoes repentance, water baptism, and receipt of God’s Holy Spirit. It represents a newness that is as though the old carnal mind has never before been used. Note Paul’s comment in Romans 8:12-15 ... noting the part where he tells us that we have to put to death the carnal mind (v. 13). That is how completely the break between carnality and spirituality is supposed to become. That is the process through which Israel will once again become the “wife” of the Lord God (Jesus Christ).

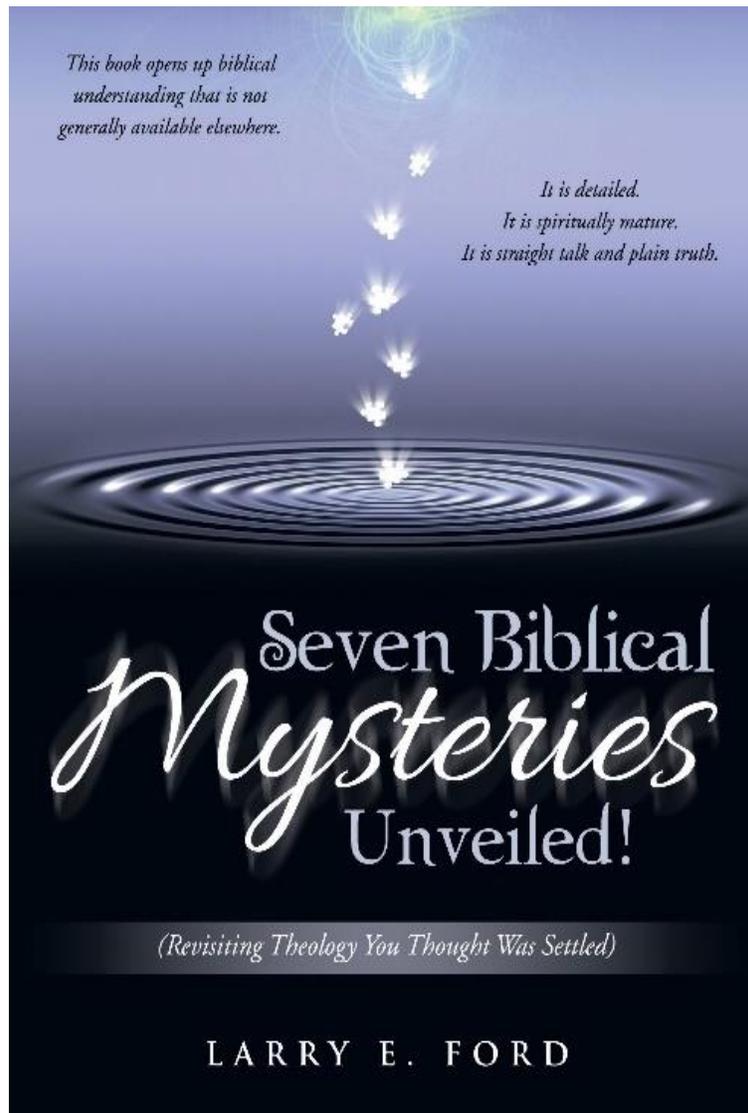
Romans 7:1-6 is not Paul’s discussion about being divorced from the Law. It is his discussion about dying to sin in order to be remarried to Jesus Christ. If anyone is remarried after the death of his/her spouse, s/he thereby becomes subject to the law of marriage (that is: no adultery). Our repentance, acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice, and baptism, in effect, represent our death to sin. We are no longer the slave to sin (6:16). The Law no longer treats us as a transgressor because we have been completely forgiven through the grace and mercy of God (Eph. 1:6, 7). We are free to “marry” Jesus Christ because we will have “died” to our “old husband” ... sin. The “law” remains in effect.

That is why Paul points out the concept in Romans 7:7 that the Law is not to be equated with sin. The Law actually identifies sin for what it is ... and shows that sin is an unacceptable and unworthy “husband.” As a matter of fact, sin itself

has to die (Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:26). If *death* is ultimately destroyed, so is lawbreaking (sin). All of this is the result of the Lord God wooing *Israel* to “marry” Him again ... and affecting the minds and hearts of the Gentiles in the process (Deut, 4:1-13). All of this identifies the means by which the Law

and Prophets are to be *fulfilled*, as well as how *Israel* will be reclaimed by the Lord God (Jesus Christ) to be His *eternal* Bride. In all respects, she will be a new, spiritual Israel.

Once that is accomplished, “scholarly” problems also will cease to exist.



“The objective ... is to focus the reader’s attention on the difference between what *appears* to be settled theology and what God’s word *actually* teaches us.” Larry E. Ford, Author

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Numbers 11:24-29

(The Gift of the *Holy Spirit*)

It is generally held in “Christianity” that the Lord God *did not* make His “Holy Spirit” available to Israel, His covenant people. What, supposedly, is the scriptural *proof* of this claim? It is supposedly derived from the New Testament teaching by Jesus Christ that, after His ascension to the Father’s right hand, He would *send* the Holy Spirit to those who thereafter repented, accepted Him as Lord and Savior, were baptized, and had hands laid upon them by God’s ministers for receipt of the Holy Spirit. We can read about this in John 14:15-19, 26; 16:7-15 and Acts 1:5; 2:1-21. Indeed, Peter does say that the Pentecost experience was what Joel had prophesied in Joel 2:28-32. Does that imply that the gift of the Holy Spirit was *withheld* from mankind at least until after Jesus Christ had ascended to the right hand of God the Father? Is any of this *really* scriptural *proof* that the Holy Spirit *was not* available to anyone in the Old Testament, including Israel? Or, was it a different matter altogether?

The objective in this lesson is to sort out why there are discussions in the *Old Testament* about the prophets and others being moved by the *Holy Spirit* to declare the messages of God (Isa. 61:1; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21). Zacharias (John the Baptist’s father) declared that God had “spoken by the mouths of His holy prophets, which have been present *since the world began*” (Luke 1:70; emphases added). Such a statement presupposes that those early prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit to reveal the thoughts and plans of God. It is fascinating to understand that those prophets date back to *the Garden of Eden*. Perhaps *Abel* was the first one (Heb. 11:4). Was *no one*, other than certain leaders and prophets, able to receive the Holy Spirit? With those thoughts in mind, let’s analyze this “mystery” and see if we can understand what *Holy Spirit* is and the role it served among the Old Testament faithful.

The Basis of the Claim

Every “proof” that an interpreter derives from Scripture is tied to the *paradigm* on which the interpreter bases his/her conclusion. While the conclusion might be couched in scriptural jargon and religious terms, it does not represent God’s truth unless it *actually agrees with God’s revelation* (see Matt. 7:21-23). If the paradigm changes or distorts or simply misrepresents God’s true revelation, then the conclusions drawn by the interpreter will have *skewed* (distorted) God’s truth ... and its true, intended meaning will be lost. It is a dangerous thing for this to happen (2 Tim. 2:15; Rom. 1:25).

What are some of the factors that drive the paradigm that the Holy Spirit was *not* made available to ancient Israel? They are pretty simply drawn

based on the idea that Jesus announced its *coming* presence after His resurrection just prior to the upcoming Pentecost Holy Day. Please allow me to acquaint you with one such paradigm that sets the standard for many other similar paradigms.

The rationale harkens back to the Tree of Life (Gen. 2:8, 9). Here is the way one commentator frames it ... based on two factors:

The tree of life, *symbolizing the Holy Spirit*, had been *cut off* from mankind at the foundation of the world after the sin of Adam [Gen. 3:22-24]. What the world does not understand is that the Spirit of God was *cut off* from humanity *as a whole UNTIL* the second Adam [Jesus Christ] actually removes Satan and re-

stores the government of God on the earth.

*The Holy Spirit was not given to the people of ancient Israel. Since God called and raised up prophets for a special purpose preparatory to the salvation of humanity, it was necessary, in order for them to perform their called function, that an exception be made and they be empowered by the Holy Spirit (Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages*; New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985; p. 214; emphases added).*

The two factors that loom large in this explanation are: (1) preventing sinful mankind from acquiring the “fruit” of the Tree of Life was the equivalent of denying them access to God’s Holy Spirit, and (2) the prophets were granted an exception because they needed God’s Holy Spirit to be able to perform the special functions for which they were called. On the surface, these two factors seem reasonable to the uninitiated that such should be the case: *In the Old Testament, only those who are called out for a special purpose are allowed to have Holy Spirit.* Okay ... let’s deal with the problem that these two factors present.

What is Holy Spirit?

Traditional “Christianity” assumes that there exists one God who reveals Himself through three “faces”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nowhere in Scripture is the Holy Spirit referred to as being “God.” We can agree that belief in a “three-faced” God is a theological paradigm: a model by which associated theological concepts are explained. But ... that concept does not answer the question about what holy spirit is.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that “God” is a spirit (John 4:24; emphases added). In that same verse, Jesus Christ also says that we must worship this Spirit known as “God” in “spirit and in truth” (emphases added). If we are given the “spirit of truth” (John 14:15), does that mean that we, therefore, have, in our minds and hearts, a holy spirit-being who guides our spiritual thoughts and actions? We must understand God’s truth about this

matter. If our paradigm is not in sync with God’s will, it will skew His truth. *Holy Spirit is not an indwelling spirit-being.*

As a first step, we should examine the words from the Hebrew and Greek languages that are translated spirit in the Old and New Testaments. We should be able to find clues there for understanding the term spirit in various scriptural contexts. We will find that *the various uses of the word “spirit” do not mean the same thing,*

Three Hebrew words (OT) are translated as spirit: ’owb (7x), n^eshamah (2x), and ruwach (everywhere else). We will examine each word, its definition, and the applicable scriptural contexts. In that way, we should be able to understand the Old Testament’s revelation about what the three terms translated as spirit mean in their contexts.

The term ’owb is found in Leviticus 20:27; 1 Samuel 28:7, 8; 1 Chronicles 10:13; 2 Chronicles 33:6; and Isaiah 29:4. Each time, it refers to someone who has “a familiar spirit.” Such “spirits” are defined as sentient spirit-beings who influence ne-cromancers or wizards (female = witch). *Brown-Driver-Briggs* includes this note on the matter:

1 S 28:8, 9 [;] 2 K 23:24 [;] Is 8:19 (where [it is] repres[ented] as chirping & muttering, in practice of their art of seeking [the] dead for instruction, prob[ably] ventriloquism) (p. 15b).

What do we see here that represents the term spirit? If your answer is demonic spirits, then you are on the right track. People can be “possessed” by them or ... merely “influenced” by them. We see in various Scriptures that evil spirits influence human thoughts and actions for evil purposes. These beings are most likely from among the rebellious angels who are being punished for their part in Lucifer’s attempt to overthrow God (see Isa. 14:12-20; 2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 12:7-9).

The term “demon-possessed” indicates that an individual demon spirit (or a group of demon spirits) has seized control of (“possessed”) an individual’s mind and actions (for examples: see Matt. 8:28-34; 9:32, 33; 12:22; 15:22-29; 17:14-18). You also can find examples of this in the Old Testament: Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Chronicles 11:15; and Psalm 106:37.

In Hebrews 1:14, Paul describes the original function of the spirit beings that belong to the angelic realm: “Are they not all *ministering spirits*, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation [humans]?” (emphases added). Jude shows that some of these angels *abandoned* this God-given function and became malevolent spirits against God and humanity (Jude 6).

Would God have intended that *holy angels* would “possess” the minds and hearts of humans in order for humans to be led by an indwelling “holy spirit”? No. But, what does Paul mean in Romans 8:9-11 when he speaks of the Spirit of God *dwelling* in you? Is he suggesting that a “ministering spirit,” or Jesus Christ, has taken up *residence* in your mind (John 14:23)? *No*.

We should be able to see that such is *not* the intention of Paul’s instruction in Romans 8:9-11 if we have already read Romans 7:18 where he speaks of things that “ *dwell* ” in him. Read v. 20 where he says “sin ... *dwells* in me.” You should understand that he is speaking of things that *occupy space* in our hearts and minds (see Job 32:8 re: the *mind*) – not about *ministering* or *demonic* spirits living in us and taking control over our thoughts and actions. *Neither “spirit” (angelic or demonic) is the kind of “spirit” that is the form and/or function of the Holy Spirit.* So, we can eliminate *’owb*.

The next Hebrew word is *n^eshamah* (2x) that is translated as “spirit” in Job 26:4 and Proverbs 20:27. In both the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, it is translated into English as “breath of life ... of God ... of man ... of animal” (BDB; pp. 675c; 1103c). We can also eliminate this outright from consideration in our discussion about the *indwelling* of the Holy Spirit.

All other references to *spirit* in the Old Testament are derived from the Hebrew word *ruwach* . This word is *generally* used to identify “breath, wind, and spirit.” *Breath* is in the context of a *sign of life* in man and beast. It can describe windy words, hard breathing, and mere breath. The gift of *breathing* (Genesis 2:7) was imparted to man and animal alike. The Hebrew term *nephesh* (“soul”) is “a living, *breathing* being” (see also Ezek.18:4, 20). In that sense of “spirit,” it was given by God ... but it *departs at the death of the human and animal* (Ecc. 3:18-21; 8:8; 12:7; Isa. 38:16). It has

nothing to do with *divine spirit* . In this case, it has to do with a life function of all who *breathe* .

So, all references to *spirit* used in the sense of “breath, wind, and spirit” related to the above-stated examples can be eliminated from consideration as references to *Holy Spirit* . This also includes references to “spirit” words like courage, impatience, temper, shame, and any other term that names an emotion or attribute of moral character.

The definitions in which we would be interested would be related to the *spirit of God* . Why? From where else would *Holy Spirit* come? For example: the prophets were moved by God’s Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). The term *inspiration* is related to such activity. One definition of this word is: “to motivate as by divine influence.” The key words in this definition are: *motivate* and *divine influence* .

Motivate has to do with the provision of an inner drive to action ... an incentive to act. *Influence* is the power to affect others in order to achieve a desired objective. This is bound up in this pithy little saying: “I *aspire* to *inspire* before I *expire* .” All of that has to do with a motivating or influential “spirit” in one form or another.

It is in the sense of the definitions we are now considering that we should approach this. Numbers 11:6 speaks of their “soul” (life; vitality) being dried away. The Israelites had griped and complained at every turn during their exodus from Egypt. Moses got to the point where he wondered if the Lord God had burdened him with these people because He was displeased with *him* (vv. 10-15). It is clear that Moses was becoming *dispirited* .

The Lord God told Moses to gather 70 Elders from the 12 tribes of Israel (v. 16). Verse 17 is very enlightening: The Lord God admits that there was *spirit* upon Moses ... and that *portions* of that *spirit* could be taken from the supply that Moses had and distributed in shares to the 70 Elders (KJV; see also vv. 24-30).

Does this indicate that the Lord God had given Moses “some sort of *substance* ” called “spirit” ... that could be divided into parts and shared around ... an idea posited by *The Interpreter’s Bible* (vol. 2; p. 198; emphases added)? At this point, we must consider the definitions of *ruwach* that are consistent with the scriptural revelations we seek.

The definitions to which I would pay special attention are the ones that refer to *spirit* as being

the source of the *principles of life* (that is: fundamental truths, law, *et cetera*) upon which others are based. This kind of *spirit* affects the emotions, mental faculties, and moral character (see Gal. 5:19-26 where they are called “fruits” of either the *carnal* [vv. 19-21] or *spiritual* [vv. 22-25] mind).

When the Lord God told Israel that they were to become *holy* because He is *holy* (Lev. 19:2), how could they have done so unless the Lord God had taken part of *His* holy spirit and put it upon them? Is Exodus 31:1-11 an example of this ... an example of the Lord God putting His *holy spirit* upon those who were to construct the Tabernacle of His *residence* among them? Could they have been vile, vulgar, and profane men under the influence of such *spirit*? Read all of Exodus 35.

Now, ask yourself what the Lord God did when He put *His* spirit upon these Israelites? Can you understand that the net effect was upon their *minds* and *abilities*? It affected their *thought processes*. As Moses wrote in Exodus 35:31: “And [the Lord God] filled [Bezaleel] with the spirit of God, in *wisdom*, in *understanding*, and in *knowledge*, and in all manner of *workmanship* (emphases added). It affected Bezaleel’s *mind* and, therefore, his *abilities* to construct the Tabernacle of God and give direction and instruction to those under his charge.

Paul discusses such *spiritual gifts* in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14. They are as diverse as the gift of prophecy is from the gift of administration ... or as healing is from teaching (see 12:4-10). Make note of how Paul uses the imagery of the Church as a *body* that has various parts that must function together (vv. 12-27). God has provided a variety of ministers who can administer the spiritual teachings and governance of His Church so they can do all things in decency and order (12:28-31; 14:33, 40).

This is very little different from what the Lord God was trying to do with ancient Israel. In both cases, you have to have people who are obedient – who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God (Mic. 6:8). They cannot be profane, immoral, and recalcitrant ... resistant to the authority over them and abusive of the authority they have.

Moffatt’s translation of Numbers 11:17, 25 is interesting. He translates it: “I will *endue* them with part of your spirit” (emphases added). The term has to do with providing certain qualities for

certain purposes. Synonyms are: provide, permeate, imbue, transfuse, instill, transfer, put on, and clothe. Look up the definitions of those terms. The definitions add clarity to the points I am making. What was the Lord God going to do here? He was going to *qualify* those men to assume such important positions as His leadership representatives among Israel. Moses would still be the Lord God’s leader over them, but they were going to be given the same kind of holy leadership *spirit* Moses had.

In these cases, it seems that the Holy Spirit that was given to them was for *the leadership responsibilities* they would have (see 1 Cor. 12:27-21; Eph. 4:11-16). Such administrative *gifts* and *skills of workmanship* do not, therefore, deny the main *body* of the Lord’s “wife” access to the Holy Spirit for building holy minds – no more than the main *body* of the New Testament Church is denied the spirit of holiness if they are *not* administrators or ministers of various ranks, *et cetera*.

Now, there is also the claim that: “It was necessary, in order for [the prophets] to perform their called function, that an *exception* be made and they be empowered by the Holy Spirit” (*Mystery of the Ages*; p. 214). Armstrong’s claim is that the main body of Israel was *not* given the Holy Spirit because of two reasons: (1) the Tree of Life, the [supposed] symbol of the Holy Spirit, had been cut off from mankind since Eden, and (2) Jesus had not conquered Satan and restored the government of God on the earth. He also asserts that: “God called and raised up prophets *for a special purpose* preparatory to the salvation of humanity.” Let’s discuss this with those reasons in mind.

What do you make of Exodus 19:5, 6? Is there *any sense* in which you would conclude that the Lord God called the nation of Israel for a *special purpose* preparatory to the salvation of humanity? Now read Deuteronomy 4:1-13, 20? Would you conclude from this that the Lord God is clarifying the *special purpose* for which He called Israel to be His “wife”? How much of it emphasizes *a purpose preparatory to the salvation of other nations*? Now read Leviticus 19:2 and Deuteronomy 5:1-29. The special purposes of individual leaders and prophets pales into insignificance to Israel’s *special purpose for existence* as the eternal “wife” of the Lord God! If we miss that most important point, then we miss the reason for *Israel’s* exist-

ence! Read Hebrews 11 and ask why there are OT “saints” who will inherit with NT “saints” (vv. 39, 40). Not all of them were leaders or prophets!

Is there any connection between being holy and obeying the law that sealed the “marriage” covenant between the Lord God and Israel – especially if you consider Romans 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; and 1 John 3:4 in the mix? Holy means, by the way, that it is spiritually pure and sinless. If the Lord God desired that Israel should be spiritually pure and sinless, how could they be so if that holiness of thoughts and ways is not made available to them to be part and parcel to their human spirit (see Isa. 55:8, 9; Jer. 17:9, 10; Rom. 8:5-9; Gal. 5:16-26)? *It is one thing to have something available to you ... and quite another for you to accept it and use it as it is intended to be used.* Scripture demonstrates that Israel refused it – in fact: they resisted it (see Acts 7:51; Rom. 9:16-21; 1 Cor. 10:1-12)!

The Source of Holy Spirit for Israel

Here is an interesting thought from Paul in Romans 7:12, 14: “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good... The law is spiritual...” (emphases added). If God’s law and commandments are put into your heart and mind, is that the same as putting a holy spirit into you (see Jer. 31:31-34; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 1 Cor. 2:9-12)? If the purpose of God’s law is to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:23-25), does it seem that the purpose of having God’s Law in our inward parts is spiritual in nature? Holy in nature?

Perhaps the most complete witness to the spiritual nature of the Law is found in the various prayers and professions of faith and obedience in Psalm 119. Verses 1-8 set the tone for the entire 176 verses that extol the spiritual nature found in God’s Law (see Rom. 7:14):

(1) Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. (2) Blessed are they who keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart. (3) They also do no iniquity: [because] they walk in His ways. (4) You have commanded us to keep your precepts diligently. (5) O that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes! (6) Then

shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Your commandments. (7) I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned Your righteous judgments. (8) I will keep Your statutes: O do not utterly forsake me! (author’s modernized revision).

Does the holy, spiritual knowledge imparted by God’s law and commandment endue, provide, permeate, imbue, transfuse, instill, transfer, put on, and/or clothe the believer in any way whatsoever to spiritually influence and motivate him/her to be holy as God is holy? If so, would you conclude that God had made available to them His Holy Spirit by giving them the 10 Commandments to influence and motivate their hearts and minds and enable them to have the fruits of the holy spirit exhibited in their thoughts and actions? If so, how was that Spirit not available to ancient Israel ... *who was called by the Lord God for a most special purpose?*

Paul admits quite a bit in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5. He points to Israel’s baptism (v. 2) and the subsequent “eating” and “drinking” of spiritual food and drink. From where were these spiritual assets obtained? Paul says quite frankly: “They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ (v. 4; emphases added). What was the problem when that spiritual food and drink were made available to them? “God was not well pleased with many of them” (v. 5). Why?

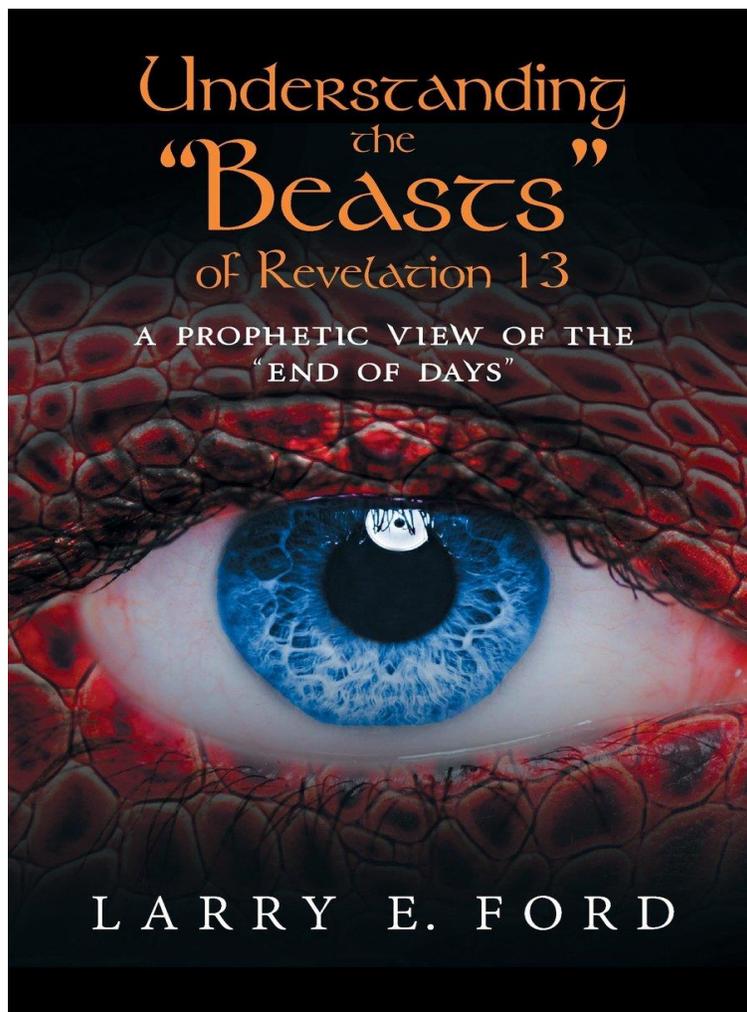
As Paul continues his discussion in vv. 6-11, he points out the ways by which Israel resisted the Holy Spirit. Here, we have harmony with Acts 7:51. Obviously enough, he warns true Christians that such a situation must not exist in the NT ekklesia of God in which the Holy Spirit is supposed to influence and motivate their hearts and minds to be holy, blameless, and loving (Eph. 1:4).

Isaiah 24:5 reveals the ultimate result of this lawlessness among Israel and the rest of mankind: “The land lies polluted by its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the Law, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant” (*Modern Language*). If you resist God’s Law and Covenant and break it as though you are exempted from the consequences, then you face the results revealed by Paul in Romans 1:24, 26, 28: God will allow the consequences of breaking His holy Law

and covenant to overtake you and punish you in an ever-increasing cascade. Paul warns us in Galatians 6:7, 8 that we cannot mock God without consequence. We will reap what we sow.

This is the point at which you should consider the message of Moses to Israel in Deuteronomy 30:15-20. It is a message that heralds to Israel the special purpose for which she was called to be the Lord God's "wife." Choosing "life and good" as intended by the Lord God (Lev. 19:2) ... "to love

the Lord your God, to walk in His commandments and His statutes and His judgments" ... is to live in a manner that is motivated and influenced by God's "Holy Spirit." That is what Israel could not have because she resisted it. God is not putting into you a spirit substance or being. He is making available to you the means by which you can develop holy thoughts and actions. It is bound up in His holy, spiritual, and righteous law (Jer. 31:33).



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Lawlessness

In 1 Timothy 1:5-10, Paul takes up the subject of *lawlessness* (Greek = *anomia*). It has several definitions that you must be prepared to search out in concordance dictionaries and lexicons in order to understand the context of the Scripture(s) involved. Consider the BibleSoft.com sample below:

STRONGS NT 458: ἀνομία

ἀνομία, ἀνομίας, ἡ (ἄνομος);

1. properly, **the condition of one without law** — either because ignorant of it, or because violating it.

2. **contempt and violation of law, iniquity, wickedness:** [Matthew 23:28](#); [Matthew 24:12](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#) (T Tr text WH text; cf. ἀμαρτία, 1, p. 30f), 7; [Titus 2:14](#); [1 John 3:4](#). opposed to ἡ δικαιοσύνη, [2 Corinthians 6:14](#); [Hebrews 1:9](#) (not Tdf.) (Xenophon, mem. 1, 2, 24 ἀνομία μᾶλλον ἢ δικαιοσύνη χρώμενοι); and to ἡ δικαιοσύνη and ὁ ἁγιασμός, [Romans 6:19](#) (τῆ ἀνομία εἰς τὴν ἀνομίαν **to iniquity** — personified — **in order to work iniquity**); ποιεῖν τὴν ἀνομίαν to do iniquity, act wickedly, [Matthew 13:41](#); [1 John 3:4](#); in the same sense, ἐργάζεσθαι τὴν ἀνομίαν, [Matthew 7:23](#); plural αἱ ἀνομίαι manifestations of disregard for law, iniquities, evil deeds: [Romans 4:7](#) ([Psalm 31:1](#); [Hebrews 8:12](#) (R G L); [Hebrews 10:17](#). (In Greek writings from (Herodotus 1, 96) Thucydides down; often in the Sept.) (Synonym: cf. Trench, § lxvi.; Tittm. 1:48; Ellicott on [Titus 2:14](#).)

THAYER'S GREEK LEXICON, Electronic Database.
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There are 18 different Greek words in the New Testament that refer, in one way or another, to six categories of *law*: law, lawful, lawfully, lawless, laws, and lawyers. The proper way to associate any of them with Jesus' statement about the *law* in Matthew 5:17, 18 is to look up the Greek word from which that term *law* was translated (*Strong's* #3551 – *nomos*). The *definition* applies specifically to the law given by the Lord God to Moses; but, in some contexts, some “scholars” apply it to the gospel of the Kingdom. In a *figurative* sense, it also is used to mean “(a *principle*): — law.” Think of the *law* of gravity.

In this article, we are going to study the various forms of *lawlessness* in Scripture. You should know that different translations of the Bible do not always translate the 18 Greek words the same – but, they will still have the same general meaning. *Lawlessness* is a great enemy of God's people.

How Scripture Addresses *Lawlessness*

It would make sense that Scripture deals with a variety of ways to define “sin.” While “sin” is

lawlessness, not all “sin” carries the penalty of *eternal* death (see 1 John 3, 4; Rom. 6:23; and 1 John 5:16-18). Nevertheless, the “lawless” act that is *not* a sin unto *eternal* death is not exempt from

whatever principles there are that work against the one who violates the principle involved.

For example, skydiving is not a sin unto death (eternal death is the stated penalty for breaking God's Law based upon the 10 Commandments). If you violate the principle of proper parachute packing (figuratively: a "sin"), you might very well suffer consequences that injure you or kill you or cause harm to someone else. But ... God does not condemn you to eternal death for poor parachute packing ... unless you do it with the intention of killing or harming someone else.

A former acquaintance of mine was a paraglider enthusiast. He was well-trained and proficient in the sport. One day, his machine stalled in flight ... which in and of itself was not a problem. All he had to do was grab his crank cord, give it a jerk, and continue on his way. In the meantime, his machine would glide safely. When he turned to re-crank the machine, it tilted forward and dumped him out to his death *because he had forgotten the safety principle of buckling his safety belt!* This was the breaking of a principle ("sin"), but not a sin unto eternal death. As such, it still constituted a type of lawlessness.

That said, you should be able now to understand the importance of searching out definitions from Scripture in order to know what the Scripture reveals. For example: If Jesus says: "Think not that I have come to destroy the law...", then two words are important to the meaning of His intended message: destroy and law. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* references its Greek dictionary to show law under #3551 (nomos) and destroy under #2647 (kataluo).

Let's deal with these words separately so we can get the meaning that Jesus Christ attached to His declaration. First, we look at a Greek-English lexicon like the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* under nomos. We have to look for the specific Scripture under the various definitions provided. Under definition #3 in *BAG*, it begins thus: "3. esp. of the Mosaic law." That sets the context of the intended meaning.

Far into the examples given, we find a reference to Matthew 5:18 that notes the "imperishable" nature of the law until it is all "fulfilled" (see also Luke 24:44 – a post-crucifixion remark). The

death of Jesus Christ on the cross did not fulfill "all things" written about Him (see Zechariah 14:1-9, for one example among many). It fulfilled the victory He achieved over sin and death through a holy, atoning sacrifice ... but not all that the Law implies or that the prophets foretold.

Under definition #4, we find the following meaning relative to Matthew 5:17: "In the strict sense *the law* = the Pentateuch, the work of Moses the lawgiver." You also must understand that the Law that Moses gave to the Israelites was not that "old Jewish law" or the "Mosaic law" (both being denigrating comments made about the Law as though it was constructed out of the minds and hearts of the Jews or Moses). If you read the Old Testament carefully and correctly, you will find that the Lord God was the author of the Law and the Prophets. What difference does that make?

The Jews were only one of 12 tribes of Israel. They did not create the laws for all of Israel. Moses was not a Jew; he was a Levite (see Ex. 2:1-10) – the tribe that later became the priestly tribe. In Exodus 20:1, we see that the Lord God created and imposed upon Israel 10 Commandments. Why? Exodus 19:5, 6 reveals the Lord God's proposal of "marriage" between Himself and Israel.

The 10 Commandments were the legal bases of that "marriage" (see Ex. 34:27, 28). All of the laws, ordinances, statutes, and testimonies derived from those 10 Commandments were created by the Lord God and revealed to Israel through Moses. You can read another example in Leviticus 23:1, 9, 33, and 44. My point here is simple: If you load the front end of your definition with the epithet "Jewish law" and/or "Mosaic law," then you stigmatize the Law's true importance and significantly reduce the true holiness and dignity attached to it. That skews the meaning of what Jesus Christ intended when He made the Matthew 5:17-19 comment.

If you have a marginal reference in your Bible, look at the Old Testament references made by Jesus Christ in His "Beatitudes" in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5: (v. 3) Psalm 34:18; (v. 4) Isaiah 57:18; (v. 5) Psalm 37:11; (v. 6) Isaiah 55:1. That should be sufficient to make the point: Jesus Christ preceded His comments in vv. 17, 18 with Old Testament Scriptures from the Psalms and Prophets ... all of them based upon two great laws: (1) Love God supremely and (2) love your neigh-

bor as yourself (Matt. 22:34-40). He says in Matthew 22:44 that the Law and Prophets *depend upon* and are *supported* by these two great laws. In fact, the Old Testament was the only Scripture Jesus Christ had available at the time because the New Testament Scripture did not even exist.

That brings up the importance of the term *destroy*. Here we deal with the Greek term *kataluo*. Under definition 1c, you find the following with reference to Matthew 5:17: “do away with, abolish, annul, make invalid.” If you couple this definition to the definition for *law (nomos)*, then the inescapable truth revealed by Jesus Christ is that He did *not* come to “do away with, abolish, annul, [or] make invalid” the Law given to Israel by the Lord God (the one who became Jesus Christ) through Moses. In other words, Jesus Christ did *not* come to do away with the legal bases for His “marriage” with Israel. In fact, He was *preserving* it so He can renew it with her when He “remarries” Israel in the future (see Jer. 31:22-34; Hos. 2:14-20). That “remarriage” is one aspect of *prophecy* that was *not* fulfilled by His death on the cross.

Lest we overlook another important word used by Jesus in Matthew 5:17, let’s investigate the word *fulfill*. Some use the trite approach by saying that He was going to “fill it to the full.” Trite though it might be, it has some measure of truth to it ... but not in the sense that it was “filled to the full” *when He was crucified*. What is the more appropriate definition?

Here is what I find in BAG: Definition #1 has to do with *filling something full* – like a sail full of wind or a house with people or a person with spirit. *No reference is made to Matthew 5:17*. Definition #2 has to do with the completion of a period of time or to reach an end of something. *No Matthew 5:17 reference*. Definition #3 is similar: “bring something to completion, finish something.” *No reference to Matthew 5:17*.

I find what I am looking for in definition #4: “fulfill, by deeds, a prophecy, an obligation, a promise, a law, a request, a purpose, a desire, a hope, a duty, a destiny, etc.” In the context of the entire definition and references, the following comment is included just before the reference to Matthew 5:17: “A duty or office.” This tells me that Jesus Christ understood and was revealing that He has a *continuing* duty and office to perform. We

can see evidence of that in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. What is He doing? Defeating the enemies of God to the point that He can hand the rulership reins of the Kingdom of God back to God the Father.

He has not *completed* that duty and office at present. And ... nailing Him to the cross did not relieve Him of carrying that duty and office to their intended purposes (see Matt. 28:18). For another witness to this interpretation, read Matthew 5:18. This suggests *continuing action* on His part well beyond the crucifixion. Matthew 5:17 is *not* referred to in definition #5: “complete, finish, bring to an end.” What does this evidence suggest to you?

Here is how I would interpret the Matthew 5:17 statement based on the definition in BAG: “I have not come to do away with the law I gave to Moses ... or the prophecies I gave to the prophets; rather, I have come to bring to pass the purpose for which I gave both of them” (see Isa. 55:10, 11). If I understand that to be the *truth* that Jesus Christ came to reveal (see John 4:23, 24; 8:31, 32; 14:26; 16:13), then I cannot accept the teachings of traditional “Christianity.” There are too many prophecies that are yet *unfulfilled* because the time for that has not arrived (consider the contents of the book of Revelation, for example). I conclude from this that the Law and Prophets are still in effect for God’s people and living by them is vitally necessary for our spiritual health and well-being.

What does this tell us about how this *nomos* can apply to the “gospel of the Kingdom of God” and the traditional “Christian” concept that the *gospel took the place of* the Law when Jesus Christ was crucified – as they claim that Colossians 2:14 means when it speaks of the “*Blotting out* the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and *took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross*” (emphases added)?

Can you understand the rebuttal to that claim by what we have discussed above? Under what circumstances would God have *lied* or *changed His mind* and, thereby, allowed, or caused, Paul to change that which was *not intended to be changed or destroyed*? Those who teach that New Testament Christians are not “under” the Law apparently do not know what happened or why. Romans 7:1 should be more fully understood. What is Paul’s point in that statement?

It is with this understanding that I take up the subject of *lawlessness*. We are going to understand some of the hard lessons that mankind will have to learn if they, in their spiritual ignorance, do away with God's Law and Prophets.

What Does Under the Law Mean?

The term under is a preposition that has a variety of meanings ... all of which generally signify a position lower than something else. The Greek term is *hupo* (ὕπό). Its meaning is governed by its usage relative to "case" (nominative, objective, dative, possessive) and parts of speech (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). So, it is improper to read every mention of the word under in Scripture and assume that they all mean the same thing. There are "nuances" (slight variations) of meanings that must be understood. In addition to that, *Strong's* lists 17 different Greek terms that are translated as "under." I will discuss *hupo* relative to being "under the Law."

Paul is considered by many in mainstream Christianity to be the champion of grace versus law ... as though he taught that the existence of grace destroys the existence of Law. If you understand Christ's statement in Matthew 5:17-19, then you should understand that Paul could not take such a position and be teaching God's truth.

Let's examine Romans 6:14, 15 in order to understand the foundation of my conclusion. Here is what Paul says in the context of the "baptism" chapter of Romans:

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace. What then, shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid [such a thing].

Notice that the word under precedes both "law" and "grace." The word under is translated from the Greek term *hupo*. According to *BAG*, it has the same meaning. So, whatever under means relative to "law," it means relative to "grace" ... in this context. *BAG* defines this as being "of place under, below" and definition **b**. clarifies that primary definition thus: "of power, rule, sovereignty, command, etc. under." This indicates that the

meaning of Romans 6:14, 15 should be understood to be saying that we are not under the power (authority) of the Law because we are under the power (authority) of grace. Does that do away with the Law? Take time to think this through.

BAG translates Galatians 4:5 ("To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons") thus: "those who are under (the power of) the law." So, being under the power of grace should also be understood. I ask the question again: Does being under the power of grace destroy, annul, or make void the existence of the law? If there is no law, who needs the grace?

In Romans 3:31, Paul has already answered that question by saying: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." What does that mean? The Greek term translated as "establish" is *histemi* (ἵστημι), which means, in this case: "to establish a thing, cause it to stand, i. e. to uphold or sustain the authority or force of anything." What else from Paul's writings in Romans indicates that this is his belief?

I am glad you asked that question. We can read Romans 7:1 to get the answer: "Know you not, brethren, (for I speak to those who know the law,) how that the law has dominion over a [person] as long as [s/he] lives?" He then uses "marriage" as a case in point. If your husband or wife dies, then you are free from the law regarding adultery (Ex. 20:14) if you marry again. Would it make sense for Paul to teach such a thing if grace has destroyed the existence of the law? No. You have to die to sin in order to "marry" Christ.

Would the individual be under the law for engaging in an adulterous affair while his/her wife/husband were still alive? Yes. Why? 1 John 3:4 says that the transgression of the law is sin! Romans 6:23 says that "the wages of sin is death." Do even God's people commit sins? According to 1 John 2:1, he raises the possibility that such a thing can happen, Hebrews 6:4-8 raises the possibility that such a thing can happen among Christians – and those who had claimed Jesus as Savior and received the Holy Spirit can lose their opportunity for salvation if they do not repent and throw themselves upon God's mercy and grace through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. It should be obvious that the sinner is under the penalty of the law.

So, we have scriptural evidence that God's Law has not been set aside (put out of existence and power) because of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Rather, we should understand that, through the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we have access to grace (God's unmerited favor that cannot be earned, bought, or repaid) *instead of* the "wages" of sin: *eternal death*. In fact, our repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 39) are the means by which God determines to *set aside* the legal penalty for our sins and treat us as though we had never, ever, sinned before. *Grace*.

Paul teaches this in 2 Corinthians 5:17 ... in which he says that we become, as far as God is concerned, like we are as newly created as Adam originally was. That is the point of the "ministry of reconciliation" in which we have a part thereafter (vv. 18-21). Note specifically Paul's comment in v. 19 where he says that God *does not impute our sins against us* (read Romans 4:1-8). He is saying that God *sets aside the penalty of the law* because we have repented, been baptized, and received the Holy Spirit in order to become newly created individuals through the Holy Spirit. In that way, we are now *under grace* (that is: under the *power* and *authority of grace*), *instead of* under the law.

All in all, many theological problems could be solved if individuals would do the "leg work" of investigating the scriptural meanings of things (2 Tim. 2:15). It is worth the time invested.

Those Who are Lawless

Generally speaking, the "scums of the earth" are usually thought of when the term *lawless* is used. The reason is simple: they are considered to be the representatives from the low-class, despicable people of the world. The petty thieves, drug addicts, winos, gang members, and such. Murderers, robbers, child-molesters, rapists, terrorists, on and on. Those with no ambition who contribute little or nothing to the common weal: low-rent, uneducated, untalented, et cetera. They do not even qualify as members of the "blue collar" crowd.

Those in leadership positions are on another tier quite a bit above the "scums of the earth" ... so to speak. Nevertheless, there are those in that crowd that are the perpetrators of "white collar" lawlessness. They "fudge" on this or that require-

ment, hide this or that "wealth," and accept bribes and "benefits" to enrich themselves. We are all familiar with the whispers and rumors and tales that "expose" them to the greater public ... many times by other "white collar" liars and talebearers. Maybe you know someone who is "lawless."

All in all, from top to bottom, it is pretty much impossible to *not* find the lawless among us. Throughout the world, we find them everywhere – even among the "churched" memberships and hierarchies. One very prominent piece of lawlessness has been happening for a very long time: ministers, rabbis, mullahs, and priests who have been guilty of gross and flagrant sexual misconduct of many types. More and more, it seems that we cannot escape the *lawless*.

There is something you should know that makes it impossible for *you* to be an exception to the rule. Isaiah 53:6 says: "We have all gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." Romans 3:23 says: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Both the Old Testament and New Testament bear witness against us that we are *all* part of the *lawless* crowd. We are *all* responsible for the existence of layers and layers of *sin* that have been a barrier between us and God (read Isa. 59 in full to get the idea expressed here).

Those who are truly spiritually converted have the spiritual understanding needed to admit their own part in this milieu. They have appealed to God through Jesus Christ to extend His mercy and grace and ... give them the Holy Spirit necessary for them to grow spiritually in that application of grace and mercy (see 2 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 12:1, 2). We need this knowledge for at least one very good reason.

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul discusses God's attitude toward the *lawless* – which includes those who *pretend* to be religious and holy and good (see Matt. 7:21-23; 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15). Lawlessness *changes* God's truth into a *lie* (v. 25). Even if a "religious" façade is put on, it is a religion that extols the *self* rather than the true God. It is gross idolatry (see vv. 23-25; Ex. 20:1-7). What has God done about this situation?

Romans 1:24, 26, 28 make it very plain that God has allowed the consequences of the sins to work against us *without* His timely intervention. Why? To demonstrate to us that *we* are not capable

of defending ourselves against the cascading effects that will eventually overwhelm us and bring us to destruction. The social and sexual “fabrics” of our society will be overrun with degradation and perversion. It will reach a “tipping point” at which it will be impossible to avoid the pending destruction without God’s personal intervention (see Matt. 24:21, 22). Paul specifically states in Romans 1:25, 28 that there are two factors involved that will absolutely result in the destruction of creation if this lawlessness is not arrested and man is not converted to God’s thoughts and ways: (1) changing God’s truth into a lie and (2) removing the thoughts and ways of God from our minds and hearts. Verses 28-32 sum it up very well: The judgment of God is that those who do these things are worthy of death.

The death to which Paul refers is the total destruction of the guilty individual who is not covered under the sacrifice of Jesus Christ – under mercy, under grace, under God’s love (see Rom. 2:1-13). Being called before the judgment seat of God is no small matter because your eternal wel-

fare hangs in the balance. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:26 that the last enemy Christ will destroy will be sin. Hebrews 9:27 shows that God’s judgment comes after man has died the death appointed to all men (which comes either naturally or unnaturally). Revelation 20:6 and 14 show that there is something called the second death. The second death is the utter destruction of the person by being cast into the Lake of Fire. What does this mean relative to 1 Corinthians 15:26? It means that the destruction of death means the destruction of sin (1 John 3:4; Rom. 6:23). If you choose to remain a sinner (a lawbreaker), then your utter destruction will erase any record in heaven or on earth that you ever existed (see Isa. 65:17).

I think that it is “convenient” that traditional Christianity accepts the idea that God’s Law was abolished by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That would do away with all the OT laws that did not allow Israel to adopt pagan religious practices and philosophies. “Christians” could freely adopt such things from Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (see Dan. 7:1-8; Rev. 16:19; 17:3-6). No penalty!



(courtesy of Wikipedia)

"YEP, SON, WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US." WALT KELLY