

**SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN
AND
DOCTRINES OF DEMONS**

By
B.L. Cocherell

**SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN
AND
DOCTRINES OF DEMONS**

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PREFACE

The Bible is unique. It is the only book that has the answers to the basic questions of life and claims to be written by the true God. This book tells humanity who its Creator is, why it was created, and its ultimate destiny.

Although the Bible reveals the awesome purpose for human existence, it does so in a carefully coded message. The studies that we present reveal much of what is contained in these messages that has not been taught or understood since the demise and disappearance of the early church as a powerful spirit filled entity.

OUR GOALS

Our primary goal is to share our knowledge and understanding of the Sovereign God's plan and purpose for humanity with those who are interested in living their lives according to the law of God, not by the dictates and traditions of men. Our secondary goal is to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God as a warning and a witness to humanity before the Messiah returns to rule the earth.

We hope that you will find this study of God's word intellectually challenging and spiritually enlightening and beneficial.

If you want to know more about us, the work we are doing, or how you can participate in our biblically based educational and research projects, contact us at: www.BibleResearch.org or www.Bible-Prophecy.net

Sincerely,
B. L.Cocherell

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the most widely published and read book in the world. The Bible is unique and unlike any other book in authorship and purpose. It is a book of mysteries and revelations and claims to hold within its pages the secret to the mystery of human life and its eternal purpose.

From the first few verses of Genesis to the last verse of the Book of Revelation, there is only one major subject being revealed—the Sovereign God's plan and purpose for humanity.

Although the Bible's sole purpose is to reveal the awesome purpose and plan for this dimension of existence and its human inhabitants, there is no other book as controversial as the Bible.

Different Perceptions

It seems very strange indeed that most of the various Christian organizations and congregational associations use the same Bible on which to base their beliefs and lifestyles, but they all differ in how they perceive what is written in this book.

It is truly amazing that no matter what language in which books about mathematics, chemistry, geology, and hundreds of other technical subjects are written, the meaning of what is written can easily be understood by those who study these subjects. But when it comes to understanding the words, laws, precepts, and principles written in the Bible, there are literally hundreds of opinions among those whose profession it is to teach what is written in this book.

This is especially perplexing when the Bible itself says it is a book of wisdom, understanding, and instruction (See Prov.2:6; Psa.119:30; 2.Tim.3:16-17). The last book in the Bible begins with the words "*The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him to show to his servants.*" Therefore, it is more than evident that the Bible is meant to be understood by those to whom it is written.

Professing Christians often say, "It doesn't matter what you believe, just as long as you believe in God and the Bible." But, it must matter because not all professing Christians hold the same beliefs. Can all of these conflicting Christian beliefs and philosophies be correct? Logically, if any of them is correct, the rest must be wrong.

Obviously, everyone who professes to follow Christ believe that their particular religious philosophy will get them to heavenly bliss more quickly and efficiently than all of the others. If one does not believe this, they are settling for second best. Is one Christian philosophy or practice just as good as another? The biblical answer may surprise you, because it is not what most professing Christians believe.

Because this book is meant to discuss some of the various beliefs, legends, myths, and misconceptions that many who profess to follow the God of the Bible hold as sacrosanct and which cannot be justified or validated by the biblical text, It is appropriate to review what the Bible says is truth and why the Sovereign God places so much importance on the various truths that he has inspired to be recorded in his instruction book to humanity.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Although the truth on various biblical topics may seem shocking, truth is truth, and should free a person from the shackles of false assumptions, misconceptions, and ignorance which prevents them from understanding the Sovereign God's awesome plan and purpose for humanity.

Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, *"If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (Jn.8:31-32).

While questioning Jesus, Pontius Pilate asked him, *"Are you a king? Jesus answered, You said it, I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears my voice. To this Pilate replied, What is truth?"* See Jn.18:33-38.

Today, Conservative, Reform, and Orthodox Judaism and professing Christians claim conservatorship of the biblical text and each claims that God has guided and inspired their understanding of the biblical text.

The problem is that each of these religions are divided into many factions, with each faction having widely differing views, opinions, and interpretations of what is and is not biblical truth. So, who do you believe? The answer is, believe no one, do not believe what anyone tells you (including me) about the Bible and what is contained in it, unless you can prove it from the pages of the Bible or from credible historical or linguistic sources.

The Way of Truth Spoken of as Evil

The apostle Peter warned that people teaching heresies would rise up in the early church and that the result of these false teachings, would cause the way of truth to be spoken of as evil instead of good:

"But there were false prophets also among the people [i.e., the Israelites], even as there shall be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many [i.e., the majority of people] shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of " (2.Pet.2:1-2 Para.).

There are many things people consider to be truth; however, what the Bible reveals as truth and the way of truth is many times not what people believe as truth. It is this truth and way of truth that is hated and ridiculed.

The Bible defines for us what is meant by "the truth", which sets a person free from the penalty of death for violating God's law and "the way of truth", which if practiced will lead a person to eternal and immortal life in the Kingdom of God.

In a prayer before his crucifixion, Jesus asked for those who followed him to be set apart for a sacred purpose through his Father's truth: and stated that the Heavenly Father's word is truth. See Jn.17:13-17.

The Psalmist also said God's law is truth, and all his commandments are truth and that his word is true from the beginning. See Psa.119:160.

There is no doubt that the Bible contains truth about many things. The problem is to be able to discern this truth and then apply it in one's life in order to obtain the benefits which are promised through its application.

Why is it so important to understand biblical truth? It is important because the Savior of mankind said: *"God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"* (Jn.4:24 Para.). Biblical truth, if believed and acted upon in a positive manner, will result in one living the way of truth in obedience to God's laws, precepts, and principles and becoming an eternal and immortal spirit-being in the Family and Kingdom of God.

Only Truth Is Truth

There are many sincere and dedicated people who sincerely believe they are worshiping the Sovereign God in truth. However, many have been misled by false prophets and teachers who teach a counterfeit of biblical truth. If this were not true, there would only be one truth being taught and only one unified body teaching this one truth.

Sincerity and dedication do not equal truth, only truth is truth! Sincerity and dedication only shows the attitude with which people believe what they believe and do what they do. It is apparent that many people are truly dedicated to their religious precepts, but this does not mean that they understand or practice God's truth.

There is a vast difference between worshiping the Sovereign God in spirit and truth and zealously doing what is thought to be truth. Only the Sovereign God determines what truth is and is not. The Bible teaches, *"There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Pro.14:12 KJV).

Would the Sovereign God of whom the Bible says is a God of love and truth, and whose holy spirit is called "the Spirit of Truth" and whom Jesus said, must be worshiped in spirit and in truth ever accept a counterfeit of his truth as the means through which he reveals himself, or the means through which he offers salvation to humanity, or the means through which he is to be served and worshiped? The biblical answer is, No!, Never! Therefore, it is extremely important to be able to determine the difference between biblical truth and a counterfeit of this truth.

Rejection of Truth

A major problem today is that there is little love and respect for biblical truth. Today, biblical truth is hated and maligned, because it condemns lifestyles which are in opposition to biblical truth. The vast majority of people reject the Sovereign God's truth when they hear it, because in order to truly believe the truth Jesus Christ brought and taught, a person must change their lifestyle and begin to obey and practice the rules and instructions contained in the Bible.

Notice what the apostle Paul foretold about the time just before Christ returns when most people will reject God's truth when they hear it:

"Because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And because of this, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but take pleasure in unrighteousness" (2.Thes.2:10-12 Para.).

Because most people believe what they want to believe or what they are told to believe, rather than searching the scriptures and believing God's truth as they should, Paul's prophecy concerning believing lies instead of God's truth has been fulfilled for centuries.

A Departure From The Faith

Paul wrote the following to the saints at Galatia and to Timothy about a departure from the Faith:

"I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel: Which is not another; but there is some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal.1:6-7 KJV). See also 2.Cor.11:13-15.

"Now the spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1.Tim.4:1-2 KJV).

"For the time will come when they [the elect] will not accept sound teaching . . . And they shall not pay attention to the truth, and shall turn away from truth, and shall be turned instead to fables" (2.Tim.4:3-4 Para.).

The Early Church Became Corrupted

The early church failed to hold onto the faith given to them and became corrupted with false and misleading teachings about God, his ways, and his plan for humanity. Because of the persistent corruption of God's truth, the once dynamic and powerful entity that Jesus established on the Feast of Pentecost in 30 A.D. began to collapse from within and eventually disappeared into obscurity to remain small and powerless until just before Christ returns to conquer the earth and end the age of human rule.

What should be readily apparent to any thinking individual is that what is taught and practiced today as biblical truth, is not solving the world's problems. People desperately want what professing Christianity says it can deliver to them. People want peace, prosperity, happiness, and an abundant life free of hunger, disease, poverty, war, crime, and violence. This is what professing Christianity says it can deliver if people will only believe the message it teaches.

The problem is professing Christianity has not delivered, and does not seem to be able to deliver it's promised benefits.

Is it possible that most of what has been taught as truth after the demise and disappearance of the apostolic church is not truth, but is a clever deception? Look at the results of these teachings. Are the results of centuries of these teachings the results that God promised to those who believe and practice his truth and way of truth? You be the judge.

This book is written for those who are serious about understanding biblical truth, discarding erroneous teachings, and pursuing a life in compliance with the Sovereign Father's truth and way of truth.

It is my hope that you will find what is presented in the following pages to be spiritually enlightening and beneficial as many of the beliefs, legends, myths, misconceptions, false assumptions and erroneous teachings which exist about what is found in the Bible are compared against what the biblical record actually reveals.

B.L. Cocherell

b10w1

NOTES AND COMMENTS

SECTION #1

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul wrote the following to the elect at Ephesus, "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*" (Eph.4:4-6 KJV).

If what the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians is a correct translation of the original text, which most Bible scholars agree it is, Paul's statement tells us that there is only One Body, One Spirit, and One Faith, which means in essence that there is also only one truth and way of truth set forth in the biblical record.

Among professing Christians today, we find many different opinions and teachings about extremely important biblical issues, which is a clear indication that much of what was originally understood and taught as foundational truth is not understood or taught today, and that much of what is believed and taught today is in error and is in opposition to the One Body, One Spirit, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God which Paul wrote of to the elect at Ephesus.

The apostle John recorded that Christ described the Synagogue of Satan as a group of people who were to come on the world scene. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that in time people would pay attention to Doctrines of Demons. The question through the centuries has been, Who or what is the Synagogue of Satan and what are these Doctrines of Demons? Are there answers to these two questions? Yes, there are answers. However, the answers are not what most professing Christians want to hear, because these answers challenge their belief system and demand a change in their lifestyle.

The following three chapters will answer many questions concerning the Synagogue of Satan and Doctrines of Demons. These chapters will also reveal what went terribly wrong during the existence of the early church which allowed the teachings of Christ and the apostles to become perverted until most of what was originally taught has almost completely been forgotten and set aside by the vast majority those who profess to follow the truth and way of truth as set forth in the biblical record.

By B. L. Cocherell

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

____ CHAPTER ____
ONE
THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

In the Book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, there are cryptic prophecies concerning the Sovereign God's elect children who comprise his earthly family of king-priests and individuals who oppose them and claim to be Jews, but are not, and who are described as being of the Synagogue of Satan.

If there is a Synagogue of Satan and if you believe that the Bible is the word of God put to print for your benefit and if you are serious about your pursuit of salvation, then it is important for you know how to identify a counterfeit Jew and the Synagogue of Satan. Why is this important to you? It is important so that you will not fall pray to Satan's deceptive teachings and if you are already deceived by one of his religions or religious philosophies you will be able to recognize the deception and distance yourself from it.

The information contained in this chapter will reveal the identity of the counterfeit Jews and the identity of the Synagogue of Satan noted in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, plus answer the following questions:

- Is the reference to counterfeit Jews speaking of individuals who are claiming to be racial Jews of the House of Judah or are these individuals a metaphor for Judaism or another worship system?
- What does being a counterfeit Jew have to do with Satan's synagogue and the Sovereign God's elect children?
- Is there a place where Satan's religion is practiced and where he is worshiped or is the Synagogue of Satan a metaphor for something entirely different?

JEWS AND THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

The prophecies in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, refer to two distinct groups of people: Those who are true followers of Christ and those who claim they are Jews, but are not and who in reality comprise the Synagogue of Satan.

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things says the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the Synagogue of Satan" (Rev.2:8-9 KJV).

Jesus accuses these individuals who claim to be Jews of blasphemy. The English word *blasphemy* is translated from the Greek word *blasphemia*, which means *to speak or to write in an abusive disparaging manner* (especially against God). Blasphemy is slanderous and reproachful speech and blasphemy of the holy spirit is the only sin noted in scripture for which there is no forgiveness (Matt.12:31-32).

Most people only associate the word synagogue with a Jewish place of worship; however, to do this when attempting to understand what constitutes the Synagogue of Satan is a huge mistake, because the word *synagogue* in both Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, is translated from the Greek word *sunagoge*, which just means an assemblage of people.

Although verse 9 seems to indicate that the individuals who claim to be Jews are associated with the elect of Smyrna, this may not be the case, because of what is said in verse 10:

"Fear none of those things which you shall suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days: you be faithful to death, and I will give you a crown of life" (Rev.2:10 KJV Para).

Verse 10 tells us that the Devil (i.e., Satan) is going to cause some of the elect of Smyrna to be imprisoned.

Therefore, it is highly likely that those of the Synagogue of Satan are not associated with the elect of Smyrna, but are a rival religion claiming to be Jews, but are persecuting the elect of Smyrna under the direction of Satan. If this is true, why would these individuals claim to be Jews and what connection does claiming to be a Jew have to do with the Synagogue of Satan?

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things says he that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens; I know your works: behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength, and have kept my word, and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the Synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you" (Rev.3:7-9 KJV).

The Bible clearly shows that the Sovereign God will not force a person to worship him or to worship a false God and that a person has the freedom to choose who or what they will worship. Therefore, in order to get a more accurate sense of what Revelation 3:9 is telling us, let us review verse 9 in the following translations:

"I will make those who are of the Synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars, I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you" (Rev.3:9 NIV). The Living Bible Paraphrased translates this verse as follows:

"I will force those supporting the causes of Satan while claiming to be mine (but they aren't-they are lying) to fall at your feet and acknowledge that you are the ones I love" (Rev.3:9 TLB).

The individuals noted in Revelation 3:9, who come and worship at the feet of the resurrected saints who are now immortal god-beings in the divine family of God, are people who exist after the return of Christ and after the government of God has been established on earth. These are individuals who will come to realize through the proclaiming of the true gospel of the Kingdom of God that their former worship system was in opposition to the Sovereign God's worship system.

The reality is that there are many people who masquerade as followers of the true God, but do not live a righteous life because they do not know any different or because they are willingly in the service of Satan. The following is one of the many warnings to beware of such individuals:

"Therefore by their fruits you shall know them. Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then I will say to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity" (Matt.7:20-23 KJV Para.). See also Matt.24:4-5, 11.

The people referred to in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 who say they are Jews but are not, are people who profess to follow the teaching of the Sovereign God and his son the Messiah, but who are in reality followers of Satan (i.e., of the Synagogue of Satan), because they are living in disobedience to God's law and way of life as set forth in the biblical record.

Because we know that people from all races are called to salvation during this gospel age (Rom.1:16; 11:1-25), logic tells us the individuals referred to as Jews in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, are not necessarily of the tribe of Judah or the House of Judah which is comprised of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi who remained loyal to the House of David after Solomon's death, nor do these individuals necessarily practice Judaism. Moreover, because we know that these prophecies concerning Smyrna and Philadelphia specifically apply to the Sovereign Father's earthly children, we can safely assume that the word Jews is a metaphor for individuals who claim to be worshipers of the Sovereign God, but who in fact are not.

Again the question is, What connection does claiming to be a Jew have to do with the Synagogue of Satan? The answer is, it has everything to do with a person's salvation because, salvation is of the Jews.

Salvation Is of The Jews

During a conversation with a woman of Samaria, of whom Jesus asked for a drink of water, and after the woman's comment about the place to worship God, Jesus said the following:

"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem, worship the Father. You do not know what you worship, because salvation is of the Jews" (Jn.4: 21-22 KJV Para.).

This is an extremely important statement, because Jesus defines salvations point of origin. Jesus was of the House of Judah and a descendant of the patriarch Judah. Additionally, the House of Judah with the House of Israel are national Israel through which is to flow the knowledge of salvation and blessings for mankind after Christ returns.

Writing to the elect at Rome about salvation, the apostle Paul wrote the following:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom.1:16 KJV).

Paul says that salvation was offered to the Jews first and then to the Greeks. Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin and therefore was of the House of Judah who are commonly called Jews.

Because Paul was an Israelite and had been educated as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6, 26:5) and by Christ in Arabia (Gal.1:11-18), he clearly understood the reasons for salvation being offered to the Jews first.

All of the promises of salvation and blessing that God has made are to come through national Israel (Gen.12:1-3; 28:10-14; Acts 3:25) and it is through a Jewish lineage that the Messiah came to fulfill the promise of salvation. It is through the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of sin that the promises made to Abraham can now be passed on to all people (See Rom.11:1-36 and Gal.3:8).

In his letter to the Gentile elect at Ephesus the apostle Paul wrote the following concerning their salvation and adoption into the commonwealth of Israel through the sacrifice of Christ:

"For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph.2:8-10 KJV Para).

Paul reminds them, it is through their faith in the sacrifice of Christ that they have been granted salvation and that they are the Father's workmanship which he has created in Christ for good works. Paul then reminds them of their spiritual condition before they were called to salvation by God the Father:

"Therefore remember, that you were at one time Gentiles in the flesh, who are called the Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision [i.e., the Jews] in the flesh made by hands; That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph.2:11-12 KJV Para.).

Because the promise of salvation and blessings are to come through national Israel, all other peoples were without hope of receiving salvation or the blessings promised to national Israel before the advent of the Messiah.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who were sometimes far off are made near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us [i.e., between the Israelite and non-Israelite]; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; to make in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both [i.e., the Israelite and non-Israelite] to God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off [i.e., the non-Israelite], and to them that were near [i.e., the Israelite]" (Eph.2:13-17 KJV Para.).

Because of Christ's sacrifice, all people whether Israelite or non-Israelite have the opportunity to receive salvation and the blessings which were promised to mankind through national Israel. The elect of Ephesus were among the first non-Israelites to be afforded this opportunity.

"For through him [i.e., Christ] we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints [i.e., the sacred ones], and of the household of God" (Eph.2:18-19 KJV). See also Rom. 11: 1-36 for Paul's explanation of how non-Israelites are made a part of national Israel and receive the blessings promised to national Israel.

Notice it is through Christ that non-Israelites are now able to become citizens of national Israel in a spiritual sense.

The Spiritual Jew

The following comments by the apostle Paul to the elect at Rome about the covenant relationship with God the Father reveals the difference between a physical Jew and a spiritual Jew:

"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom.2:28-29 KJV).

Paul's reference to the law of circumcision is extremely important, because under the terms and conditions of the Creator God's covenant with national Israel, physical circumcision was the evidence that a covenant relationship existed between the Creator God and the Israelites. Any Israelite male who was not circumcised was without a covenant with the Creator and could not participate in the blessings afforded to national Israel. However, men whom the Sovereign Father calls to salvation today need not be circumcised, because after a person is made sinless and pure through Christ's sacrifice, God the Father ratifies his agreement with that person by placing his spirit within them. See Rom.8:16-19; Jer.31:31-33; Heb.8:8-11.

The covenant relationship with God the Father is one of the spirit and not of the flesh. The spiritual Jew is a person who has received the Father's holy spirit (Acts 5:32) and has been adopted into his earthly family of sacred ones during the gospel age of salvation (Rom.8:15-23). Counterfeit Jews claim to have the indwelling of the Sovereign Father's holy spirit, but in actuality do not; therefore, they are in fact counterfeit spiritual Jews.

The Law and The Jew

Concerning God's law and the tribe of Judah, the Creator God decreed the following, which made the Jews and subsequently the House of Judah the stewards of God's law:

"The scepter [a reference to rulership] shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes [a reference to Christ's return]; and to him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen.49:10 KJV).

The prophet Jeremiah recorded the following confirmation of the prophetic promise made through Jacob concerning Judah and subsequently the House of Judah (i.e., Judah, Benjamin, and Levi) about the rulership of Israel and those charged with persevering and teaching God's law:

"For this says the Lord; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually. And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, This says the Lord; If you can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister to me" (Jer.33:17-22 KJV Para.).

What is the connection between being a Jew and being one who is considered by the Sovereign Father to be a member of his earthly family of king-priests? The apostle John reveals this connection by writing the following:

"And hereby we do know that we know him [i.e., the Sovereign Father], if we keep his commandments. He that says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, in him truly is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that says he abides in him [i.e., Christ] ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1.Jn.2:3-6 KJV Para.). See also 1.Jn.5:1-3.

The connection between being a Jew and being a person who is considered of the Synagogue of Satan is that individuals who say they are spiritual Jews (i.e., those who practice God's laws which apply to them as a child of God), when in fact this assertion is a lie, places these individuals in the category of being in Satan's worship system, because Satan is a law breaker. See Jn.8:44.

WHAT IS A CHURCH?

In order to understand what the Synagogue of Satan is and the difference between the Synagogue of Satan and the Sovereign God's earthly family of king-priests commonly called the church of the first-born (Heb.12:18-24), one must first understand what a church is and is not.

In the Book of Exodus the Creator God's covenant people were called the congregation of Israel (Ex.12:1-6) and in the Book of Acts they were called the church in the wildernesses (Acts 7:38), both of which just meant all of the tribes of Israel as a national entity under the Creator God's rule.

The difference between the church in the wilderness and church of the firstborn described in the New testament is that national Israel had an agreement with Creator God and those whom the Sovereign Father calls his firstborn have an agreement with him which has better promises than the agreement with national Israel (Heb.8:1-13).

The English word *church* is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means *a calling out* (i.e., *a popular meeting, an assembly, especially a religious congregation*). The word *church* simply means a group of people meeting together. Attaching the word church to a group or organization does not necessarily make it a part of the Body of Christ. The *ekklesia* (the true church) which exists during the gospel age of salvation was established on the Festival of Pentecost after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. See Acts 2:1-47; 5:32.

In the purest sense, the church Jesus said he would establish (Matt. 16:18) is composed of people who are personally called out of this evil world by God the Father (Jn.6:44;65) to believe what Jesus taught, follow his example, and submit to his Father's rule in their lives (Jn.14: 15-24).

The church Jesus established for his heavenly Father is very different from what most people believe is his church. The church Jesus built is composed of people whom God the Father has personally called out of this world's societies to be a part of the collective Body of Christ (i.e., the church, 1.Cor.1:1-31). Each individual member is an integral part of the whole, who either gather together as a group or worship him as individuals to do the work of the church and to work out their individual salvation. See Matt.28:18-20; 2.Tim.2:15; 2.Pet.3:18; Phil.2:12.

Today, the reality is that the elect of God are scattered throughout the world. Some are organized into collective groups and some are alone and separated from fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Body of Christ (i.e., the church) is not a corporate organization sanctioned by men, this church is a spiritual organism. Christ is its head and its body is composed of those called by the Father to salvation during this gospel age. Many people think because they are a member of an organization called a church and believe God exists, that they are Christians (i.e., followers of Christ's teachings). This is a very dangerous assumption to make, especially when according to the teachings of Christ and the apostles, our eternal life depends on our diligent practice of the Sovereign God's worship system and obedience to his truth and way of truth to the best of our knowledge and ability.

TWO WORSHIP SYSTEMS

After Adam and Eve were evicted from the garden of Eden, two worship systems began to exist side by side. One was established and ruled by the Creator God and one was established and ruled by Satan. In the book of Genesis we see two different worship systems being practiced by Abel and Cain.

Abel accepted the Creator's rule over his life and worshiped him as he instructed and Cain rebelled against God, his rule, and his worship system. Because Abel was willing to follow God's instructions about how he wanted to be worshiped, Abel was called righteous and had a harmonious relationship with the Creator God:

"And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and by the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect to Able and to his offering" (Gen.4:2-4 KJV).

Abel's offering was symbolic of Christ, the Lamb of God, and is consistent with the sacrificial system recorded elsewhere in the Bible, which was established for those to practice who desired to serve and worship the Creator God:

"By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it being dead yet he speaks" (Heb.11:4 KJV).

Abel is the first person mentioned in the Bible to receive salvation and is a type of many who would follow his example and be saved from the second death in the Lake of Fire.

"For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and killed his brother. And why killed he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1.Jn.3:11-12 KJV).

We can conclude from what John records about Cain and Able that Able lived a righteous life according to God's standards and is an example of all whom God the Father calls to salvation and remain faithful to him.

Cain, the Wicked

Cain seems to be the first incorrigibly wicked person. Although Cain acknowledged God as the source of all good, he rejected God's worship system and substituted his own in its place:

"Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and by the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect to Able and to his offering: But to Cain and to his offering he had not respect. . ." (Gen.4:2-5 KJV).

Cain brought a bloodless offering of the fruit of the ground in contrast to Abel's sacrifice of a lamb from his flock of sheep. Abel's offering addresses a major truth of God's law which proclaims, *"without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin"* (Heb.9:22; 11:4).

In conformity to God's system of worship, Able brought a blood offering; therefore, he acknowledged that he was a sinner and in need of forgiveness. Cain's offering shows his rebellion against God's system of worship and the beginning of all false religious systems which attempt to worship God through their own methods, which are in opposition to God's methods.

After Cain made his offering, and understood that God had not accepted it, he became angry at God; therefore, the Creator said to him:

"If you do well, shall you not be accepted? and if you do not do well, sin [a sin offering] lies at the door. And to you shall be his desire, and you shall rule over him" (Gen.4:7 KJV Para.).

The English word *sin* in Genesis 4:7 is translated from a Hebrew word, which means *sin* and *sin offering*; therefore, the use of the word emphasizes the complete identification of the believer's sin with his sin offering. In verse 7, both meanings are brought together: *"sin lies at the door"* and *"a sin offering crouches at the door."* Cain's bloodless offering was a denial of his guilt and a rejection of God's method of atonement for sin. The Creator appeals to Cain to bring the required offering by saying *"If you do well [make the correct offering], shall you not be accepted? . . . and you shall rule over him [sin]"* (Gen.4:7).

The Living Bible Paraphrased translates this account as follows:

"And Abel brought the fatty cuts of meat from his best lambs, and presented them to the Lord. And the Lord accepted Abel's offering [because Abel's offering represented Christ], but not Cain's. This made Cain both dejected and very angry, and his face grew dark with fury [Cain was angry at God]. "Why are you angry?" the Lord asked him "Why is your face so dark with rage?" (Gen.4:4-6 LBP).

The Creator tells Cain if he would repent and bring the proper sacrifice as Able had done, he could be very happy.

"It can be bright with joy if you will do what you should! But if you refuse to obey [God's previous instructions concerning the proper offering]. Watch out [Here is a warning from God]. Sin is waiting to attack you, longing to destroy you [Sin will eventually destroy you if you do not bring the proper offering and have it forgiven and covered]. But you can conquer it!" (Gen.4:7 LBP).

The Creator gave Cain an opportunity to repent and follow the right system of worship through which he could have his sin atoned for and hidden from his Creator's sight.

Cain could have conquered sin through having a proper attitude and bringing the proper sacrifice. But, Cain refused to do what he knew the Creator wanted him to do, which makes Cain the first example of an incorrigibly wicked person. Therefore, Cain is an example of all who are called by God to live a righteous life and reject that calling. Cain refused to worship God in the manner in which God wanted to be worshiped.

Cain through self-delusion or through Satan's influence decided to worship God in an unacceptable manner, which was a different worship system than the Creator had established. From this point forward and throughout human history two separate worship systems have existed—The Sovereign God's worship system and Satan's worship system in its many and varied forms.

The followers of the Sovereign God are his congregation (i.e., his church) and the followers of Satan are his congregation (i.e., his church).

Most professing Christians and most of the general public believe the historical record shows that the world's many Christian denominations evolved from the church Christ originally established. However, this belief is in error. When one searches the biblical and historical record without a preconceived notion of the outcome, one finds that the church Christ established never evolved, it disappeared into obscurity leaving behind a counterfeit which assumed the identity of the true church, but which is in fact one among many of the worship systems which began with the rebellion of Cain against the one established by the Creator God.

THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

Does the Bible identify and describe the worship system noted in the Book of Revelation as the Synagogue of Satan? The biblical answer is yes. In fact this worship system is clearly identified and described throughout the biblical record.

According to the Bible there are only two religions on earth: the Sovereign God's and Satan's in its many and varied forms. If you practice a religion, you are either worshiping the Sovereign God through his worship system or you are worshiping Satan or evil spirits either directly or by proxy through one of the many and varied worship systems, which are in opposition to the Sovereign God's worship system—That which is not of God is of Satan or of man influenced by Satan or evil spirits. See 2.Cor.4:3-4; Rev.12:9.

It should be readily apparent to anyone who carefully studies the Bible and this world's religions and the impact that these have had and are having on mankind, that Satan has a vast following of people comprised of organized religions, churches, and ministers through whom he is actively deceiving the whole world:

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, that deceives the whole world" (Rev.12:9 KJV).

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2.Cor.11:13-15 KJV). See also Matt:7:15; Rev.2:9; 3:9.

Yes, Satan is actively deceiving the whole world into following his various religious philosophies and worship systems and he does have ministers and organizations disguised as true adherents of the Sovereign God's worship system.

Satan's ministers and organizations teach and practice various religious philosophies and counterfeits of the Sovereign God's worship system in order to deceive people into thinking they are truly worshipping a god or gods who will provide them physical, spiritual, or eternal benefits.

Where Satan Dwells

Is or was there a place on earth where Satan had or has his headquarters and from where he conducts his business of deceiving this world religiously, philosophically, and politically? The answer is yes, at least according to the Book of Revelation:

"To the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things says he which has the sharp sword with two edges; I know your works, and where you dwell, even where Satan's seat is: and you hold fast my name, and have not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells" (Rev.2:12-13 KJV Para.).

The city of Pergamos was the capital city of Asia Minor. Pergamos was a wealthy city and well known for its political power, its intellectual achievements, and its many religions and temples dedicated to various gods.

The English word *seat* in verse 13 is translated from the Greek word *thronos*, which means a *stately seat* (i.e., a *throne*); by implication, *power* or (concretely) a *potentate*.

The English word *dwells* is translated from the Greek word *katoikeo*, which means *to house permanently*, i.e., *reside* (literally or figuratively).

Christ's revelation to the apostle John seems to have been given in the last part of the first century A.D.. And according to Christ, the location of Satan's seat of power from which he ruled and resided at that time was at Pergamos. Whether or not this is from where Satan directs his affairs and where he resides on earth today is unclear. What is clear from the biblical record is that Satan is the current ruler of this world and will not be deposed until Christ returns to depose him. See 2.Cor.4:1-4; Rev. 11:15.

The Faith Once Delivered

At the time Jude wrote his letter to the elect, the truth of God was being corrupted by heretical teachings of individuals and spiritual leaders within the church who were perverting God's truth and way of truth in order to destroy the elect; therefore, Jude felt it necessary to write the following:

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write to you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write to you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3 KJV).

This scripture shows the importance of striving to recapture the system of beliefs which were given to the early church. The original Greek language of Jude verse 3 gives the sense that it will take more than a casual effort to recapture the faith that was given to them. It will take a sincere, dedicated, and diligent effort.

The scriptures warn us to avoid heresies, heretics, and participation in satanic religions; therefore, in the final analysis, the accountability and the responsibility for being deceived by Satan and his ministers, religions, and philosophies belongs to each individual within whom the holy spirit dwells.

A SERIOUS WARNING

The prophet Amos recorded this prophecy about the results of ancient Israel's rebellion against God:

"Only you have I known out of all the families on earth; therefore I will punish you for your lawlessness. Can two walk together, except they are in agreement?" (Am.3:2-3 Para.).

"Can two walk together, except they are in agreement?" The answer is, No, they cannot. A person cannot be a part of a satanic worship system and a worshiper of the true God. A person is either a follower of Satan's religious system or philosophy of life or a follower of the Sovereign God's worship system and philosophy of life. According to the biblical record, there is no neutral position between these two belief systems and ways of life.

This prophecy recorded by Amos applies to anyone who claims to believe the biblical record and considers themselves to be a follower of Christ's example.

SATAN'S WORSHIP SYSTEM

Does a powerful spirit-being called Satan and the Devil actually have places of worship where people pay homage to him and serve him? The answer to this question may surprise you and help bring into focus the reality of the biblical narrative and the warnings about the extreme danger posed by Satan and other evil spirits.

Have any of this world's past and present religions, whether they be biblical based or some other religious philosophy brought lasting peace and prosperity to mankind? The answer is obvious. No, they have not. But why not? The answer to this question is that they are in opposition to the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth—they were and are clever deceptions.

Being keenly aware of religious deception and one's spiritual enemies is extremely important to one who is seeking to worship the true God during this age of religious confusion. Therefore, the following warning to the early church by the apostle Peter about Satan should be seriously considered:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, walks about as a roaring lion seeking those he may devour" (1.Pet.5:8 KJV).

SATAN'S DECEPTION

Satan began his deceptive practice long before mankind was created. This powerful, arrogant, and rebellious spirit-being had deluded himself to the point that he thought he was more powerful than his maker and could dethrone the Sovereign God and assume control of his kingdom.

Thinking that numbers would increase his power and give him an easy victory over the Sovereign God and spirit-beings loyal to him and his governmental system, Satan deceived other spirit-beings (Matt: 25:41; Rev.12:9) into following him in this futile attempt to depose the Sovereign God. Notice what Isaiah records about Satan's self-deception:

"For you [Satan] have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa.14: 13-14).

Although Satan deceived hundreds of millions of angels into following him in his rebellion and his attempt to depose the Sovereign God, he failed in this ill conceived and foolish rebellion.

After the creation of Adam and Eve, we see Satan in the Garden of Eden deceiving Eve:

"Now the serpent [Satan] was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Is it true that God has said, you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" (Gen.3:1 Para.).

Satan who is the master of deception questions Eve to see if she understood what the Creator had said regarding the trees in the garden.

"And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die" (Gen.3:2-3 KJV).

Eve knew that God had not only forbidden them to eat fruit from this particular tree, but also he had forbidden them to touch it. It seems that the Creator had made it very clear to Adam and Eve that this particular tree was something very dangerous to their well-being. It was so dangerous that to even touch it would bring the death penalty.

"And the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die: For God knows that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen.3: 4-5 KJV).

Satan tells Eve a lie in order to deceive her into a false sense of security; however, he tells her the absolute truth about the knowledge to be gained from eating the fruit of this particular tree. This truth with the suggestion from Satan that the Creator was trying to keep something from them which was highly desirable was more than Eve could resist.

Satan has not ceased to deceive mankind since he deceived Eve into disregarding the Creator's instruction to not touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or eat its fruit. The Book of Revelation tells us the following about Satan's continued deception:

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, that deceives the whole world" (Rev.12:9 KJV).

In a conversation with the Pharisees, Jesus said the following about these men's intention to kill him and the source of their evil character:

*"If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God: Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father. Then they said to him, We are not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, you would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me"
"You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (Jn.8:39-42, 44-45 KJV Para.).*

Although these spiritual leaders of the Jews were highly respected for their knowledge of God's law they were in fact not worshiping the true God correctly, instead, they had perverted his law and worship system. Therefore, Jesus considered them to be children of Satan who deceives and influences people into believing and practicing his religions and philosophies.

SATAN'S MINISTERS AND FALSE PROPHETS

Satan's Ministers

When Jesus' disciples asked him about the things that would transpire at the end of the age. One of the things Jesus said would occur, would be the appearance of individuals and prophets who will lead people astray.

"Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt.24:4-5 KJV).

"And many false prophets will arise, and will deceive many" (Matt.24:11 Para.).

At the very beginning of the early church, Satan began his plan to destroy the elect of God by sending his ministers to subvert, deceive, and destroy the congregations of the elect from within. The apostle Paul gave the following warning to the elect at Corinth concerning the threat to their salvation posed by Satan's ministers and their teachings:

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled [deceived] Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that comes [and is] preaching another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if you receive another spirit [an evil lying spirit], which you have not received, or another gospel, which you have not accepted [a false gospel]. . ." (2.Cor.11:3-4 KJV). See also Gal.1:6-9.

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2.Cor.11:13-15 KJV). See also Deut.13:1-5; Jer.23:21-22.

Yes, Satan has ministers disguised as true servants of God and some of these individuals are within the various congregations of the Sovereign Father's elect. These individuals actively preach and teach gospel messages and worship systems which are a perversion of the Father's true message and worship system. See Rev.2:9, 3:9, 12:9.

Although some of the individuals who claim to be the ministers of Christ are truly deceived themselves, some are not, some are willing tools of Satan. These individuals actively try to destroy the unsuspecting, the ill informed, and the naive. Jesus knew this would happen and gave the following warning to his followers to beware of those who were not sent by him to shepherd his people:

"Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt.24:4-5 KJV).

Notice what the apostle John wrote about deceivers who oppose Christ:

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2.Jn.7 KJV).

The English words *deceivers* and *antichrist* are translated from the Greek words *planos* and *antichristos*, which respectively means *roving* (as a tramp), i.e. (by implication) an *impostor* and an *opponent of the Messiah*.

Whether intentional or through ignorance, individuals who teach a religion or a philosophy which is in opposition to the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth are serving Satan's purpose and are against Christ and the message he brought from his heavenly Father.

Satan's False Prophets

In today's world there are many people who consider themselves prophets. Prophets come from almost every race, religion, educational, and philosophical background. Some prophets foretell gloom and doom for humanity, some foretell a bright, happy, and prosperous future, while others only concern themselves with more mundane aspects of life, such as what film star will get married or divorced, who will win an election or the national lottery. Some prophets require payment for their services while others do not.

The apostle Peter warns that many would be misled by false prophets who would come among the elect and teach things contrary to truth and he gives three clues that help one to determine whether or not what a prophet or a spiritual leader says is from the true God.

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of " (2.Pet.2:1-2 KJV).

Notice that these false prophets and teachers, teach things contrary to God's truth (i.e., heresies), deny the validity of Christ, and ridicule the truth of God. The early church did not heed these and other warnings of Christ and the apostles and therefore it all but disappeared as a powerful spirit filled entity by the end of the first century A.D..

The End of the Age

When Jesus' disciples asked him about the things which would happen during the end of the age, one of the things that he said would occur would be the appearance of prophets who will lead people astray:

"And many false prophets will arise, and will deceive many" (Matt.24:11 Para.).

In order to understand this prophecy, it is important to know that this prophecy is specifically directed to those who are truly of the household of God and live in the times just before Christ returns.

Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the demise and disappearance of the early church into obscurity, this prophetic warning has come true and is still being fulfilled. Today, the world is full of prophets, some masquerade as Christians, others claim to be sent by non-Christian gods, spirit-beings, physical beings other than humans, or claim some other source of their prophetic revelations and teachings.

For those who truly believe in the Sovereign God (God the Father) and the Creator God who came to earth as the Messiah, determining if a prophet is truly representing them is of great importance, because one's eternal destiny depends on what one believes and practices.

Prophets and the Return of Christ

Many prophets have foretold the return of Christ. In our recent history. One such prophet foretold that Christ would return in 1844, another said his return would be in 1914, and yet another predicted his return would be in 1975. Prophets continually set dates and continually disappoint tens of thousands of people who believe and follow them.

It is obvious that people who believed these prophets were deceived, because these prophecies did not come to pass. Were these prophets sent from the true God? Obviously not, because their prophecies failed; therefore, one of the more obvious indications that a prophet is not sent from the Sovereign God or Christ is that their prophecies concerning things of God fail to materialize. See Matt.24:23-51; Mk.13:21-22.

The Bible and secular history record many people who foretold future events which did happen. But does this mean that these people were prophets of the true God? Does the foretelling of future events certify a person as a prophet sent from the true God?

Prophets and Supernatural Works

The Creator God gave many instructions to national Israel about how they should serve him and conduct their lives as a righteous nation. Among these instructions were warnings against worshipping false gods, learning and practicing the ways of other nations around them, and paying attention to false prophets.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses records the following instructions about how to determine who is a prophet sent from God and who is not, even when their predictions come to pass:

"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder comes to pass, whereof he spoke to you, saying, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them; You shall not pay attention to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God puts you to the test, in order to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut.13:1-3 Para.).

The English word *wonder* is translated from the Hebrew word *mowpheth*, which means a *miracle* (in the sense of being visible); by inference, a *token* or *omen*.

The Creator God did not prevent false prophets from coming among the Israelites, but instead required the Israelites to know and understand his truth and way of truth and to determine for themselves whether or not a prophet was sent from him.

"You shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and you shall serve him, and cleave to him" (Deut.13:4 KJV).

If a person truly knows and understands the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth and is practicing his laws, precepts, and principles to the best of their ability, it will be very difficult to deceive that person and that person should be able to easily determine who is and is not sent from God as a prophet.

"And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he has spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust you out of the way which the Lord your God commanded you to walk in. So shall you put the evil away from the midst of you" (Deut.13:5 Para.).

Notice that the Israelites were given strict instructions to put false prophets to death when they were discovered among them. Notice also that this same punishment was to be meted out to individuals who attempted to entice the Israelites to serve false gods:

"If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son, or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend, which is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which you have not known, you, nor your fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, near to you, or far off from you, from the one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth; You shall not consent to him, nor pay attention to him; neither shall your eye pity him, neither shall you spare, neither shall you conceal him: But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people" (Deut.13:6-9 Para.).

Verse 10 to 11 tells us why the Creator prescribed such harsh punishment to be administered to those who would attempt to lead people away from the service and worship of the true God.

"And you shall stone him with stones, that he dies; because he has sought to thrust you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this among you" (Deut.13:10-11 KJV Para.).

Throughout the centuries, many false prophets and false Messiahs have come and gone. During the time of trouble, at the end of the age of human rule on earth, religious deception will be so intense that the only ones who will not be deceived by Satan and other evil spirits are individuals who diligently follow the teachings of the true God:

"Then if anyone says to you, Behold, here is the Christ; or, Here he is! Do not believe it. For false christs will rise up, and false prophets. And they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I tell you beforehand. Then if they say to you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; do not go out. Behold, he is in the inner rooms; do not believe them" (Matt. 24:23-26 Para.). See also Mk.13:21-22.

Jesus says that, before his return a very powerful prophet will come on the world scene and do great supernatural works. The following are some of the supernatural works which will be performed by this false prophet:

"And he does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (Rev.13:13-15 KJV). See also Rev.16:15; 19:20; 20:10.

It is important to understand that this false prophet and the religious system he leads have tremendous supernatural power with which to deceive people and to counter the supernatural works the elect of God will be doing as they proclaim the Sovereign God's good news message at that time.

Does the ability to perform supernatural works certify a person as a prophet sent from the true God? Clearly not, because the Bible and secular history record many people who have had supernatural abilities, but clearly were not worshipers of the true God (Ex.7:8-12, 20-22; Matt.7:22-23). Today is no different than the past when it comes to false prophets and miracle workers, many of whom claim to worship the true God, but who in fact worship and serve Satan and other false gods.

The Bible reveals there is only one faith and one method of worship acceptable to God; therefore, one of the best ways to tell the difference between a false prophet and one sent from the true God is to determine if what is taught by a person claiming to be a prophet conforms to God's laws, precepts, and principles (Isa.8:19-20). Another way to determine a prophet's credentials, is to analyze their spiritual fruit to determine if it is good or evil when compared to God's word (Matt.7:20-23).

Opposing the Good News Message

The following event during the apostle Paul's ministry demonstrates the opposition to the message of salvation by those in Satan's service:

"So they [Paul and others], being sent forth by the holy spirit, departed to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to assist them. And when they had gone through the isle to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Son of Jesus" (Acts 13:4-6 KJV Para.).

Verse 6 and the first part of verse 7 describes an individual who practiced magic and who purported to tell the future and who was either an associate, companion, or friend of a government official:

"Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Paul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas [i.e., the wizard] the magician (for so is his name by interpretation) opposed them, seeking to turn the deputy away from the faith" (Acts 13:7-8 KJV Para.).

Here we see this individual who served Satan through witchcraft attempting to convince the deputy to not pay attention to what Paul was telling him about God's truth and way of truth. Satan and his ministers actively attempt to destroy the elect (1.Pet.5:8) and anyone who is being offered salvation.

"Then Saul, [who also is called Paul], filled with the holy spirit, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:9-10 KJV Para.).

What Paul said to this individual could not be more clear. Here was an individual who was actively attempting to prevent another person from understanding the Father's message of salvation. Today, there are many individuals who are doing the same thing.

"And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:11-12 KJV Para.).

RELIGIOUS DECEPTION

The elect of the early church were continually warned and admonished to keep the faith and to be on guard against those who would attempt to destroy them. Paul's warning to the evangelist Timothy is just as valid today as it was then:

"Now the spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1.Tim.4:1-2 KJV). See also 2.Tim.4:3-4.

Counterfeit Christians and Satan's Sons

As Jesus was preparing his disciples for their conversion and their responsibilities as spiritual leaders of the elect after his death and resurrection, he warned them through the parable of the wheat and the tares of an extreme danger which would always be present within their midst:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from? An enemy did this, he replied. The servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up? No, he answered, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn" (Matt.13:24-30 NIV).

Verses 24-30 tells us there are two different types of grain planted in the field—good grain and bad grain. The beneficial grain was planted by the owner of the field and the harmful grain was planted by the owner's enemy, but both the good and the bad grain must be left to mature together until the harvest.

Satan's Sons

"His disciples came to him and said, Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field. He answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man [Christ]. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom [the elect]. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil . . ." (Matt.13:36-39 NIV).

Clearly, the wheat is symbolic of the Sovereign Father's elect children and the weeds are symbolic of the children and servants of Satan, whom Jesus describes as the evil one and the devil. Although both the wheat and the weeds claim to be followers of Christ, one is not. These false Christians among the elect can be very dangerous to one's salvation, because they weave themselves among the roots of the wheat (the foundation and inner-workings of a congregation of true followers of Christ) and are spiritual poison to a true Christian, because their mission is to subvert the plan of God and destroy his people.

"The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man [Christ] will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matt.13:39-43 NIV).

This parable tells the spiritually alert Christian the following things about professing Christianity as a world religion and those who truly follow Christ's example:

- Not everyone who claims to be a Christian is truly a follower of Christ.
- Jesus Christ allows counterfeit Christians to exist within the congregations of true believers.
- Counterfeit Christians are not to be removed when they are recognized, because their removal might uproot some of the true but spiritually immature Christians.

Although counterfeit Christians can be identified, many of God's people cannot tell the difference between a true Christian and a false one, simply because they have not put forth enough effort to truly know and understand the difference between good and evil on both a physical and spiritual level.

Although the removal of a counterfeit Christian from among God's people is the responsibility of Jesus Christ, the parable of the wheat and tares is a clear warning to those who are serious about their salvation to develop a keen sense of spiritual hearing and eyesight in order to keep from being deceived by counterfeit Christians.

Satan Inspired Wolves Among the Flock

"And from Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. . . Take heed, therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the holy spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his blood. For I know that after I leave, grievous wolves will come among you, that will not spare the flock. Also among you shall men arise, speaking perverse things, in order to draw away disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:17; 28-30 Para.).

Paul's prophetic warning to the elders at Ephesus came true. Throughout the centuries, evil men and women have entered congregations of God's elect claiming to be spiritual Jews and have abused and manipulated God's elect in order to gain a following for themselves and fulfill their own sinful lusts and desires. Today is no different, there are individuals who infiltrate the congregations of God's elect with the intent to destroy them and to use and abuse them for their personal gain (See Rom.16:17-18). These individuals are in reality counterfeit Christians and members of the Synagogue of Satan.

Religions and Governmental Systems

It is readily apparent that all past and present religions, philosophies, and political and governmental systems have failed and are failing to remove the ills of humanity and to bring about a better world. However, Jesus proclaimed a message of true peace and prosperity through the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Jesus taught his followers to pray for the Sovereign Father's kingdom to come, because it is only through the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth that humanity can be saved from itself. It is only through true worship of the Father and the enforcement of his laws and governmental system on earth that humans will ever find the things they seek—true peace, prosperity, security, and happiness. However, almost all of this world's religions and religious philosophies teach that mankind through its own effort and worship systems can achieve world peace and prosperity. These teachings are clearly in opposition to what is taught through the biblical text.

When we look at the conditions of this present world, we see a world of unending chaos where righteous, ethical, and moral behavior is rare. The world is in turmoil. There are wars, famines, disease epidemics, environmental pollution, crime, hatred, racism, poverty, squalor, religious bigotry, broken-homes, permissiveness, promiscuity, sexual perversion, upset weather conditions, and natural disasters.

The pathetic situation in which we see the world today is the result of centuries of practicing the wrong kinds of religious and political systems. If this were not true, we would live in a far different world than exists today.

If Jesus personally walked the earth today and proclaimed his heavenly Father's good news message, he would give the same reprimands to the majority of professing Christians that he gave to the Jewish people, the priesthood, and the religious leaders of his day who were charged with a sacred trust to preserve God's word in its purity and meaning. But, who had instead perverted God's law and worship system to the point that its original intent was almost unrecognizable during Christ's lifetime and ministry. This is why Jesus said the following to the Scribes and Pharisees:

"You have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophecy about you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips honor me; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the ordinances of men" (Matt.15:6-9 KJV Para.). See Isa.29:13; Ezk.33:31-32.

Although the Jews of Jesus' day were extremely religious and zealous in what they believed, they were not correctly worshiping the true God, they had devised their own religion which only had an outward appearance of what had originally been established in ancient Israel.

The Bible reveals that Satan and his ministers have counterfeited the true good news message and the Sovereign Father's worship system with perverted versions. These false gospels and worship systems have been accepted by the majority of people as the original teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles.

SUMMARY

Yes, Satan and the evil spirits who followed him in his rebellion against the Sovereign God are actively deceiving the whole world. Satan and these other evil spirits are masters of deception and have been deceiving most of the world religiously, philosophically, and politically since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Notice what the Creator God said through Joshua to the elders and other officials of Israel about their ancestors worship of false gods before the Great Flood and the false gods of Egypt:

"This says the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods" (Josh.24:2 KJV).

"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve you the Lord" (Josh.24:14 KJV).

The existence of deceptive worship systems before and after the great worldwide flood of Noah's time is a biblical fact and many people fall prey to these same gods, religions, and religious philosophies thinking that they are worshiping the God of the Bible.

The prophecies of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, clearly show that there are two categories of people who claim to be followers of Christ and worshipers of the Sovereign God. One group truly follows Christ's teachings and worship his heavenly Father and one group which is composed of counterfeit Christians follow Satan's teachings and are of the Synagogue of Satan.

The simple fact according to the apostle John is that the world in general does not recognize the true followers of Christ:

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know him" (1.Jn.3:1 KJV Para.). See also Jn.17:25-26.

Because the world at large does not recognize the true Sovereign of all that exists, his son the Christ, a true follower of Christ, or how to conduct their lives according to God's law, precepts, and principles, the vast majority do not know or understand how to worship the Sovereign God; therefore, they are easily deceived by Satan's ministers and his religions and religious philosophies.

Does the biblical record identify the worship system noted as the Synagogue of Satan in the Book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3? The biblical answer is yes. In fact this worship system is clearly described and explained throughout the Bible.

According to the biblical record there are only two religions on earth: the Sovereign God's and Satan's in its many and varied forms, one of which is a counterfeit of true Christianity. If you practice a religion, you are either worshipping the Sovereign God through his worship system or you are worshipping Satan or evil spirits either directly or by proxy through one or more of the many and varied worship systems which are in opposition to the Sovereign God's worship system—That which is not of God is of Satan or of man influenced by Satan or evil spirits. See 2.Cor.4:3-4; Rev.12:9.

Although separated doctrinally and spiritually, the congregations of the true God have existed alongside congregations of Satan for centuries. The Sovereign God's worship system which is administered by his Son Jesus Christ leads people who practice it to eternal and immortal life; Satan's counterfeits of the Sovereign's worship system leads people to the irrevocable termination of their life in the Lake of Fire unless they come to true repentance of their evil ways and accept the Sovereign God's truth and his rule in their life.

Therefore, the two following questions and their answers are extremely important to anyone whom God the Father is calling to salvation during this age:

- Does it really matter what you believe about God and the Bible?
- Does it really matter which professing Christian organization or congregational association you attend?

If there is no God, and the Bible is not his word, it does not matter what you believe about God and the Bible or with whom you associate to worship God. If no Sovereign God exists to whom you are accountable, why waste your time and effort with religion? The problem with believing there is no Sovereign God is the fact that there is abundant proof that God the Father and Jesus Christ do exist and that the Bible is the Father's message and instruction manual to the human race.

If you are truly seeking to be in harmony with the Sovereign of all that exists and his son the Messiah and desire to have eternal life, you should be extremely concerned that your life measures up to the Sovereign Father's expectations.

God's True Church Does Exist

The Sovereign Father's earthly family of true believers have endured the test of persecution, martyrdom, and time and still exist today as a single spiritual organism consisting of individuals who worship and serve him and his Son while practicing the laws, concepts, and principles as set forth in the biblical record and as instructed by Christ and the apostles. See Matt.16:18; 18:20.

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph.4:4-6).

Somewhere on earth there are people who truly worship and serve the Sovereign Father and his Son, either individually or as a collective group. The Sovereign God's church does exist. It is here on this earth right now! It is doing the same work Jesus commissioned it to accomplish, and it has the same spirit, attitude, goals, and objectives as the early apostles and the church they ruled and served. If a person is going to find the true church, they will have to look outside this world's religions and look into the Bible for its description, doctrines, and policies, because one will not find God's true church among the popular religions of today.

The true church that Christ built is separate from this world's religions and religious philosophies. But, it can be identified and found by those whom the Father is calling to salvation during this gospel age, because these individuals follow the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth as set forth in the biblical record.

The Synagogue of Satan

In the simplest terms, The Synagogue of Satan is composed of all individuals who claim to follow Christ, but who do not follow his example and practice the things he said to practice in order to be a righteous person.

Christ said the following concerning individuals who are at odds with him and his Heavenly Father:

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. And why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" (Lk.6:45-46 KJV Para.).

"You have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophecy about you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips honor me; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the ordinances of men" (Matt.15:6-9 KJV Para.). See Isa.29:13; Ezk.33:31-32.

These are the individuals who worship at the feet of Satan, either individually or collectively through one or more of his imitations of the Sovereign Father's worship system. These individuals claim to practice biblical Christianity, but do not. These are the counterfeit Jews of the Synagogue of Satan noted in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3.

By B. L. Cocherell

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____ CHAPTER ____
TWO
DOCTRINES OF DEMONS
AND
THE TRADITIONS OF MEN

This chapter is not for the closed minded nor the easily offended, it is specifically for individuals who are seeking biblical truth and are not afraid to challenge their current belief system.

If you believe that you do not need to follow the instructions of the apostle Peter to *"Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* then read no further.

But if you believe the Creator inspired the prophet Hosea to record, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, that you shall be no priest to me: seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children"* and if you believe the apostle Paul's instruction to *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness"* (2.Tim.2:15-16 NKJV) then please read on.

TWO BASIC WORSHIP SYSTEMS

According to the biblical record there are only two basic worship systems and ways of life people practice—the Sovereign God's or Satan's. The Sovereign God's worship systems and way of life, if practiced, will lead to everlasting life in the Kingdom and Family of God, while Satan's worship systems and way of life, if continued to be practiced, will lead to the second death in the Lake of Fire.

A worship system or a religious philosophy of behavior is either guided and regulated by the Sovereign God's laws, precepts, and principles or it is guided or influenced by Satan or other evil spirits. There is no middle ground according to what is written in the Bible.

According to the Bible, if you practice a religion, you are either worshiping and serving the Sovereign God or you are worshiping and serving Satan or evil spirits, either directly or by proxy through one or more of the many and varied worship systems which oppose the Sovereign God—That which is not of God is of Satan or of man influenced by Satan or evil spirits. See 2.Cor.4:3-4; Rev.12:9.

RELIGIONS AND RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHIES

Literally tens of thousands of religions and religious philosophies have come and gone throughout human history. Some claim to be the only true religion, while others claim their religion and philosophy is one among many which benefit mankind.

Among the many religions being practiced today are those professing to follow the teachings of the Bible and for the most part teach this book contains instructions concerning how to live one's life now and forever; however, there is much confusion and bewilderment within both the Jewish and professing Christian religions as to the exact meaning and intent of much of what is recorded in this book. Moreover, there are literally hundreds of opinions on biblical issues found within this book.

A serious study and analysis of the biblical text will reveal that much of what is taught and practiced by various Jewish and professing Christian organizations and congregational associations is a perversion of what is set forth in the biblical record. This perversion deceives people into thinking they are worshipping and serving the God of the Bible. However, this perversion of the biblical record results in people being denied the physical, spiritual, and eternal benefits promised for correctly worshipping and serving the Sovereign God.

Different Perceptions

It seems very strange indeed that most of the various Jewish and Christian organizations and congregational associations use the same biblical record on which to base their beliefs and life styles, but they all differ in how they perceive what is written in this book. To add to the confusion, professing Christians often say, "It doesn't matter what you believe, just as long as you believe in God and the Bible." But, it must matter because not all professing Christians hold the same beliefs.

Obviously, everyone who professes Christianity believes that their particular religious philosophy will get them to heavenly bliss more quickly and efficiently than all of the others. If a person does not believe this, they are settling for second best.

Is one professing Christian philosophy or religious practice just as good as any another? Can all of these conflicting Christian beliefs and philosophies be correct? Logically, if any one of them is correct, the rest must be in error? See Eph.4:4-6.

DURING JESUS' LIFETIME

During Jesus' lifetime the sacrificial system of worship was being practiced and administered from Jerusalem through the Levitical priesthood and God's law was being taught by the scholarly orders of Scribes and Pharisees.

One day, some Pharisees and Scribes came to Jesus and asked him why his disciples had eaten bread without first washing their hands in accordance with the tradition of the spiritual leaders of the Jews. In reply to these men's subtle accusation that his disciples had broken God's law, Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees for breaking God's law concerning giving to needy parents:

"And he said to them, Well you reject the commandments of God, that you may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother; and, Whoever curses father or mother, let him die the death: But you say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever you might be profited by me; he shall be free. And you suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of no effect through your tradition, which you have delivered: and many such like things you do" (Mk.7:9-13 KJV Para.).

The Greek word *corban*, which is used to explain these individual's wrong attitude toward giving, is from the Hebrew word *qorban*, which means an *offering* or *oblation* of self-sacrifice coming from one's life substance.

These men were so perverted in their view of what they thought was righteousness that they had twisted and manipulated God's law to fit their own selfish desires. The Living Bible gives a good translation of Christ's reprimand and puts what he said in a proper perspective:

"You are simply rejecting God's laws and trampling them under your feet for the sake of tradition. For instance, Moses gave you this law from God: 'Honor your father and mother'. And he said that anyone who speaks against his father or mother must die. But you say it is perfectly all right for a man to disregard his needy parents, telling them, 'Sorry, I can't help you! For I have given to God what I could have given to you.' And so you break the law of God in order to protect your man-made tradition. . . ." (Mk.7:9-13 LBP).

During Jesus' lifetime the understanding, teaching, and application of many of God's laws, precepts, and principles had been so perverted that they were almost unrecognizable (See Matt.23:1-4).

Continuing his reprimand of these men who had accused his disciples of breaking God's law, Jesus said the following:

"You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips honor me; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the ordinances of men" (Matt.15:7-9 Para.). See also Isa.29:13; Ezk.33:31-32.

Jesus called these religious leaders of the Jews hypocrites, because they were not teaching the total truth of God. Instead, they were teaching half truths and their own perverted philosophies which were in opposition to God's truth and way of truth. See Matt.3:7; 12:33-34.

The same can be said for the quasi-Christian and Jewish sects of today. Both claim to be obedient to the word of God; however, their actions and the results of their teachings are far different from what the Bible says they should be, if they were truly worshiping the true God and living according to his way.

Jesus also says of those who only pretend to follow him, "*Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, when you do not do the things that I say?*" (Lk.6:46 Para.).

Although much of the perversion of truth these religious leaders of the Jews taught came from their own perverted thinking, much came through the influence of evil spirits, this is why Christ said the following to these men:

"You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (Jn.8:44 KJV). See also Matt.23:1-33.

Christ's condemnation of these men was extremely severe and to the point. In essence, he told them they were so closely aligned with the Devil and his ways in their thoughts and behavior that they were for all intent and purpose the Devil's children.

Satanic Deception

Satan and his followers have for centuries been deceiving most of the world religiously, philosophically, and politically. See Rev.12:9; 2.Cor. 11:13-15; Matt:7:15-20.

Many believe that Jesus is the Christ, but the vast majority do not preach or teach what he taught. Examples of this are the multitudes of quasi-Christians who profess to follow Christ, but who teach there is no need to obey the laws, precepts, and principles that he taught and that are codified throughout the Bible. Clearly Satan and other evil spirits do not want people to believe that Christ came to magnify God's law and expand its meaning (Isa.42:21; Matt.5:17-20).

Satan is a master at deception and there is no doubt that his activities are on the increase. He does not want anyone to believe the Sovereign God's true good news message concerning his awesome plan for humans, the Kingdom of God, and the only way to obtain salvation.

A SERIOUS WARNING

The prophets continually warned ancient Israel about committing spiritual adultery through the worship of other gods and the practice of other worship systems:

"When the Lord your God shall cut off the nations from before you, where you go to possess them, and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after they are destroyed from before you; and that you enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so to the Lord your God: for every abomination to the Lord, which he hates, have they done to their gods. . ." (Deut.12:29-31). See Jer.10:1-5; Ezk.8:16.

Paul also warned the Sovereign God's earthly children at Corinth not to participate in Satan's worship systems:

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellow ship has righteousness and unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (2.Cor.6:14-16 Para.).

Paul makes his point with five different examples in order to leave no doubt that one should not be unequally aligned with non-believers.

Righteousness and unrighteousness are two completely different concepts in attitude and behavior and therefore are not comparable one with the other. The reason the two are incomparable is that one has spiritual light and the other does not. Therefore, there is no common ground on which to build a spiritual relationship.

The existence of deceptive worship systems both biblical based and non-biblical based is a fact. Many people fall prey to satanic worship systems believing they are worshiping beneficial gods or the God of the Bible. Although this is true, there is no eternal punishment for most individuals who worship within these false religions, except for the incorrigibly wicked and the evil spirits who lead them. See chapter 9, Is This The Only Day of Salvation?

There are many warnings throughout the Bible to be continually alert to the danger of entertaining and accepting beliefs and teachings which are in opposition to the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth. There are also many warnings not to encourage or tolerate people who teach beliefs and practices which are inconsistent with God's laws, precepts and principles.

SPIRITUAL LIGHT

During the days of the early church there were many individuals who came among the elect bringing strange and perverted teachings which on the surface seemed to have some validity, but which were in reality teachings of demons which were carefully crafted in order to deceive the elect into discarding the truth and way of truth taught to them by the apostles.

The apostle Paul wrote the following about individuals who were masquerading as apostles of Christ, but who were in fact Satan's ministers:

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing for his ministers to be transformed into the ministers of righteousness. . ." (2.Cor.11:13-15 KJV). See also 2.Tim.3:6.

The vast majority of Satan's ministers who masquerade as apostles of Christ disguise themselves in an aura of spirituality and a pretense of righteousness in order to deceive those who are not well versed in the Bible and are not constantly on guard against deceptive teachings. The apostle Paul warned the Corinthians to beware of those who came to them claiming to be ministers of Christ but taught a gospel message contrary to the one he had taught them. See 2.Cor.11:4.

Since the early years of the church, many men have attempted to appropriate to themselves the office of apostle, and many have claimed to be the chief apostle over the congregations of the Sovereign Father's earthly children. However, God's word shows all of these men to be either ill informed as to the identifying characteristics and credentials of a true apostle or are simply wolves among the sheep who devour the unsuspecting, the ill informed, and the naive. See Acts 20:17, 28-30.

The apostles of the early church have no successors. These men occupied a unique office for a unique time in history with a unique reward for their faithful service. See Matt.19:27-28; Lk.22:23-30.

What Is Spiritual Light?

Paul wrote the following to the elect at Corinth about Satan and his ministers:

"Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing for his ministers to be transformed into the ministers of righteousness." But what is this light Satan and his ministers counterfeit in order to appear righteous?

King David and King Solomon wrote the following about God's word and his law being that which allows a person to know and understand righteous precepts and principles which results in a happy, prosperous, and fulfilling life when practiced:

"How sweet are your words to my taste! yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path" (Psa.119:103-105 KJV). See also Mic.7:7-8.

"My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not the law of your mother. Bind them continually on your heart, and tie them about your neck. When you go, it shall lead you; when you sleep, it shall keep you; and when you awake, it shall talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (Pro.6:20-23 KJV).

God's law is a lamp and a light which defines righteousness and gives correction and instruction in the proper way to live.

Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep my commandments"* (Jn.14:15 Para.).

The apostle John wrote the following about those who say they know God, but do not practice his law:

"He that says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and has no truth in him" (1.Jn.2:4 Para.).

God's law contains precepts and principles a person must follow in order to be righteous. See Psa.119:171-172. One indication a person truly knows God and is following his way of life is their understanding, obedience, and practice of God's laws, which were expanded by Christ to cover every aspect of human activity. See Isa.42:21; Matt.5:1-34.

The light of God's truth and way of truth is far different than the darkness of the teachings of evil spirits which Paul called doctrines of demons (1.Tim.4:1-2) and that Satan and his ministers counterfeit and pervert in order to clothe themselves in a perceived aura of righteousness in order to deceive people into religious systems and philosophies which will not lead one to eternal life, but instead lead to the second and final death in the prophetic Lake of Fire.

The Light

The prophet Isaiah was inspired to foretell a time when those in spiritual darkness (the Jews and prophetically mankind) and without hope of salvation would see Christ who was symbolically spiritual light and that he would shine this light (i.e., the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth) on them:

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined" (Isa.9:2 KJV). See also Matt.4:14-17; 2.Pet.1:18-19; 2.Cor.4:3-6.

Jesus said the following concerning himself, his Heavenly Father, and those who would truly practice his teachings:

"I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn.8:12 KJV Para.).

"He that believes on me, does not believe on me, but on him who sent me. And he that sees me, sees him who sent me. I am come as a light into the world, that whoever believes on me should not live in darkness. And if any man hears my words, and does not believe them, I do not judge him, because I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejects me, and does not receive my words, has one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn.12:44-48 KJV Para.).

A major truth taught throughout the Bible is that individuals who practice God's truth and way of truth have as an integral part of their nature, spiritual knowledge, and understanding which if practiced leads to eternal life.

The Father is Light

"This then is the message which we have heard of him [Christ], and declare to you, that God [God the Father] is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1.Jn.1:5 KJV).

God the Father's very nature and personality is composed of all that is good and true (i.e., spiritual light) and this is the kind of light (i.e., nature and personality) that he wants his children to emulate as they live in this world.

The Father of Lights

Many scriptures show that it is God the Father's plan to increase his heavenly family through the transformation of humans into sons of his new creation. This is one reason why he is called the Father of lights by the apostle James and why the elect are called the children of light by the apostle Paul:

"Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures" (Jms.1:16-18 KJV).

"But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1.Thes.5:4-5 KJV).

The elect of God are called out of spiritual darkness into spiritual light. When a person makes the transition from darkness to light their whole being is altered and that person dwells within the Father's light.

The Children of Light

Spiritual darkness is the absence of spiritual light. It is a biblical fact that spiritual light only comes from the Father who is spiritual light. Those in spiritual darkness cannot truly know or understand spiritual concepts and principles nor can false prophets and counterfeit followers of Christ understand or correctly teach the Father's spiritual concepts and principles.

The apostle Paul wrote the following to the elect at Ephesus about their spiritual condition before they received the indwelling of the holy spirit and the life they should now practice:

"Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not you therefore partakers with them. For you were sometimes darkness, but now are you light in the Lord; therefore, walk as children of light. For the fruit of the spirit in each of you is goodness, righteousness, and truth; therefore, prove what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather rebuke them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things which they do in secret. But all these evil things are revealed by the light: for whatever brings to light is light. Wherefore he says, Awake out of sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeem the time, because the days are evil" (Eph.5:6-16 KJV).

The apostle Peter wrote the following of those who were spiritual lights:

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1.Pet.2:9-10 KJV Para.). See also Eph.5:6-14; 1.Jn.1:5-7.

The elect are not only called out of the spiritual darkness of this world to participate in his royal priesthood and holy nation on earth, they are also called to let the spiritual light within them shine through good works in order to glorify their heavenly Father. Christ said the following to those who would become his heavenly Father's earthly children and who would come to understand spiritual concepts and principles:

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on a lamp-stand; and it gives light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt.5:14-16 KJV)

"Nobody lights a lamp, and then hides it in a secret place or puts it under a basket, but they put it on a lamp-stand so that people can see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body is full of light; but when your eye is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore, be careful that the light in you is not darkness. If your whole body is full of light, and no part of it is darkness, your whole being shall be full of light, as when a bright lamp shines to give you light" (Lk.11:33-36 Para.).

Following teachings which are in opposition to God's truth and way of truth is extremely dangerous to one's physical and spiritual well being; therefore, individuals who are serious about their salvation and want to avoid being deceived by a counterfeit of God's truth, must diligently and prayerfully study and meditate upon God's word as set forth in the Bible and diligently apply the instructions and wisdom therein.

It is extremely important to have a good understanding of God's truth in order to counter deceptive religions, religious philosophies, and religious teachers. See 2.Tim.2:15. Truly understanding what is taught in the Bible will give a person the ability to determine if a teaching is truly from the Sovereign God and his Son the Messiah.

In Opposition to Truth

There are literally hundreds of thousands who teach concepts and principles which are in opposition to God's truth by not teaching what the Bible reveals as truth. Jesus said you will know those who are and are not children of God by their fruits (Matt.7:15-20). What are the fruits of the counterfeit gospel messages being taught today?

Are the results of these counterfeit gospel messages a world of peace, prosperity, happiness and an abundant life free of hunger, disease, poverty, war, crime, and violence? This is what most of professing Christianity says it can deliver if people will only believe the message they preach. The problem is that belief in these false gospel messages have not delivered, and do not seem to be able to deliver their promised benefits.

Look at the world today, look at the violence, the crime, the hunger, the disease, the poverty, the war, the immorality, adultery, lying, cheating, unethical behavior, within all of the professing Christian nations. Why do these problems exist, when belief in these various gospels is supposed to remove all of these problems, and replace them with peace, happiness, prosperity and all of the things that are good and beneficial to humanity?

One only has to review a few of the thousands of different ideas and teaching people have about the gospel message to understand that something is very wrong with what most people believe, teach, and understand about what Jesus taught. Could it be that the vast majority of these gospels are clever deceptions?

Masters of Deception

Today, professing Christians claim conservatorship of the biblical text and claim that the Creator God has guided and inspired their understanding of what is written in the Bible. The problem is that each of these Christian denominations have widely differing views, opinions, and interpretations of what they believe the Bible says and what the gospel message is that Jesus Christ brought centuries ago.

Most professing Christians today believe that it really does not matter what particular Christian philosophy a person adheres to, as long as one believes in Jesus. However, this belief is in opposition to the clear instructions in the Bible—this belief is a deception by the masters of deception—Satan and other evil spirits.

Because most people believe what they want to believe or what they are told to believe, rather than searching for and believing the truth of God as they should, the vast majority of those who profess to be of the Christian faith have accepted and believed many perversions of the true gospel message that the Sovereign God sent the Messiah to proclaim.

Can People Be Deceived?

Can people be deceived and led away from the God's truth and way of truth? Absolutely they can. Not only can it happen, it has happened in the past and continues to happen today. Look at the doctrinal chaos today within the professing Jewish and Christian communities.

During Christ's time, the Levitical priesthood whose sacred trust it was to preserve God's truth in its purity and meaning, had instead, allowed the teaching of God's law and worship system to become perverted.

The Jews and those who lived around Palestine during Jesus' time were in spiritual darkness and did not recognize who Jesus truly was (See Jn.1:1-11; 3:20). Moreover, they did not understand the message he brought from his heavenly Father, because they were listening to religious leaders who were perverting God's truth and teaching false and misleading concepts and principles concerning this truth.

Notice what Jesus said to a group of scholarly Scribes and Pharisees who had accused his disciples of violating the Jewish tradition of washing the hands before eating food:

"Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophecy about you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips honor me; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the ordinances of men" (Matt.15:7-9 KJV Para). See Isa.29:13; Ezk.33:31-32.

Of this same event Mark records the following additional remarks of Christ about the Scribes and Pharisees and the system of worship they had taught the Jewish people:

"In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do. And he said to them, Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition" (Mk.7:7-9 KJV). See also Col.2:20-23.

Although the practices Jesus condemned were devised and imposed on the Jewish people by their spiritual leaders, these practices were not entirely the result of human thought. These spiritual leaders were being influenced by Satan as Jesus told them on one occasion (Jn.8:44). The holy spirit is the spirit of truth, whereas the perversion of the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth comes from the influence of evil spirits.

Religious and Societal Pressures

There is little historical documentation about the people of Corinth. However, what is known gives us an insight into the potential problems of being one of the Sovereign Father's elect in that society.

Corinth was the capital of Achaia in 57 A.D. and was at the cross-roads of a major trade route between Asia and Europe. The city was very wealthy and notorious for the licentious lifestyle of its inhabitants. The city's reputation was so bad it became a proverb in some foreign languages and immortalized by Latin poets. The term *to Corinthianize* became a part of the Greek vocabulary, which meant *to live in drunken immoral debauchery*.

The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, towered above the city on a hill. One thousand priestesses who were temple prostitutes spent their evenings selling their bodies in the city of Corinth. The city was home to the religions of its many diverse inhabitants who came to ply their trades in this prosperous area. The bulk of the inhabitants were Italian freemen, Greeks, Jews, and people from the cities of Levant. Within this city of wealth, immorality, and Satanic religions, God called a cross section of its citizens to become his children. When one considers their environment and cultural background, it is no small wonder that the elect of Corinth had difficulty growing into mature Christians.

The congregation of God at Corinth seems to have been a group of Christians with many problems. Both of Paul's letters to them contain strong correction. His first letter was almost totally devoted to very strong correction for their sinful behavior. No other congregation was corrected on as many points as the one at Corinth.

In chapter 10 of his second letter, Paul reminds the elect of Corinth of national Israel's idol worship in the wilderness, tells them to flee idolatry, makes a reference to the Passover ceremony and again to idolatry and then says the following:

"But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: you cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1.Cor.10:20-21 KJV).

Clearly, this is a reference to partaking of the Passover symbols while practicing things which were in opposition to their heavenly Father's truth. Paul warns in verses 20-21 not to mix teachings and practices of demons with God's truth, because doing so will corrupt one's worship of the Sovereign God.

Paul does not refer to any specific erroneous belief or teaching. However, what was being practiced by some of the elect at Corinth had something to do with sacrifice and eating of these sacrifices made to devils (i.e., demons/evil spirits).

People who profess to follow the teachings of the Bible and claim to follow Christ's example and mix the practice of truth and error should carefully consider this behavior in the light of Paul's warning to the elect at Corinth.

Blinded By The God Of This World

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not faint; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine to them" (2.Cor.4:1-4 KJV).

Paul's comment about those who do not believe being blind to the gospel, not only tells us that these individuals cannot believe the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth, but that their mind is open to being influenced to believe things of a spiritual nature which are not true. If a person truly believes what is written in the Bible, that person will want to know what is true, what is not true, what is good and what is evil.

GOOD AND EVIL

For centuries people have attempted to define good and evil behavior in accordance with their personal philosophies, religious beliefs, or contemporary ethics. Because human philosophies, religions, morals, and ethics are always changing, it has been impossible for humans to determine and codify empirical standards and values for good and evil behavior. However, the Bible does define good and evil behavior and does set forth empirical standards for these behaviors.

After he had repeated the major points of God's covenant law given to Israel, Moses writes the following concerning God's law and the results of obeying or disobeying it:

"See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil in that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the Lord your God shall bless you in the land where you go to possess it. But if your heart turn away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce to you this day, that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land, where you passed over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live" (Deut. 30:15-19 KJV).

Moses recorded that obedience to God's laws, precepts, and principles would bring tremendous blessings (good) and that disobedience would bring horrible curses and death (evil). Obedience to God's law is considered righteousness while disobedience is considered unrighteousness.

The biblical definition of sin is extremely important to being able to determine if a religious teaching or philosophy conforms to biblical truth or if it is a doctrine of demons meant to deceive and lead one away from biblical truth. Since the demise and disappearance of the early church there has been much debate and confusion as to exactly what sin is and what constitutes sinful behavior. The apostles Paul and John give the following clear and concise definition of what reveals the knowledge of sin and exactly what sin is.

"Now we know that the things the law says, it says to them that are under the law: that every mouth may be silenced, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, no one can keep the law and be justified in God's sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom.3:19-20 Para.).

"What then shall we say, Is the law sin? No, But I did not understand sin except through the law. For also I did not understand lust except the law says, You shall not lust" (Rom.7:7 Para.).

"Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1.Jn.3:4 KJV).

"All unrighteousness is sin" (1.Jn.5:17 Para.).

God's law is the standard that defines good and evil. Evil is any violation of God's law. Sin is any deviation from God's righteous laws, precepts, and principles which define how a person should live their life and worship God. Deviations and perversions of God's empirical standards of good and evil behavior are what evil spirits promote through their various religions and philosophies in order to keep humans in a state of confusion concerning the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth, which when practiced brings true happiness, peace, and prosperity.

THE SEDUCTION OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

Although Jesus foretold that the elect would be persecuted for their adherence to his heavenly Father's truth (Jn.15:20; 17:14-17; Acts 8:1; 2.Tim.3:12) and for teaching his ways, this is not the primary reason the early church disappeared as a powerful, unified, spirit-filled entity.

Jesus warned to beware of deceitful individuals and that many whom his heavenly Father would call to salvation would become deceived and fail in their call to salvation:

"Take heed [beware] that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ [I am the Christ]; and shall deceive many [the majority of people]" (Matt.24:4-5 Para.). See also Mk.13:5-6; Lk.21:8.

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt.24:11-12 KJV).

Continual Warnings

Even before the end of the first century, the apostles of Jesus Christ warned the Sovereign Father's elect children to beware of deceptions, because they could see false and deceptive teachings beginning to emerge. Toward the close of the first century Jude, one of the brothers of Jesus Christ, wrote that evil men were turning the grace of God into a license to sin, and he encouraged the elect of his day to diligently seek and hold onto the Father's truth which had been given to them, because there were evil men among them who were actively seeking to destroy them:

"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the spirit" (Jude 3-4,19 KJV). See also 2.Pet.2:1-3.

About forty years before Jude wrote his warning to the church, and barely twenty years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Galatia giving them a strong warning to beware of false teachings. Even then (52-53 A.D.), as the early church grew in numbers, so did those who opposed God's truth. During Paul's time, the true gospel and teachings of Jesus Christ were being perverted by people who were determined to distort the gospel message for their own purpose. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul issued a severe condemnation, and warns of punishment for those who attempt to change or corrupt the true gospel:

"I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel: Which is not another; but there are some who trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. . . So I now say again, if any man preach any other gospel to you than that you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal.1:6-9 Para.). See also 2.Cor.11:13-15.

This is no shallow meaningless threat by the apostle Paul, his decree is backed by the authority of Jesus Christ whom the apostle Paul served as a minister of the gospel. What is recorded here is a historical fact: during the lifetime of the apostles, the true gospel was being corrupted, and another gospel was being taught to confuse and seduce the elect of God and the world at large into believing a false gospel.

Confusion and Division

The apostle Paul urged the elect at Corinth to avoid confusion and division:

"Now I [Paul] beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been told of you, my brethren, by them who are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that every one of you says I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1.Cor.1:10-12 Para.).

The apostle Paul asked *"Is Christ divided?"* (1.Cor.1:13).

It is absurd to think the church Jesus Christ established should be divided over doctrinal issues or any other thing important to their salvation or their personal and collective work for their heavenly Father. It is also absurd to think that Jesus Christ is not quite sure what his Father's elect children should believe about truth or how they should function as a united body under his direction as the head of his Father's royal family and holy nation on earth.

It is just as absurd to believe that Jesus and his heavenly Father do not care how those called to salvation worship and serve them. The reality is, they do care, and they will eventually punish those who refuse to hear what the spirit says to the churches about following false doctrines. See Revelation, chapters two and three and Ex.20:5; Deut.5:29; 12:29-32; 13:1-4; 30:15-16.

God is not of confusion (1.Cor.14:33); he is an orderly being. Look at the order of all that exists. From the balance of the galactic systems down to the smallest atomic structure, all of the physical creation shows great order; it is not in confusion. Because God created the physical existence to function in an orderly manner, it makes sense that he would have his people worship and serve him in an orderly structured way—not in many different conflicting ways. See Eph.4:4-6; 1:22-23; 1.Cor.12:12-13.

A short review of the Creator God's instructions to Moses and the priesthood about the construction of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the conduct of the priesthood, and the warnings of dire consequences for failure to comply in every detail to these instructions clearly shows that God requires his people to worship and serve him in the manner he chooses, not in the manner people choose.

ONE FAITH

The elect of the early church were continually warned and encouraged to keep the faith delivered to them and to be on guard against those who wanted to destroy them.

According to the apostle Paul, *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"* (Eph 4:4-6 KJV).

The one faith the apostle Paul refers to is the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth as expressed in the biblical record.

A prophetic promise recorded by the prophet Isaiah tells us that after Christ returns and establishes his heavenly Father's government on earth, his Father's truth will be taught to humanity from Jerusalem:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain [i.e., government] of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills [i.e., lesser governments]; and all nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa.2:2-3KJV).

"For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: you shall weep no more: he will be very gracious to you at the voice of your cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer you. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not your teachers be removed into a corner any more, but your eyes shall see your teachers: And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk you in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left" (Isa.30:19-21KJV).

The prophecies recorded by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets reveal that after Christ returns the temple system of worship will again be established and will be officiated over by the descendants of Zadok (Ezk.44:15) and that God's laws, precepts, and principles as taught to the ancient nation of Israel and expanded on by Christ and the apostles will be taught to the whole world.

A Departure From The Faith

The apostle Paul warned the evangelist Timothy to beware of those who would depart from the faith and remain among the elect to draw them away from God's truth:

"Now the spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times saying that some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons; telling hypocritical lies; having their conscience seared with a hot iron . . ." (1.Tim.4:1-2 Para.). See also 2.Tim.4:3-4; Jude verses 1-19.

The English word *seducing* in the phrase *seducing spirits* is translated from the Greek word *planos*, which means *roving* (as a tramp), i.e., (by implication) *an impostor* or *one who misleads*.

The English word *demon* in verse 1, is translated from the Greek word *daimonion*, which basically means *a supernatural spirit* (of a bad nature) inferior to God, but superior to humans.

Demons are powerful, intelligent, and clever spirit-beings who are extremely adapt at twisting and misapplying scripture in order to deceive those who lack spiritual understanding, the spiritually lazy, and the gullible. It is obvious that evil spirits do not want people whom they are attempting to deceive with their teachings to know who and what they are. So, how do they accomplish their deception?

The seducing spirits Paul speaks of are evil spirits who influence people to promote their false and deceptive teachings which Paul defines as doctrines of demons. Doctrines of demons are the teaching of religious worship systems and philosophies which are in opposition to the Sovereign God's empirical standards of good and evil behavior, which he has had codified in the biblical text. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he encourages him to do the following because of the eventual perversion of truth by people:

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables" (2.Tim.4:2-4 KJV).

Many who fellowshipped in the congregations of the early church would not accept sound teachings. They sought out teachers who would teach things pleasing to them and things which did not require their obedience to God's laws, precepts, and principles. In order to deceive the gullible and the spiritually lazy, these teachers replaced truth with error and taught mysticism and other philosophies which appeal to human nature. These deceptive teachings Paul warned of are doctrines of demons.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find a dynamic evangelizing church spreading the Sovereign Father's truth throughout the world. However, as dynamic as this church was, it virtually disappeared from history after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. From 70 to 120 A.D., there was very little recorded about the Father's true church. When historians began to write about the church again, they wrote of a dramatically different church from the one that embraced the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles.

Many professing Christians believe that Satan's deception only affects religions that do not believe in the God of the Bible, however this belief is untrue. It is readily apparent by performing a small amount of research into what is recorded in the New Testament and the history of professing Christianity that Satan has a vast following among professing Christian churches and its ministers through whom he proclaims his deceptive concepts and practices.

Today, we find many individuals and organizations claiming to be followers of Christ teaching many different gospel messages, yet the vast majority of these gospels do not even faintly resemble what Jesus and the early church taught. We find great confusion as to God's identity, who Jesus Christ was and is, what constitutes the gospel message Jesus and the apostles taught, and what the Bible actually says is truth. Jesus said there are two distinct paths a person can follow during their life, but there is only one path leading to eternal and immortal life. Jesus said:

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the path that leads to destruction, and many will enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the path that leads to life, and only a few will find it. (Matt.7:13-14 Para.).

How important is to understand what is truth and what is not truth? It is very important, because Jesus said:

"Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt.7:21 KJV).

In order to do the Father's will, you must first know what the Father's will is; however, you cannot know what his will is unless you search the scriptures where his will for you is written.

As Jesus revealed his heavenly Father's truth and the way to eternal and immortal life, he continually explained that, if a person was to enter the Kingdom of God, that person must come into conformity with his heavenly Father's law and way of life. Jesus said the following about people who only pretend to follow his teachings:

"Many will say to me in that day [the day of judgment], Lord, Lord, didn't we prophecy in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I say to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. (Matt.7:22-23 Para.).

Today, many who profess to teach biblical concepts and principles teach that there is no need to comply with God's law. But, if there is no need to comply with God's law, why did Jesus foretell that those who are lawless will be denied access to the Kingdom of God?

Is it possible that most of what was taught as truth after the disappearance of the apostolic church was not truth? And is it possible that what is being taught today by most who profess to teach biblical truth is not God's truth, but is a clever deception? Look at the results of these teachings. Are the results of centuries of these teachings the results that God promised to those who follow the way of truth? You be the judge.

The Bible reveals that Satan and his ministers have counterfeited the true good news message with a perverted version. It is this false message that has been accepted as the original teachings of Jesus Christ.

This powerful spirit-being known as the Devil and Satan, and other evil spirits are actively deceiving and influencing the entire world politically, philosophically, and religiously into following various religious systems and philosophies which do not lead to eternal happiness, peace, and prosperity, and yes, Satan does have ministers and organizations disguised as true adherents of the Sovereign God's system of worship. See 2.Cor.11:13-15; Rev.12:7-9.

It is openly admitted by many biblical scholars and professing Christian leaders that what is taught today as Christianity is very different from what was taught during the days of the apostles.

Satan, through his ministry, churches, and other followers, teach his many and varied worship systems and philosophies plus a counterfeit Christianity and gospel message. Today, these deceptive teachings which began centuries ago have been accepted as original truth by almost all of professing Christianity.

The existence of deceptive worship systems is a biblical fact and many people fall prey to these false religions and philosophies believing they are worshipping the God of the Bible.

The writer to the Hebrews wrote that Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever and not to entertain teachings which are foreign to the truth and way of truth (Heb.13:8). The Sovereign God and his Son have not changed their plan for the salvation of mankind and they have not changed nor diminished what they caused to be recorded centuries ago to guide those called to salvation into the knowledge of how to worship and serve them.

The pathetic situation in which we see the world today is the result of centuries of people practicing religions, philosophies, and political systems which are in opposition to the Sovereign God's truth. If this were not true, we would live in a far different world than exists today.

DOCTRINES OF DEMONS

There are many doctrines of demons being taught throughout the world through biblically based and non-biblically based religions and religious philosophies. It is these clever deceptions that are the cause of much of the confusion, competition, and animosity among and between those who profess to worship the God of the Bible and those who do not.

The prophet Amos recorded the following prophecy about the results of ancient Israel's rebellion against God and a question that God asks of those who profess to live in harmony with him:

"Only you have I known out of all the families on earth; therefore I will punish you for your lawlessness. Can two walk together, except they are in agreement?" (Am.3:2-3).

Although the prophecy was directed to national Israel, this prophecy and its question applies to everyone who claims to believe what is written in the Bible and claims to follow Christ's example.

"Can two walk together, except they are in agreement?" The answer is, Absolutely not. Therefore, a person seeking to live in harmony with the Sovereign Father and his son the Messiah must diligently seek and practice the Father's truth and way of truth to the best of their ability.

All religious teachings in opposition to the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth as expressed in his laws, precepts, and principles are doctrines of demons, regardless of whether these teachings are devised by humans or evil spirits. Why is this so?

According to the biblical record, Satan and other evil spirits have been busy deceiving the world religiously, philosophically, and politically since the deception of Eve in the garden of Eden. The biblical record also reveals that the basis of all teachings in opposition to the Sovereign God's truth and worship system are doctrines of demons. See Rev.12:9; 20:10; Rom.1:18-32; 1.Jn.3:7-11; 5:17).

The Bible clearly says that Satan is deceiving the whole world into following his various religions and philosophies and that he does have ministers, churches, and organizations disguised as true adherents of the Sovereign God's worship system. Satan's ministers and churches teach and practice a counterfeit of the Sovereign God's truth and worship system in order to deceive people into believing that they are worshiping the true God.

SUMMARY

Doctrines of Demons are simply the teaching of concepts, precepts, and principles which are in opposition to the Sovereign God's truth and way of truth as set forth in the biblical record. These teachings are cleverly disguised in religious sounding words, symbolism, rituals, religious and secular philosophies, and mysteries in scientific jargon, all of which, are crafted to deceive people into thinking that what is presented is logical, true, and beneficial.

By B. L. Cocherell

b10w3

____ CHAPTER ____
THREE

HERESY, HERETICS, AND HERETICAL TEACHINGS

The topic of Doctrines of Demons and Traditions of Men cannot be fully understood in the context of the Sovereign Father's elect children today without understanding the issue of heresy, heretics, and heretical teachings as it applied to the early church and to the church today.

The biblical record documents and explains teachings, beliefs, and practices which are in opposition to the Sovereign God's truth as doctrines of demons and heresies, which if believed or practiced will lead a person away from God's truth.

Most people today define heresy as any idea or teaching which is contrary to their particular religious ideology or belief structure. Therefore, any other ideology or belief which is in opposition to theirs is heresy, and the person who believes or teaches it is a heretic.

Because the words *heresy*, *heresies*, and *heretic* are used in the New Testament to define concepts, teachings, wrong attitudes, and behaviors which must be eliminated within the congregations of God, it is necessary to understand what constitutes heresy and who is to be considered a heretic.

The word *heresy* is borrowed from the Greek language. A literal translation of the word *heresy* is simply a *choice*, but in the Septuagint, heresy is translated as a *free choice*. In later classical Greek literature, heresy takes on the meaning of a philosophical school or sect of one's choosing. The Jewish historian Josephus, uses the word *heresy* to denote a religious body. Today, the word *heresy* is mostly used to convey a sense of condemnation for a particular belief or opinion.

Although the early technical meaning of heresy referred to making a choice or belonging to a religious sect, the scriptures where the words heresy, heresies, and heretic are used, show that, with the establishment of the early church and the introduction of an expanded understanding of God's plan for the salvation of humanity through Jesus Christ, the word heresy and heretic took on a completely different meaning when used in reference to the truth of God.

The words *heresy*, *heresies*, and *heretic* as used by the writers of the New Testament have meanings that embrace the concept of being in opposition and hostile toward God's truth or holding or teaching doctrines which are in opposition to his truth. Moreover, these words connote the condemnation of those who believe and teach things in opposition to established truth.

The Sadducees

"Then the high priest rose up and all they that were with him which is the sect [heresies] of the Sadducees and were filled with indignation" (Acts 5:17 KJV).

Here, the Greek word *heresies* was translated into the English word *sect* to denote a certain group of people who held certain beliefs concerning the laws and teachings of the God of the Jews.

The Heresy of Circumcision

The Book of Acts shows that the apostles and elders of the early church held a conference in Jerusalem in order to decide certain doctrinal issues, one of which was the doctrine of circumcision:

"There arose up certain of the sect [heresies] of the Pharisees, which believed, saying, it is necessary to circumcise them [Gentile Christians] and command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5 KJV).

Here, it is shown that the word *heresies* refers to those who hold certain opinions concerning the law of circumcision and the law of Moses and their application to Gentile converts. During this conference, these subjects were discussed and both sides presented their opinions concerning these issues.

Paul goes Before Felix

"For we have found this man a pestilent fellow. . . a ringleader of the sect [heresies] of the Nazarenes. . . But this I confess to you, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Acts 24:5, 14 KJV).

Tertullus accuses Paul of being a trouble maker and a leader of those who are called Nazarenes and Paul confirms that he does believe in the way called heresy. When Acts 24:1-14 is reviewed, it becomes clear that the word *sect (heresy)* is used to criticize the religious group with which Paul is associated. These are the first indications in the New Testament of the word heresy being used as a condemnation of a system of beliefs.

Although the Greek meaning of heresy appears to have originally been a neutral term used to indicate a difference of opinion rather than a strong condemnation, Acts 24 verses 5 and 14 show that heresy took on a new meaning within the religious community.

Paul in Rome

After Paul arrived in Rome to make his appeal to Caesar about the accusations the Jews had made against him, he called for the leaders of the Jews to meet with him so he could explain why he had appealed to Caesar:

"For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said to him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning you, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spoke any harm of you. But we desire to hear of you what you think: for as concerning this sect [heresies], we know that everywhere it is spoken against. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the Kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:20-23 KJV).

Here, there is no condemnation denoted by the use of the word *sect* (*heresies*), although the followers of Christ were condemned by the Jews who lived in Judea.

The Corinthian Problem

Paul's letter to the Corinthians gives us more insight into the word *heresy* as it is used to denote something objectionable among the elect of God:

"For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear there are divisions [schisms] among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1.Cor.11:18-19 KJV).

There are several important things to understand about the choices the Corinthians were making concerning their spiritual behavior. There were major differences of opinion among them concerning many spiritual issues, and because of these various opinions, the church was not unified in their worship of God.

Paul reprimands some of the Corinthians for making wrong choices about the things they had come to believe concerning God's laws, precepts, and principles. He says that because of this division, those who understand the spiritual intent of God's laws, precepts, and principles are revealed, which implies that those who did not truly understand these things were either not part of the elect or were weak in their understanding of spiritual things.

The Galatians

"Now the works of the flesh are certainly revealed, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lustfulness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, fighting, jealousy, wrath, strife, division, heresy, envy, murders, drunkenness, wild parties, and things like these; of which I tell you beforehand, as I have said before, that the ones which do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God" (Gal.5:19-21 Para.).

In Paul's critical assessment of the kind of choices being made by some of the Galatians, heresy is listed as one of the works of the flesh. Here, the use of the word heresy clearly denotes something which is in opposition to God's laws, precepts, and principles. Notice that those who make these wrong choices concerning their beliefs and behaviors will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

In the context of verses 19-20, heresy involves more than just making a choice or having a difference of opinion. There is something very wrong with the choices and opinions being made, because they are spiritually life threatening and will cause the loss of one's salvation. All of these things that Paul mentions have to do with unrighteous lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. These are all things which are wrong from God's perspective and are condemned because their practice will lead a person to eternal death in the Lake of Fire.

In verses 19-20, the word *heresy* is not used in the purely technical sense; it is used to convey the thought that these choices and opinions are to be viewed as sinful and must be avoided by the elect of God.

Avoid the Heretic

Many people have been ostracized from religious organizations because their lifestyles, personal choices, opinions, or beliefs are in opposition to the beliefs of their spiritual leaders. During the Catholic inquisition of the middle ages, many people were branded as heretics and put to death for their lifestyle choices and opinions. Since the demise of the early church, many of the elect have also set their own criteria for branding a person a heretic, and used their own reasoning instead of the truth of God as a basis for removing people from their fellowship.

It is not within the authority of the elect of God to set the standards for what is heresy or who is a heretic, because these standards have already been set by God the Father and Jesus Christ. However, it is the responsibility of each child of God to know and understand what these standards are:

"Stay away from foolish questions, and genealogies, and arguments, and quarrels of the law, for they are unprofitable and vain. After the first and second warning, avoid a man of heresy, knowing that such a person has been perverted, and sins, being self-condemned" (Tit.3:9-11 Para.). See also Tit.1:10-11.

Paul instructs Titus to warn the person who has caused division within the congregation with their foolish questions and arguments about the law. It is important to note that Paul does not say not to study these topics; he is referring to a specific type of individual who creates arguments and causes divisions in order to harm the elect of God.

After this person is warned twice that what they are doing is in opposition to God and his truth, this person was to be avoided by the entire church, because he had a perverted perspective of God's laws, precepts, and principles and was living in sin. It is also important to note that a person's heresy itself will reveal him to be a heretic to those who have a solid spiritual foundation.

Although Paul does not specifically instruct Titus to put the heretic out of the congregation, it is very clear that a heretic and his untrue beliefs and teachings should be avoided. It is also clear that, if a person is excluded from fellowship, that person essentially has been separated from the congregation.

People are not to be rejected from fellowship or put out of the congregation of God for making choices or holding opinions which are not in opposition to God's laws, precepts, and principles. However, it is important to understand there is a body of truth which is empirical and unalterable, which must be believed, taught, and observed by all who serve God the Father and Jesus Christ. When a person is in opposition to these foundational truths of God and believes or teaches things which are in opposition to these truths, they must be considered a heretic.

DIVISIONS AND SCHISMS

"I plead with you, brothers, to take note of those who cause division and stumbling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them. For these people do not serve the Lord Jesus, but serve their own belly; and by their smooth flattering words, they deceive the hearts of the innocent" (Rom.16:17-18 Para.).

Paul warns the church in Rome to take note of those who question the truths they were taught, and those who caused some to believe things which are in opposition to God's truth. Paul says these people must be avoided because they do not serve Jesus Christ, but serve themselves and deceive those who are not well grounded in foundational truth.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms [divisions] among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1.Cor.1:10 Para.)

Here, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to eliminate differences of opinions they have concerning God's truth and become unified in doctrine, so there will be harmony among them.

Unity of the Faith

"And he [Christ] made some apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the Father's elect children, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ: Until we all come in the unity of faith, and knowledge of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That we no more be children who are tossed here and there, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the craftiness of men, with which they lie in wait to deceive; but speak the truth in love, that you may attain the stature of Christ in all things" (Eph.4: 11-15 Para.).

One of the primary purposes of the eldership is to help the elect reach spiritual maturity and perfection, and it is the responsibility of each of the elect to strive to know and understand the difference between spiritual truth and spiritual error. This knowledge will enable the elect to not be easily deceived by heretical teachings.

There are obviously going to be differences of opinion concerning many subjects within the scriptures; however, there should never be a difference of opinion concerning foundational truths pertaining to the Father, Jesus Christ, and how people are expected to conduct their lives to obtain salvation.

Heretics and Damnable Heresies

The apostle Peter gives a serious warning to be aware of heretics and heresies, and he shows that the end result of a heretic's beliefs and teachings is eternal destruction. A heretic receives no call to repentance, which seems to indicate that once a child of God has set their mind to believe and teach things which are in opposition to God's truths (i.e., heresies), a fatal mistake has been made which cannot be reversed.

2.Peter 2:1-22 Paraphrased

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privately shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. And many shall follow their pernicious ways [i.e., that which causes ruin, or loss]; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not" (vs.1-3).

Peter says to be wary of those in the congregations who sneak around in private and teach things which are untrue concerning things of the spirit. Notice that the things these people teach are things which will cause them to lose their salvation. Without exception, people who teach things in opposition to God's truth deny Jesus and his teachings concerning himself, his Father, and his Father's good news message of salvation. In the next few verses, Peter leaves no doubt as to the intent of those who teach heresy and the punishment they will receive:

"For if God did not spare the angels that sinned, but cast them into prison, an delivered them into chains of darkness, there to be reserved for judgement; and did not spare the old world, but saved Noah the eighth preacher of righteousness, and brought the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes. . . making them an example to those who after them will live in an ungodly way: and he delivered just Lot who was vexed by the filthy conversation of the wicked; . . . the Lord knows how to deliver the Godly out of temptations, and reserve the unjust to the day of judgement to be punished" (vs.4-9).

Those within the congregations of God who teach things which are in opposition to God's truth are in the same category as the wicked angels and the most wicked of humanity, because they are attempting to subvert and destroy those whom the Father has called to become his first born sons. It is extremely clear that God will have no mercy on those who teach heresies.

"But chiefly these walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise governments. They are presumptuous, self-willed, and not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring railing accusations against them before the Lord. But these, are as natural brute beasts, which are made to be taken and destroyed, these speak evil of the things they do not understand; and they shall utterly perish in their own corruption. And shall receive the wages of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their deceiving while they feast with you" (vs.10-13).

Peter shows the true priority of a heretic is physical rather than spiritual, and in God's eyes, their existence is of no more value than an animal whose thought process is totally inward. Peter calls heretics spots and blemishes that contaminate the sanctity of God's people.

"Having eyes full of adulteries and never ceasing from sin, enticing unstable souls: having a heart busied with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the straight path, they went astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the way of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice held back the madness of the prophet. These are springs without water, clouds being driven by a tempest; for whom the blackness of darkness is reserved forever" (vs.14-17).

A heretic is one of the Father's elect children who, for whatever reason, has gone astray and forsaken the path of righteousness. The heretic is self deceived and has lost the ability to discern between truth and lies. Their spiritual life-force has dried up; they can give nothing of spiritual value, because they have nothing of true value to give.

"For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, by the lusts of the flesh, by unbridled lusts of the flesh, they entice those who were escaping the ones who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the slaves of corruption; for by whom anyone is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and the Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandments delivered to them. But it is happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (vs.18-22).

The apostles Paul and Peter have defined what heresy is and who a heretic is for us. A heretic's beliefs and teachings are extremely dangerous to the elect of God who are diligently seeking to please the Father and mature spiritually, because the heretic believes and teaches things which are spiritually life threatening. Heretical teachings are not just opinions and choices on some small, minor point of Christian living which are without consequence; heretical teachings lead to the denial of the Father and Jesus Christ and their teachings.

This is why Paul tells Titus to, *"Stay away from foolish questions, and genealogies, and arguments, and quarrels of the law, for they are unprofitable and vain. And that after the first and second warning, avoid the heretic, knowing that such a person has been perverted, and sins, being self-condemned" (Tit.3:9-11 Para.).*

SUMMARY

The scriptures instruct the elect to deeply love and respect each other and watch for each other's spiritual safety. Therefore, each of the elect should continually be on guard for heretics and heretical teachings. And because it is by the opinions that people have and the choices that they make concerning God's truth that they are recognized as children of God or heretics. The key to not being seduced by a heretic's teaching is to be well grounded in the foundational truths about God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the things pertaining to one's salvation.

When a person continually espouses things which are inconsistent with foundational truths of God, and continually attempts to persuade others to believe these things, this person is in one of the following spiritual conditions:

1. This person has not been called of God and cannot understand spiritual concepts and principles in the same way as one who has the indwelling of the holy spirit.

2. This person is either new to the faith or has not taken the time and made the effort to diligently search the scriptures in order to be well grounded in foundational truths.
3. This person has been sent by an evil spirit to subvert and destroy the elect of God.
4. For whatever reason, the person has strayed from the path of righteousness and become a heretic who opposes the truth of God and has denied Jesus Christ and his right to rule their life.

Jesus' warning about false prophets can also be applied to heretics and their beliefs and teachings, because no good can come from accepting them:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but are in reality dangerous wolves. By their fruits you shall know them, Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs from thistles? So every good tree produces good fruits; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruits. A good tree cannot produce evil fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not produce good fruits is to be cut down and thrown into the fire. Then surely from their fruits you shall know them" (Matt.7:15-20 KJV Para.).

The instruction from the word of God is to be continually alert to the danger of heretics and their beliefs and teachings, and not to encourage or tolerate people, beliefs, or teachings which are inconsistent with the pure word of God.

Heretical Teachings

No matter how cleverly crafted and eloquently stated a heretical teaching is, it is a teaching in opposition to the Sovereign Father's truth. Although a false teaching may have some elements of truth within it, a false teaching will always have within it some error that will lead a person away from the foundational truth of God, which will result in eternal death for those who believe or practice these heretical teachings.

Clever Counterfeits

In order for an evil spirit, a false prophet, or a heretic to counterfeit a biblical teaching with a perverted version, he must design his deceptive teachings to closely resemble what is genuine, so that it is extremely difficult to distinguish between the two. There is a tremendous danger in accepting doctrines which sound correct without first examining them with cold hard logic.

The teachings of most evil spirits, false prophets, and heretics seem plausible because they are cloaked in the aura of spirituality. These individuals can easily deceive those who allow their emotions or intellectual vanity to influence their spiritual discernment. However, the teachings of these types of individuals always have one or two major flaws:

- Their teachings never harmonize with the entire Bible.
- Their teachings always involve the breaking of one or more of God's laws, precepts, or principles.

The writers of the New Testament described teachings, beliefs, and practices which are in opposition to God's truth and way of truth as doctrines of demons, and heresies, which if believed or practiced will lead a person away from God's truth.

By B. L. Cocherell

b10w4

INTRODUCTION TO POPULAR BELIEFS

When a group of Scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus why his disciples violated the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before eating. Jesus answered them by saying, "*Why do you also violate the command of God by your tradition?*" Then, after reviewing one of their teachings which was clearly in violation of God's law, he said, "*You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*"

The apostle Paul warned the evangelist Timothy to beware of those who would depart from the faith and remain among the elect to draw them away from the Sovereign Father's truth and way of truth:

"Now the spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times saying that some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons; telling hypocritical lies; having their conscience seared with a hot iron . . ." (1.Tim.4:1-2 Para.).

Paul's statement about doctrines of demons can easily be applied to the teachings of most Christian denominations and sects today.

An honest comparison between the biblical record and what is taught, believed, and practiced by most professing Christian churches will show that much of what is taught is in opposition to biblical truth. Moreover, these false teachings, traditions, and philosophies do not result in the benefits promised to individuals who truly follow Christ, worship and serve the Sovereign God, and live according to God's truth and way of truth.

In the following chapters you will find several popular teachings of professing Christianity which are inconsistent with what is actually written in the Bible. Additionally, you will find the biblical answer to the question, Why are there so many different opinions and beliefs among professing Christians about what is recorded in the Bible?

By B. L. Cocherell

b10w5

NOTES AND COMMENTS

____ CHAPTER ____

FOUR

WHO IS THE GOD OF THE BIBLE?

The identity of God is one of the greatest mysteries of the entire Bible. Without understanding who God is, it is impossible to understand the Bible and the purpose for the existence of the human race. See Eph.3:13-15.

Numerous books and papers that attempt to explain who God is have been written and published. And the explanations are as diverse as the people doing the writing. But, why is there such confusion about who God is, when the identity of God is the key that unlocks all spiritual knowledge and understanding about the salvation of humanity which is contained in the Bible?

Almost two thousand years ago Jesus asked his disciples, "*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*" (Matt.16:13). The scriptures show that many did not know who he was; however, the apostle Peter gives the correct answer when he says, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matt.16:16).

Today, people ask remarkably similar questions: Who was the one called Jesus? Was Jesus a prophet, a wise man, a mere human, an angel, half human and half divine, or God incarnate, and who is the Father that he came to reveal?

In the Beginning

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen.1:1).

The Bible clearly states that a being called God created heaven and earth. But who is this God? Is he God the Father; is he Christ; is he both?:

"And God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen.1:26-27 KJV).

Most Bible scholars and linguists will agree that the word *God* in Genesis 1:1, 26-27 is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which is a plural word which can mean *Mighty Ones*. Therefore, some say that this one word defines two specific individuals. Although the word *Elohim* does allow for a plural meaning, understanding who God is does not entirely depend upon this one descriptive word for *God*, because there are many scriptures showing that, at the beginning of the physical creation, there were two god-beings in the God family—the Sovereign God and the Creator God.

If the Mighty One of ancient Israel is the One who created the Savior of the New Covenant, as some believe, we have a gigantic problem to deal with in reference to what the Savior and his apostles said about the personage called the Father. The solution to this problem of who the Father and Jesus Christ are is found in the scriptures that clearly speak of two separate beings—God the Father and Jesus Christ, who became the Son of God.

The following will show that Genesis 1:1 speaks of the Creator God who became Jesus Christ and Genesis 1:26-27 reveals that it was God the Father who gave the instructions to the Creator God for the creation of humanity.

The meaning of much of the Bible concerning the identity of God should become clear, when one understands that the Creator God of ancient Israel was the second member of the God family, he became our Savior (Jesus Christ), and he came to reveal God the Father who is the Sovereign of all that exists.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

In the books of Matthew and Mark, there are some very strange statements made by Jesus Christ concerning the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

The Privileged Few

"And the disciples came, and said to him, Why speak you to them in parables? He answered and said to them, because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matt.13: 10-15 KJV). See also Mk.4:11-12; Lk.8:9-10.

Only a select few were privileged to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. And in order to begin to understand these mysteries, one must first know what a kingdom is. There are four basic things to understand about a kingdom: A kingdom must have officials to govern it, territories to govern, people to govern, and laws with which to govern.

The mystery that Jesus spoke about pertained to the Kingdom of God; therefore, it seems logical that the mystery concerns the who, what, when, and where of this kingdom.

Who May Understand The Mystery?

Jesus says that the twelve apostles could understand the mystery of the Kingdom of God and the apostle Paul says that the ministers of Christ are stewards of the mysteries of God:

"And the disciples came, and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? He answered them and said, to them, Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt.13:10-11 KJV).

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1.Cor.4:1-2 KJV).

Paul was given special insight into the mysteries of God—*"How that by revelation he made known to me the mystery; as I wrote before in few words"* (Eph.3:3) and he states that the Ephesians also understand the mysteries of God. Since the elect of God at Ephesus understood, it can be assumed that all of the elect have the ability to understand the mysteries of God:

"Wherein he has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself" (Eph.1:8-9 KJV).
See also Dan.11:32-33; 12:10.

The Mystery of Christ

"Whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ. Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit; That the gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effectual working of his power. To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of [i.e., participation of] the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by [through] Jesus Christ" (Eph.3:4-9 KJV). See also Rom.16:25-27.

Paul says that the mystery concerning Christ was revealed and that Jesus is not only the Son of God, but is also the Creator God.

Who is Jesus?

One thing people always wanted to know about Christ was his identity. On many occasions, Jesus told the people who he was, but they would not believe that he was the actual Son of God:

"And Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him, saying 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ tell us plainly' Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. . .'" (Jn.10:23-26 NIV).

Who is the Father?

After all the things Jesus taught his disciples about his heavenly Father and his message of salvation to humanity, they still did not fully understand who the Father was nor did they understand the message that Jesus brought from the Father.

"Thomas said to him, Lord, we know not where you go; and how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you should have known my Father also: and from henceforth you know him, and have seen him. Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us. Jesus said to him, Have I been so long a time with you, and yet have you not known me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father; and how say you then, Show us the Father?" (Jn.14:5-9 KJV).

A Mystery to be Understood

"For I would that you knew what great conflict [concern] I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ" (Col.2:1-2 KJV). See also Col.1:24-27; 4:1-3.

Here, we see there is a mystery involved in understanding who God is, who the Father is, and who Christ is. This mystery of the Kingdom and the Family of God is understood by those to whom Jesus will reveal it.

"But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he has declared to his servants the prophets" (Rev.10:7 KJV). See Matt. 11:25-27; 13:10-15; Lk.10:21-22; 1.Cor.4:1-2; Eph.1:8-9.

Hidden Wisdom

"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: Yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1.Cor. 2:6-8 KJV).

It is apparent when we read the history of the Jews that, if they had truly understood in their innermost being that Jesus was God, the majority of them would have worshiped him. However, this did not fit the plan of God, so most were blinded to this fact. See Mk.4:11-12; Lk.8:9-10:

"But as it is written, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them to us by his spirit: for the spirit searches all things, Yes, the deep things of God" (1.Cor.2:9-10 KJV).

"Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen" (Rom.16:25-27 KJV).

"Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" (Dan.12:10 KJV).

Many of the mysteries surrounding prophetic events and the gospel message Jesus brought are being revealed during this age. These mysteries are revealed to those whom God the Father has called and is calling to salvation. The understanding of these mysteries will remain hidden from everyone else until the Kingdom of God is established on earth.

The Identity of God

The major reason that it is so difficult for most people to understand the exact identity of God is that the information is hidden from those who do not need to know. However, those who do need to know are told that they must diligently study in order to come to an understanding of who God is. Moreover, all of the information that is given in the Bible about God is presented as fact, which presumes that the person reading the information already believes in God and that the Bible is his written word.

The remainder of this chapter will provide enough information about God to help the reader who wants to study further solve many of the mysteries surrounding the identity of God and the relationship between the Creator God, Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the holy spirit. Because there is so much interrelated information in the Bible concerning these individual subjects, this chapter will only explore the following topic areas in order to establish foundational information about the identity of God:

- There is a God family
- Jesus, God with us
- Jesus, the Creator God
- Jesus, the Creator, the Son, and the Savior
- Jesus, the Rock of ancient Israel
- The Father, Jesus Christ, and the Book of Revelation
- Jesus reveals the Father
- Who is the Father?
- Three popular beliefs about God
- When did Jesus become the son of God?

THERE IS A GOD FAMILY

One of the great mysteries of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the elect of God concerns the identity of the Family of God. Our Savior repeatedly called the Supreme Sovereign "Father" and he talked about their father-son relationship. But, why do the majority of professing Christians believe that there is only one god-being? The reason is quite simple: Satan has deceived the whole world into thinking the Family of God does not exist. See Rev.12:9; 18:23; 19:20; 20:10.

Until a person comes to understand that there are two individual and separate god-beings who comprise the God family and that the relationship between the Sovereign God (God the Father) and the Creator God (Jesus Christ) is a father-son relationship, almost none of the Bible, including the Father's good news message, can be clearly understood.

Notice what the apostle Paul plainly says about the sovereign Family of God:

"I do not want you to fail because of my trials, because it is for you that I suffer, and for this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph.3:13-15 Para.).

When we understand that the Father's plan for the salvation of humanity is centered around increasing his family and that presently there are only two spirit-beings in his family (himself and his firstborn, Jesus Christ), and that his elect children on earth also bear his name and are considered a part of this family, what Paul says about the Father's family in heaven and earth makes sense.

The Gospel According to John

Above all other books of the Bible, the Gospel according to John expounds the pre-existence of Christ and the father-son relationship between Christ and God the Father. If this book did not exist, it would be difficult to explain the concept of the God family and how it functions.

Because the Book of John exists, the mystery of the God family, the pre-existence of Christ, and his position in the God family can be clearly understood.

Most of the people Jesus spoke to did not have a problem understanding the things that he wanted them to understand, regardless of the language he used (e.g., Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek). Today, however, we do have a problem understanding the mystery of Christ and his heavenly Father because we are centuries removed from that time and these languages.

The New Testament was translated into English from Ancient Greek and no translation can be totally accurate in every detail. Although the King James translation is thought to be one of the most accurate translations of the holy scriptures, it does have its problems.

Today, many of the words used in the Early Modern English (1500-1700 A.D.) convey very different meanings and concepts. This situation makes it necessary for us to return many times to the original Ancient Greek language in order to gain a more clear understanding of the scriptures, especially when trying to understand a subject as complex as who and what Christ is in relationship to God the Father. Therefore, to discover who Christ is, this chapter examines the original Ancient Greek language and the context in which key concepts and words are used.

The Word Was With God

In the first chapter of John, we find some very difficult scriptures which cannot be understood without correctly understanding who and what the Family of God is:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn.1:1 KJV).

John says that, in the beginning, the *Word* (Greek, *Logos*) existed. In the context of verse one, the word *logos* does not mean a part of speech or a language. John uses the word *logos* as many of the prophets did when they referred to being given information from the Creator God whom they described as *The Word of The Lord* (See Psa.107:20; 147:15; Jer.2:1, 31; Ezk.1:1-3; 6:1-3).

John speaks of Jesus as being the word of God who is a separate being from God the Father. This is substantiated by the statements in the rest of John, chapter one.

At the beginning of creation, there was one called the Word (Greek, *Logos*), this *Word* was with God (Greek, *Theos*. English, *Deity*), and the Word (*Logos*) was also God (*a Deity*).

When John says, "*This One was in the beginning with God*" (Jn.1:2), he makes a further distinction between these two beings—The *Logos* and The *Theos*. Why would John emphasize this distinction if there is only one god-being?

"All things were made by him [the Word, the Logos]; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (Jn.1:3 KJV). See Gen.1:1, 26-27.

John says that all things that exist were made by this Logos who was with the Theos. Why did John have to explain this? We know that he was writing to Christians and Israelites who should have known who God was. So why was he explaining this fundamental principle?

Heresies of the Docetism and Gnostics

During the period in which John wrote, two major heresies were being taught—'Docetism' and 'Gnosticism'. 'Docetism' is the belief that Jesus only 'seemed' to be a man, but he was actually too divine to be a human. 'Gnosticism' teaches that the material world is basically evil, the spirit is basically good, and good could not touch evil; therefore, God could not have created the world.

Countering these heretical teachings could have been one of the reasons John went into such detail when he explained the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Christ. Whatever his reason, John does give us a very detailed narrative of this relationship, which makes it possible to know the difference between God the Father and Jesus Christ.

A Father-Son Relationship

"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do: for what things soever he does, these also do the Son likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that he does: and he will show him greater works than these, that you may marvel" (Jn.5:18-20 KJV).

Over and over again Jesus said that he was the Creator God, the Son of God, and the Redeemer and Savior of humanity. However, most did not believe him because they were looking for a release from their physical problems instead of their spiritual problems.

"For as the Father raises up the dead, and quickens them; even so the son quickens whom he will. For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son: That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father has life in himself; so has he given to the Son to have life in himself" (Jn.5: 21-26 KJV).

In order to understand what Jesus said here, it is important to remember that the Israelites historically held a monotheistic view of God. The God who the Israelites worshiped was a single entity; they believed in one God who was the supreme ruler (Deut.32:39; Mal.2:10). It is easy to understand why the Jews and even Jesus' disciples had a problem with what he taught concerning the concept of the God family. Here was a person who said he was God and also said that he was sent by his Father. This was a strange and repugnant doctrine to the vast majority of the Jews, most of whom could not accept this new teaching and felt it was blasphemous to even consider such a thing. See Jn.10:29-38.

Note:

Please read the entire sixteenth chapter of John for a detailed explanation of the father-son relationship between the Sovereign God and Christ.

Two, Not Three in the God Family

There are a number of scriptures that record Jesus saying, *"I and my Father."* Three persons are never mentioned in this phrase, it is always *"I and my Father."* See Jn.10:30; 17:11, 22.

"If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him" (Jn.14:23 KJV).

"To him that overcomes, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev.3:21 KJV). Again, two individuals are mentioned, not three.

Two Separate Gods Doing Two Separate Works

The Father does a work and Christ does a work. Here, we find two separate god-beings working harmoniously while doing two separate works:

"But Jesus answered them, my Father works hitherto, and I work" (Jn.5:17 KJV).

Again, we see individual beings spoken of—the Father and Christ. Clearly Jesus' own words should be proof that the Father and Jesus are two separate individual beings in the Family of God, and each of them performs a separate work in order to accomplish a common goal:

"But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father has given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father has sent me. And the Father himself, which has sent me, has borne witness of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And you have not his word abiding in you: for whom he has sent, him you believe not . . . I am come in my Father's name, and you receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe,

which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuses you, even Moses, in whom you trust" (Jn.5:36-45 KJV).

A WARNING

"Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father" (1.Jn.2:22-23 KJV).

John states very clearly that those who deny that Jesus is the Christ and deny the individuality of the Father and the Son are liars. See Isa. 43:11; 44:24-25; 45:21; 48:12-20; 60:16; Psa.78:20-35.

JESUS, GOD WITH US

Some people say that Jesus was not really God with us, but that he was merely a representation of God's divine nature. However, this is not what the Bible says. Notice what Matthew and Isaiah say about the reason for Mary's child being called Emmanuel:

"And she [Mary] shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord, by the prophet saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt.1:21-23 Para.). See also Lk.1:28-35.

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and shall call his name 'Immanuel'" (Isa.7:14 KJV). Immanuel means 'God with us'. See also Isa.8:8-10.

There are two important things to learn from these scriptures:

1. The conception and birth of Jesus to a virgin was to be a sign of his divine origin.
2. The prophet Isaiah was inspired to reveal the Savior would be named Immanuel—God with us. (Isa.7:14; 8:8-10).

The Hebrew and the Greek words that are used in the above two texts clearly state that the being who would be the Savior would be GOD WITH US. There is absolutely no way that both the Hebrew and the Greek words used in these two texts can be translated to say anything other than what is clearly stated, without purposefully mistranslating the original language. Truly, Jesus was God with us.

Jesus the Son of God

After the angel told Mary that she would give birth to the Savior, she asked how this could happen because she was a virgin:

"And the angel answered and said to her, The holy spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: Therefore also the holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Lk.1:35 KJV).

Luke says that it was the power (i.e., the holy spirit) which came from the Highest which impregnated Mary and performed the process of conception. We are not told how this was accomplished, we are only told that it happened.

The English word *Highest* is translated from the Greek word *Hupsistos* and, in this case, it denotes the Sovereign of the universe—the most high, the highest, the supreme (God). Whoever this being is, he is the Supreme Sovereign above all others, whether they are spirit or physical, and this Supreme Being is the Father of our Savior.

The High Priest Zacharias

After the birth of John the Baptist, John's father, Zacharias, was inspired to foretell the coming of the God of Israel as the Messiah as if it had already taken place. If Jesus was the Messiah, it follows that he was also the Creator God who came to redeem humanity.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he has visited and redeemed his people" (Lk.1:68 KJV). See also verses 57-80.

John the Baptist

"As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, which shall prepare your way before you" (Mk.1:2 KJV). Mark quotes Malachi 3:1, but with a significant alteration. Malachi 3:1 reads: "Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me. Mark is simply affirming that Jesus, who was the Creator God, prepared for his own coming.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea. And saying, Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare you the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Matt.3:1-3 KJV).

John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah by preparing the way of the Lord (Isa.40:3). Isaiah said the One whose way was to be prepared was *Yehovaw*, the Self Existent One, the Eternal. Likewise, John says he was preparing the way for the *Kurios*, the Supreme Authority. Both Isaiah and John say that God is the One for which the way was being prepared.

Only God Can Forgive Sins

"When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the sick of palsy, Son, your sins be forgiven you. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why does this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mk.2:5-7 KJV).

These scribes were correct in their knowledge of who could set sins aside (See Psa.32:5 and Isa.43:25). However, they did not know that Jesus was the incarnation of the only God they had known, and that he had the right and authority to set sins aside. See Mk.2:8-10.

A GOD BECOMES FLESH AND BLOOD

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:14 KJV). See also Rom.8:3; Heb.2:9; 1.Jn. 1:5-9; Jude 25.

Here, John adds a new dimension of understanding, when he speaks of a being called 'the Father'. There is no doubt from the context that this spirit-being is distinctly different from our Savior. He is the One whom John says the Word was with and he is the One whom Paul says created all things through Christ (1.Cor.8:6; Col.1:15-18):

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached to the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1.Tim.3:16 KJV).

The English word *manifest* is translated from the Greek word *phaneroo*, which means *appear, declare, or show*. Paul says that God appeared in the flesh. However, when did God manifest himself in the flesh? The only place in the Bible where we find conditions that fit all of the descriptive terms used in 1.Timothy 3:16 is the New Testament. And the only person who claims to represent and come from the Father is Jesus. Therefore, the God who was manifested had to be the Creator God, Jesus Christ.

This powerful spirit-being came to earth to perform a mission of great importance, and the majority of the people he came into contact with did not know who he was:

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not" (Jn.1:10 KJV).

One of the most profound mysteries of the New Testament is the incarnation of the immortal Creator God. In his incarnation, he was still God, but in the human form in human flesh. Moreover, he was without immortality and subject to eternal death.

Some teach that Jesus was not God incarnate, but that he was only a normal human being with the spirit of God dwelling within him. If Jesus was not God incarnate, then Jewish history is correct and humanity is still in need of a Savior.

JESUS THE CREATOR GOD

The eighth chapter of the gospel according to John is full of details which show that Jesus came from heaven and was the Creator God before his physical existence.

John 8:21-25 KJV

"Then said Jesus again to them, I go my way, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, you cannot come. Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? Because he says, Whither I go, you cannot come. And he said to them, You are from beneath; I am from above: You are of this world [Greek, cosmos]; I am not of this world [cosmos]" (vs.21-23).

Jesus explained that he was not from the physical realm, but was from the heavenly realm.

'I AM', THE CREATOR GOD

"I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I AM he, you shall die in your sins. Then said they to him, Who are you? and Jesus said to them, Even the same that I said to you from the beginning" (vs.24-25).

A very interesting thing to note in verse 24 is the English phrase *I Am he*. In the original Greek text, it is *ego imee*, which means *I AM*. The word *he* was added by the translators. Most interlinear translations capitalize the phrase *I AM* and set it apart from other words. The important point here is that *I AM* is one of the names of the Creator God.

If the words *I AM* mean *God* and Jesus was telling these people that he was the Creator God, it should be easy to understand why the Jews were so frightened when they came to arrest him and he told them *I AM*:

"They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I AM. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said to them, I AM, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek you? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I AM: if therefore you seek me, let these go their way" (Jn.18:5-8 KJV).

Note: The word *he*, which follows *I Am*, is omitted for clarity of meaning, since it is not in the original Greek text.

John 8:26-59 KJV

"I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of [from] him. They understood not that he spoke to them of the Father" (vs.26-27).

Jesus heard these things directly from the Father. John adds that, at that time, the apostles did not understand that Jesus was speaking about the supreme sovereign—God the Father:

"Then said Jesus to them, When you have lifted up the son of man, then shall you know that I AM he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father has taught me. I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father has not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. As he spoke these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (vs.28-32).

"They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how say you, You shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abides not in the house for ever: but the son abides ever" (vs.33-35).

"If the son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham's seed; but you seek to kill me, because my word has no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and you do that which you have seen with your Father" (vs.36-38).

If Jesus saw these things with the Father, he must have been there to see them. Either Jesus was telling the truth, or he was lying. If he lied, he is not our Savior.

"They answered and said to him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (v39).

"But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham" (v40).

The Interlinear Bible translation of verse 40:

"And you seek me to kill, a man who the truth to you has spoken which I heard beside God, this, Abraham did not do."

Here, the English word *beside* is translated from the Greek word *para*, which means *beside, next to, near, in the sight of, and close proximity to*. By using this word, Christ affirms that he had been with God the Father in heaven.

"You do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, you would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me" (vs.41-42).

The religious leaders of the Jews had great difficulty with what Jesus said about his heavenly Father because they did not understand the prophecies concerning the Messiah and what he would teach.

"Why do you not understand my speech? even because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, you believe me not. Which of you convinces [censures] me of [because of] sin? and if I say the truth, why do you not believe me? He that is of God hears God's words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God" (vs.43-47).

Although these religious leaders had an academic understanding of the scriptures, they could not perceive the spiritual intent of what Jesus was saying because they were not living or teaching the truth of God.

"Then answered the Jews, and said to him, Say we not well that you are a Samaritan, and have a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and you do dishonor me. And I seek not my own glory: there is one that seeks and judges. Truly, truly, I say to you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death" (vs.48-51).

Jesus could make this promise because he was the Creator God and the Savior of humanity.

"Then said the Jews to him, Now we know that you have a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Are you greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom make you yourself?" (vs.52-53).

We must remember that the Jews were looking for the Messiah to come and deliver them from physical bondage. If Jesus had said he was the Christ and had come to deliver them from their physical bondage, their reaction would not have been the same—but Jesus said something very different!

"Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honors me; of whom you say, that he is your God: Yet you have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like to you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews to him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" (vs.54-57).

To what day was Jesus referring that Abraham was happy to see? Without more information we can only assume that Jesus was speaking of the day when Abraham entertained God prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, because we know Abraham is not in heaven. See Jn.3:13; Acts 2:34.

Jesus Said He Existed Before Abraham

Even though many scriptures speak of Jesus being a member of the God family, many people feel that he was only a human being and did not pre-exist. Notice what Jesus himself and others were inspired to say of his pre-existence.

In verse 58, Jesus makes a statement that was more than the Jews could bear or comprehend:

"Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

Jesus had just bluntly told them that he had pre-dated and existed prior to Abraham. In other words, he told them that he was the Creator God of Abraham. This so angered the Jews that they immediately tried to kill him for speaking what they considered to be blasphemy.

"Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by" (v59).

Jesus explains that he is the way to eternal life:

"Then said they to him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes on me shall never thirst" (Jn.6: 34-35 KJV).

"Jesus answered and said to them, Do not murmur with one another. No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up in the last day. It has been written in the prophets, "they shall be all taught of God." So then everyone who hears and learns from the Father, comes to me" (Jn.6:43-45 Para.). See also Jn.6:47.

JESUS THE CREATOR, THE SON, AND THE SAVIOR

This section will examine many of the scriptures which show, without a doubt, that Jesus is the Creator God, the Son of the Sovereign Father of all that exists, and the Savior of humanity.

The apostle Paul clearly taught that Jesus was the Creator God who became the Savior and that he was the Son of God the Father:

"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1.Cor.8:6 KJV). See also Col.1:1-3.

Here, we have an extremely clear statement which shows that God the Father is the supreme power and ruler over all things and that all things exist through Jesus Christ, including the Father's sons of the New Creation.

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin. Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth . . . all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first born from the dead . . ." (Col.1:14-18 KJV).

Some people believe that this scripture speaks of the Father as the Creator; however, it does not. How can this belief be true, when the One spoken of here was the one who shed his blood for humanity? Clearly, these scriptures refer to the Savior as the Creator of all that exists.

"And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. To the intent now to the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal wisdom which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph.3:9-11 KJV).

In his letters to the Corinthians, the Colossians, and the Ephesians the apostle Paul makes the same distinction that John did regarding these two distinct and individual god-beings and their relationship to each other. Paul also substantiates the writings of John in showing that God the Father is the supreme sovereign, who directed Christ to create all that is. Notice what the writer to the Hebrews clearly says about God the Father and Jesus Christ the Creator God:

"Long ago God spoke in many different ways to our fathers through the prophets [in visions, dreams, and even face to face], telling them little by little about his plans. But now in these days he has spoken to us through his Son to whom he has given everything, and through whom he made the world and everything there is. God's Son shines out with God's glory, and all that God's Son is and does marks him as God. He regulates [Greek, phero. English, to uphold or to rule] the universe by the mighty power of his command. He is the one who died to cleanse us and to clear our record of all sin, and then sat down in highest honor beside the great God of heaven" (Heb.1:1-3 LBP). See also verses 7-10 and Job 26:12-13; Psa.65:6; Rom.16:25.

The fourth and fifth chapters of the Book of Revelation give further details, which confirm that Jesus Christ is the Creator God who made all things for the Sovereign God. Please carefully study both chapters for a clear understanding of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ.

"And he said to me, Write, Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, see you do it not: I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren that have the testimony of Jesus; worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he does judge and make war. His eyes were a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name was The Word of God" (Rev.19:9-13 KJV).

Clearly, the spirit-being described as the *Word of God* is none other than Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

John 1:4-5, 6-9 KJV

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (vs.4-5).

Simply put, the vast majority of the people who saw and heard the Savior did not know or understand who he was or why he came to earth. The same condition exists today; very few people really know who Jesus was, why he came then, and why he will come again.

John the Baptist

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That Light was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world" (vs.6-9).

The apostle John clearly says that John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Light (i.e., the Creator God/Jesus Christ) who would be the Messiah.

Even Jesus said he was the Light from God:

"Then spoke Jesus again to them saying, I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn.8:12 KJV). See also Isa.42:1-7; Mal.4:2; Acts 26:13-18.

Jesus Says he is the Messiah

On a number of occasions Jesus said he was the Messiah. If Jesus was telling the truth, he had to be the Creator God, because the Creator God said that he was the only Redeemer and Savior. See Isa.43:11.

A Samaritan woman said to Jesus:

"I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I that speak to you am he. . ." (Jn.4:25-26 KJV).

"And Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him, saying 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ tell us plainly'. Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep'" (Jn.10:23-26 NIV)

Paul and Peter say that Jesus is the Savior:

"But has in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior. To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior" (Tit.1:3-4 KJV). See also Lk.1:47; 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23; 2.Pet.1:1-11; 2:20; 3:2-18; and Jude 25.

"For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men especially of those that believe" (1.Tim.4:10 KJV).

"Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit.2:10-13 KJV).

"Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12 KJV).

Salvation can only come through Jesus, not only because he is our Savior today but also because he was the Creator God who made covenants and promises with the patriarchs and national Israel concerning salvation. This is why the patriarchs (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David) will have salvation along with anyone else who remains in Christ.

Another reason that there is no salvation in any other name (i.e., authority) but Jesus' is that he became the supreme sacrifice by giving up his life for humanity. The scriptures plainly state that Jesus is the only name (authority) under heaven by which we can be saved. Because the Mighty One of Israel said he was the only Redeemer and Savior, it makes sense that he (Jesus) is still the only name or authority by which we can be saved.

Once it is understood that the Creator God was the One who became Jesus Christ the Savior, it becomes much easier to understand and determine who is being spoken of when the word 'God' is used in the scriptures—(e.g., God the Father, Jesus Christ, or both).

JESUS, THE ROCK OF ISRAEL

One of the major misconceptions people have about Jesus is the assumption that he did not exist before his physical birth. The mystery of who and what Jesus was before his physical birth must be solved before one can understand who and what God the Father is. Therefore, the following scriptures should prove beyond a doubt that Jesus was the God of ancient Israel who was known as the Rock and Israel's deliverer, Redeemer, and Savior:

"Because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe you greatness to our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut.32:3-4 KJV).

"There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside you: neither is there any rock like our God" (1.Sam.2:2 KJV).

The word *rock* in Hebrew is *sur*, which means *boulders, formations of stone, or material of which mountains are composed*. This word appears about seventy-five times in the Old Testament and it is used many times to describe the Creator God and his characteristics.

The word *sur* also appears in names such as: *Zurishaddai—my Rock is Shaddai* (Num. 1:6), and *Zuriel—my Rock is El* (God). See Num.3:35.

"But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: you are waxen fat, you are grown thick, you are covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation" (Deut.32:15 KJV).

"And he said, The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer. The God of my rock; in him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my Savior; you save me from violence" (2.Sam.22:2-3 KJV).

"He shall cry to me, you are my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation" (Psa.89:26 KJV).

"Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed;. . . he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven . . . He sent them meat to the full. . . He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea: . . . for all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works . . . When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the High God their Redeemer" (Psa.78:20-35 KJV).

Jesus the Rock and Redeemer of Israel

The apostle Paul leaves no doubt that he believed Jesus Christ was the Rock and Redeemer of Israel:

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized to Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1.Cor.10:1-4 KJV). See also 1.Pet.1:10-11.

"Israel, that pursued the law of righteousness, has not succeeded in their attempt to conform to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith, but attempted to conform by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and rock of offense: and whosoever believes on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom.9:31-33 Para.).

"For there is one God [supreme sovereign], and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1.Tim.2:5 KJV).

The apostle Peter confirmed Paul's analysis that Christ is the prophetic Rock:

"Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believes on him shall not be confounded. To you therefore which believe he is precious: But to them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereto also they were appointed" (1.Pet.2:6-8 KJV). See also Psa.118:22-23; Matt.21:42; Acts 4:11-12; Eph.2:20.

While being questioned by the high priest and elders about his authority to heal a lame man, Peter explained that it was through the authority of Jesus Christ that he healed. Moreover he explained that Jesus was the Savior of humanity:

"Be it known to you all, and to all people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12 KJV).

Because the Creator God of Israel and Jesus Christ are both called the only Redeemer and Savior, they must be the same being. If they are not the same being, there is a problem that cannot be solved using the Bible, because, the Creator God of Israel and Jesus Christ are both the same being according to the Bible.

The Savior and Redeemer

Because both the apostles Paul and Peter say that Jesus was the Rock (God) of ancient Israel, the prophetic scriptures that speak of the rock of offence and the only Savior and Redeemer can only be referring to Jesus Christ:

"And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Isa.8:14 Para.).

"I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Savior" (Isa.43:11 KJV).

"Thus says the Lord your Redeemer, and he that formed you from the womb, I am the Lord that makes all things; that stretches forth the heavens alone; that spreads abroad the earth by Myself" (Isa.44:24 KJV).

"Tell you, and bring them near; Yes, let them take counsel together: who have declared this from ancient time? who have told it from that time? have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me" (Isa.45:21 KJV).

"I the Lord am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (Isa.60:16 KJV).

"Yet I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but me: for there is no Savior beside me" (Hos.13:4 KJV).

The biblical record leaves no doubt that the Creator of humanity is its only Redeemer and Savior. Furthermore, there is no contradiction with Jesus Christ being the only Redeemer and Savior, because they are one in the same person:

- The Creator was in absolute authority over the earth.
- Salvation could only be gained before the gospel age through the keeping of the laws, precepts, and principles of God.
- Only after the Creator became the Savior could humans gain access to the Father who is the immortal sovereign. See Heb.4: 15-16.

THE FATHER, CHRIST, AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

In order to even begin to understand what is said in the first four chapters of the Book of Revelation concerning God the Father and Jesus Christ, it is necessary to review what Jesus says about the fact that he came from the Father and would return to him:

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (Jn.16:28 KJV). See also Jn.3:13.

Jesus says that he came forth from the Father into the world and he leaves the world again. If we understand that Christ was the Creator, this statement will not be a mystery.

Here, the English word *again* is translated from the Greek word *palin*, which means *once more*, *repetition*, or *again*. As the Creator God, he came to this planet many times. Remember, Adam, Eve, Cain, Abraham, Jacob, Moses and many others saw, ate, and communicated face-to-face with the Creator.

The next few verses are very important because they show us when the disciples began to understand who Jesus and the Father are:

"A little while, and you shall not see me: and again, a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he says to us, A little while, and you shall not see me: and again, a little while, and you shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?" (Jn.16:16-17 KJV).

The disciples did not understand what Jesus was telling them because they did not yet fully grasp the concept of the God family. In the verses that follow, Jesus further explains that he came from the Father and he had to return to heaven. After this explanation, the disciples began to truly believe the things that Jesus had been telling them about the Father and himself.

"I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: Again I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said to him, Lo, now speak you plainly, and speak no proverb. Now we are sure that you know all things, and need not that any man should ask you: by this we believe that you came forth from God" (Jn.16:28-30 KJV).

The Book of Revelation

One of the first things we notice as we begin to read the Book of Revelation, is that this revelation was given by God (Greek: *Theos*—the Supreme Sovereign of all that exists) to Jesus Christ to give to the saints.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show to his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel to his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw" (Rev.1:1-2 KJV).

Here, John is inspired to record the distinction between Jesus Christ and God the Father and he continues to make this distinction throughout the entire Book of Revelation.

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be to you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. . . ." (Rev.1:4-5 KJV).

Some Bible scholars point out that the *and* in the phrase *and from Jesus Christ* is the Greek exegetic *and*, which can mean *even*. If *even* is the correct translation it would mean that the One referred to as *the One who was and is coming* is Jesus Christ. If not, then we could assume that the One spoken of is God the Father, because the Father will eventually come to the earth (Rev.21:1-7).

There is no need to guess who this being is that sits upon the throne, because the seven spirits are also shown to be before the throne of God the Father along with Jesus Christ and the 24 elders. See Rev.4:1-11 (especially verse 5); 5:1-9; 6:16; 7:9-17.

The Alpha and Omega

In a prophecy of the future the Creator God speaks of himself as the first and the last (the Alpha and Omega) and says that he is sent by the spirit of God to redeem humanity. This prophecy can only be understood with the understanding that Jesus is the Creator God who was sent to redeem humanity.

Isaiah 48:12-20 KJV

"Hearken to me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. My hand also has laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand has spanned the heavens: when I call to them, they stand up together (vs.12-13). . . Come you near to me, hear you this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; From the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and his spirit, has sent me (v16). This says the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord your God which teaches you to profit, which leads you by the way that you should go (v17). . . The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob" (v20).

The following are some of the things that can be learned from these verses about the One who calls himself the first and the last:

- He is the One who has created the physical existence.
- He has revealed who he was from the beginning of Creation.
- He has been sent by his Lord and his Lord's spirit.
- He is Israel's Holy One and Redeemer.
- He is the Lord God.

Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega

"To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And has made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold, he comes with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What you see, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia. . ." (Rev.1:5-11 KJV).

We are freed from our sins by the sacrifice of the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and Ending, who is Jesus Christ our Savior and Redeemer. From this evidence, it is easy to see that Jesus is the Creator God, because the God of the ancient Israel also claimed these same titles.

The One "*who was and is coming*" refers to Jesus. However, even if it did refer to God the Father, there would be no contradiction in the phrase "*who was and is coming*" because both are god-beings and both will be in the heavenly Jerusalem when it is brought to earth. See Rev.21:10-27.

Remember that John was told to write these things to the elect of God through Jesus Christ who says that it was his God (i.e., God the Father) who instructed him to reveal these prophecies to John and the churches.

NAMES AND TITLES AND THEIR MEANINGS

'Alpha' is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and it is often used to signify the number one or the first of something:

- The Beginning, *arche*, means *commencement*.
- The First, *protos*, means *foremost in time, place or order*.
- Omega, the last letter in the Greek alphabet, means *finality*.
- The Ending, *eschatos*, means *final in time and place, and the last*.
- The Almighty, *pantokrator*, means the all *ruling*.

Jesus is all of these things and more. He is the author and finisher of our faith; he is the Creator of all things; he is the first and last Savior of humanity; and he is the second in command in the Kingdom of God sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

The Alpha and Omega was Dead and Now Lives

After hearing the voice of the Alpha and Omega, John turned to see who was speaking to him (Rev.1:12-17). What he saw scared him so much that he fainted. It is interesting to note that a similar being was seen by the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel (Ezk.1:26-28; Dan.7:9).

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying to me, fear not; I am the First and the Last: I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev.1:17-18).

The Greek Interlinear translates the Greek phrase *ginomia nekros* as *I became dead*. The English word *dead* in verses 17 and 18 is translated from the Greek word *nekros*, which means *a corpse*. The Alpha and Omega said he was a dead body and now is alive forever. These words are very important when one considers that some believe that the totality of Jesus did not actually die and that only his flesh died. This statement, however, documents that he was totally dead.

Notice that the Alpha and Omega (the Savior) was totally dead at one time: *"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the first and the last, which was dead [was a corpse], and is alive"* (Rev.2:8 KJV).

THE BOOK OF LIFE

"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white clothing; and I [Jesus] will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess [acknowledge] his name before my Father [God the Father], and before his angels" (Rev.3:5 KJV).

The Alpha and Omega is the one who controls the Book of Life. There should be no doubt that the Alpha and Omega was the Creator God who told Moses he had the power to blot names out of the Book of Life. See Ex.32:32-33 KJV.

JESUS REWARDS THE SAINTS

"Him that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God [Theos], and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God [Theos], and the name of the city of my God [Theos], which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God [Theos]: and I will write upon him my new name" (Rev.3:12 KJV).

Jesus, is the Alpha and Omega, and has the power and authority to give names and official positions in the Kingdom of God to the Father's elect children. See Matt.28:18.

"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev.3:21 KJV).

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty [Greatness] in the heavens" (Heb.8:1 KJV).

At the Father's Throne

In chapter four of the Book of Revelation, John describes another event that takes place in heaven. This momentous event starts with the opening of a door through which John sees a god-being sitting on a central throne with twenty four others he calls elders sitting on thrones around the central throne.

John describes this great god-being in the same way he did the God of Christ in Revelation, chapter one, verse four. Moreover, the scriptures clearly show that all things were created for this god-being's pleasure (Rev.4:11) and that God the Father created all things by and through Jesus Christ (Eph.3:9; Col.1:11-16). Therefore, it should be evident that the god-being sitting on the central throne is God the Father. Revelation, chapter five, also shows that the spirit-being on this throne is God the Father.

"And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are and were created" (Rev.4:8-11 KJV).

THE ROOT OF DAVID AND LAMB OF GOD

As this event progresses in heaven, we are told that the One sitting on the throne has a book that no one can open, except Jesus Christ.

"And one of the elders said to me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David [see Rev.22:16] has prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (Rev.5:5-6 KJV). See also Rev.1:4-5.

We know from the prophecies of the Old Testament and the history of the New Testament that the only person who could possibly fit the description of the Lamb is Jesus the Christ.

"And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne" (Rev.5:7 KJV).

As soon as Jesus Christ had taken the book out of the hand of God the Father, the twenty four elders who had been worshiping the Father begin to sing and praise Jesus Christ and worship the One who sits upon the throne.

John again makes a difference between God the Father and Jesus Christ: *"Blessing, and honor, and glory and power be to him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev.5:13 KJV).*

Verses 10 through 17 of Revelation, chapter 7, show that some of the elect of God who come out of great tribulation will serve God the Father in his temple. These scriptures also show that the Lamb of God (Christ) is a distinct and separate individual from God the Father.

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; And he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshiped God, saying, We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which are, and were, and art to come; because you have taken to you your great power, and have reigned" (Rev.11:15-17 KJV).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. . . I Jesus have sent my angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the root and offspring of David the bright and morning star" (Rev.22: 12-13, 16 KJV).

THE FATHER AND CHRIST

When Jesus was revealing the existence of God the Father and his plan for the salvation of humanity, many of the things he said offended the Jewish religious leaders. These leaders were offended because what he said was a condemnation of their perverted view of God and their incorrect worship of him.

"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him [Jesus], because he not only had broken the Sabbath [according to their interpretation of the law], but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do: for what things soever he does, these also does the Son likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that he does: and he will show him greater works than these, that you may marvel" (Jn.5:18-20 KJV).

Over and over again, through his teachings, Jesus made it clear that he was the Creator God, the Son of God, and the Redeemer and Savior of humanity. However, most of the people he spoke to did not believe him because they were looking for a release from their physical problems instead of their spiritual problems.

AUTHORITY FROM THE FATHER

The Jewish religious leaders were always asking Jesus where he got the authority to teach the things that he taught and to prove that he was sent from God (Lk.20:1-8). In reply to these leaders' lack of understanding about his authority to teach what he did, and his relationship to the Sovereign God, Jesus said the following:

"I am one that bears witness of myself, and the Father that sent me bears witness of me. The leaders replied, Where is your Father? And Jesus answered, 'You neither know me, nor my Father: if you had known me, you should have known my Father also" (Jn.8:18-19 KJV).

Paraphrased in modern English Jesus said in verse 19: *"Look, if you had really known the God you profess to obey, you would have known me and my Father."*

A GREAT DECEPTION

Over and over again our Savior called the Supreme Sovereign whom he served 'Father', and over and over again he spoke about the father-son relationship between himself and the Sovereign God who was in heaven. If what Jesus said about his status in the God family is true, and what he said about God the Father is true, why do so many people believe that there is only one god-being?

The reason there is so much confusion and misunderstanding among professing Christians about God, the Family of God, God the Father, and Jesus Christ is quite simple. Satan has deceived most of them into believing there is only one god-being or that God is a trinity of beings. Moreover, he has deceived the rest of the world into believing that the true God does not exist, and to worship a false god. See Rev.12:9; 18:23; 19:20; 20:10.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour" (1.Pet.5:8 KJV).

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God [God the Father], and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (Rev.12:9-10 KJV).

A great part of Satan's deception is the teaching that God the Father and Jesus Christ are not separate individual god-beings and that the Family of God does not exist.

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CHAPTER

FIVE

THREE POPULAR BELIEFS ABOUT GOD

Trinitarianism, Dualism, and Monotheism are the three most popular theories about who and what the God of the Bible is. However, most people who hold any one of these beliefs cannot even superficially begin to explain how a being with multiple personalities or a single entity could function as the Father, Jesus Christ, and the holy spirit.

TRINITARIANISM

The theory of a trinity is the most popular belief about who is and what is the God of the Bible. Trinitarianism is the belief that God is a combination of three beings or personalities within one entity. This is a very difficult concept to prove because of the total lack of scriptural evidence.

The Council of Nicaea

After the Babylonian mystery religion was well established as a Christian church, the Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 A.D. to solve some major political and theological problems within this church.

One of the major problems that had to be solved was the question of who and what God is. Two members of the Alexandrian congregation appeared before the council to declare their theories on the subject: One of them was a priest named Arias who believed that Christ was not God but a created being. The other was a deacon named Athenius who believed that the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit were the same being living in the form of a trinity.

Emperor Constantine, who had convened the council, made the final decision in this matter. Although he had little interest in religion, he had a great deal of interest in politics. Constantine knew this theological question had to be solved in order for unity and harmony to prevail within this politically powerful religion.

Emperor Constantine declared God to be a trinity and excommunicated Arias, the priest. This single act by Constantine solidified the church and produced a doctrine that is still believed by millions with no question as to its validity.

The Facts About 1.John 5:7

The foundational scripture used in attempting to prove the validity of the trinity doctrine is 1.John 5:7:

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1.Jn.5:7 KJV).

This is the only scripture in the entire Bible that seems to give credibility to the teaching of a trinity. However, the historical facts surrounding this verse reveal that it does not support this teaching. Moreover, it is a clever deception.

The following facts about this verse reveal that it was intended as a deception:

- This verse does not appear in any of the Greek manuscripts prior to the fourteenth century.
- Jerome's original version of the Vulgate does not include this verse.
- The first person to formally quote this verse was Priscillian who died in 385 A.D. after which this verse was noted in Latin texts.
- The first Greek Testament published by Erasmus in 1516 A.D. omitted this verse.
- Nearly all Bible Commentaries confirm that the King James translation of this verse is a blatant alteration of early manuscripts (circa. 800 A.D.) where this verse is found.

The historical record and multiple biblical scholars have proven, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that 1.John 5:7 was not in the original writings of the New Testament, and that it was actually added to the Bible. Simply stated, this scripture is not a part of the Word of God, and it was added in an attempt to justify the teaching of a triune God.

DUALISM

Dualism is the belief that God is composed of two personalities within one entity, and the holy spirit is a power or energy of this entity. This theory allows for God to be two persons: the spiritual God, and the physical God.

MONOTHEISM

Monotheism states that there is only one God. There are many versions of this doctrine, and each version has a different explanation of what the holy spirit is and who and what Jesus Christ was and is.

Most people who adhere to this doctrine believe that the Creator God is the Father spoken of in the New Testament.

The Three Theories

All three of these popular theories about the identity of God have extreme difficulty explaining how a being with multiple personalities or a single entity could function as God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the holy spirit. In order to disprove these three popular theories and discover the truth of who God is, which is revealed in the Bible, this chapter will answer a number of questions about God using the Bible.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

There are many questions which could be asked about God. Below are a few of the more important questions with answers and comments which should help one to understand who and what God is.

THE GODHEAD

Q. What is the meaning of the word Godhead?

A. The English word *Godhead* is translated from the Greek word *theotes*, which means *divinity*. *Theios* and *theiotes* are other forms of this word that connote duality. See Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20.

Colossians 2:9 is the only place in the New Testament where the word *theotes* is used. In this verse it is used to indicate the fullness of Christ's divinity, power, and authority:

"Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ. For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead [theotes, i.e., divinity] bodily" (Col.2:8-9 KJV).

In Acts, *theios* is used to show that the divine majesty of God is above that of human concepts and representations of God.

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead [theios, i.e., divinity] is like to gold or silver, or stone, graven by the art and man's devise" (Acts 17:29 KJV).

In Romans, *theiotes* is used to indicate that something is divine or has the quality of being divine:

"For the invisible things of him from creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead [theiotes]; so that they are without excuse" (Rom.1:20 KJV).

When King James authorized the Bible to be translated into English the concept of God as a triune being was popular, which is inferred by the Greek word *theotes* being translated into the English word *Godhead*.

The meaning of the English word *Godhead* used in the 1611 King James translation of the Bible is basically the same today as it was then. The word *Godhead* still indicates the nature of God and the concept of God existing as a dualistic or triune being of multiple personalities.

When the word *Godhead* is properly translated into the word *divinity* with its various word-forms, the scriptures containing it do not support a dualistic or triune concept of God.

For an in-depth analysis of the Greek word *theotes* (divinity), see pages 119-123, vol.3, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (G. Kittel).

THE EVERLASTING FATHER

Q. Isaiah 9:6 says that the Messiah was the everlasting Father. However, does this prove that Christ is also God the Father?

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa.9:6 KJV).

A. In this scripture, there are five different names given for our Savior, and each has a different meaning, which shows different functions, characteristics, and aspects of his office.

The first chapter of John reveals that the Creator was the One who became the Christ. Jesus said he came to reveal the Father whom no one knew. And in the Book of Mark, God the Father called Jesus his beloved Son. Can Jesus be both a son and be a Father? The answer is yes! Simply stated, the Creator God who became the Savior was the Father of humanity, but he is not the Supreme Father who he came to reveal. See Matt.3:13-17, 11:27; Jn.16:25-29; 17:25-26.

THE FATHER IS GREATER THAN THE SAVIOR

Q. How could the Father be greater than Christ when Paul said that Christ was equal with God?

"For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who subsisting in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, having become in the likeness of men" (Phil.2:5-7 Para.).

A. Before the Creator God emptied himself of his spiritual glory, he was equal to God the Father in that he was also an immortal God.

Comment

Many would like to believe that there was little difference between the God in Heaven (the Father) and the God on earth (the Savior) during the life of Jesus and that this difference only pertained to the physical versus the spiritual condition, which supports the theory of an omnipresent triune, dualistic, or monotheistic god-being. However, the concepts that Jesus and the apostles continually taught about the God Family was one of a Father-Son relationship:

"You have heard how I said to you, I go away, and come again to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice, because I said, I go to the Father: for my Father is greater than I" (Jn.14:28 KJV).

Not only did Jesus acknowledge that the Father was greater than he was, but also acknowledged that his Father was his God (see Mk.15:34-35). How could the Father be greater than Jesus, if they were the same spirit-being? How could one part of a being be greater than the other? And how could the Father be Jesus' God, if Jesus was that same God?

The reason the Father was greater than Jesus during his human existence is because, God the Father was the only sovereign immortal spirit-being in existence while Jesus was living in human flesh. Moreover, the reason the Father is greater than Jesus today, is because Jesus is now a son of the Father's New Creation, and he is second in authority to his Father in the Kingdom of God. See Matt.26:62-64; Mk.10:35-40; Acts 7:51-56; 1.Cor.15:23-28; 1.Pet.3:18-22.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Q. If the holy spirit is not a god-being, what is it?

A. A short study into the Greek language will eliminate the 'proof' that most theologians use in claiming that the holy spirit is a person. The Greek language, like many other languages, has gender associated with nouns: an object can be feminine, masculine, or neuter. This treatment of a word has nothing to do with whether the object is feminine, masculine, or neuter; it is just a grammatical tool.

The text used by most people to prove that the holy spirit is a person, is found in John, chapters 14, 15, and 16. In these chapters, the apostle John quotes Jesus speaking about the spirit as a Comforter (Greek: *parakletos*). John speaks of the holy spirit using the pronoun *he* in connection with the word *parakletos*. However, with the exception of these few scriptures the spirit of God is always described with words that mean *breath*, *wind*, *mind*, or *spirit*.

As diligent as the King James translators tried to be, they were influenced by the theology of the day, which stated that God was a trinity. Therefore, it is not hard to understand why they would translate any word that referred to the holy spirit into *he*. However, in Romans 8:16 they did translate the gender of the noun correctly:

"The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

Very rarely did the writers of the biblical record attribute emotion or intellect to the holy spirit and when they did, these expressions are allegorical or mere figures of speech. Moreover, there are no references to the holy spirit being an individual in the biblical record.

The biblical record, pictures the holy spirit as the power of God. The New Testament details many of the attributes, functions, and qualities of the holy spirit as they relate to the elect of God, and the majority of the New Testament texts reveal the holy spirit as a thing and not a personage. Moreover, when a manifestation of the spirit is ascribed to the holy spirit, there is never a contextual justification for its personification.

The Holy Spirit is Power

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?" (Lk.11:13 KJV).

Jesus says that the holy spirit is something that will be given to those who ask the Father for it. The reason that the Father can give the holy spirit to each and every person who follows Christ is that the holy spirit is a thing; it is energy and power within which are various attributes, functions, and qualities, it is not a person.

"And he said, Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day; and that this message of salvation should be taken from Jerusalem to all the nations; There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me. You have seen these prophecies come true. And now I will send the holy spirit upon you, just as my Father promised. Don't begin telling others yet—stay here in the city until the holy spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven" (Lk.24:46-49 LBP).

"And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry you in the city of Jerusalem, until you be endued with power from on high" (Lk.24:49 KJV).

When the apostles were told to wait until God sent power from on high, they were being told that God would send them something that was going to give them power.

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the holy spirit" (Rom.15:13 KJV Para.).

Notice that Christians are to abound in hope through the power of the holy spirit. Power is definitely associated with the holy spirit.

"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2.Tim.1:7 KJV).

Again, we see that the holy spirit is power, and this power is given to the elect of God.

The simple truth is that the holy spirit is not a personage, but it is the energy and power of the Father through which he causes his will to be performed throughout his kingdom.

We have seen scripture after scripture showing that the Father and the Son are two distinct individuals, each with their own personality and separate functions in the Family of God. However, we can search the Bible from beginning to end and never find any evidence to support the theory that the holy spirit is a third member of the God family.

COMMENTS

The Creator God of Israel stated that he would not give away his glory:

"I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory I will not give to another . . ." (Isa.42:8 KJV).

Some say this scripture proves there is only one God. But this is not the case at all. Isaiah 42:8 just tells us the Creator will not share his personal glory with others. It does not tell us that others cannot have their own glory. See also Dan.12:3; Rom.8:18; Col.1:26-27; 1.Thes.2:11-12; Rev.18:1; 21:22-24.

Return to Glory

"And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (Jn.17:5 KJV).

Here, Jesus asks the Father to use his power to return him to the state of spiritual glory that he had as a part of the God family before he created the world and before he became the Savior of humanity. This request by our Savior to his Father is one more proof that the Father and the Son are individuals in the God family.

ANGEL OR GOD?

There is a teaching that the One who came as the Savior was an angel sent from the Creator. This belief assumes that the Savior was not God incarnate, but a being of lesser status and power. If this doctrine were correct, mankind would not have a Savior, because neither angels nor ordinary humans can atone for sin.

The law of sacrifices clearly shows that a sacrifice of lesser worth than the individual being sacrificed for could not forgive sin, but could only temporarily forestall the punishment for sin.

Only a sacrifice of greater value than the sinning individual could pay the full penalty for sin and allow the sinner to be set free. Until a sacrifice of greater worth was made, the sinner was still under the death penalty for their sin (Ezk.18:4-32; 33:11-20). This is why only a God-being could fulfill the ultimate of sacrifices; only a being who was the Supreme Being or equal in status and power to the Supreme Being could fulfill this requirement of an ultimate sacrifice.

Because the Savior was the Sovereign of ancient Israel and the Creator of all that exists for the Sovereign God, including mankind (Jn.1:1-18; Eph.3:9; 1.Cor.10:1-4), he was superior to his creation (Gen.1:26). Only when the Creator gave up immortality and became flesh was he inferior to the spirit-realm (Jn.14:28; Heb.2:9), and then this inferiority was only one of mortality versus immortality.

If the Creator who was our Savior was not the supreme sacrifice, we do not have a Savior (Heb.9:9-28; 10:1-22; 6:4-8). It is an abominable thing for anyone to disdain the sacrifice of our Savior as anything less than the supreme sacrifice, when the price paid for our salvation was the death of the god-being who created mankind.

There is no salvation for anyone who does not believe that the Savior was the literal Son of the Father—the Son of God. Please read John 1:18, 34, 36; 3:16-18; Matt.3:16-17 to see how serious it is to disdain our Savior's sacrifice.

NO OTHER GOD FORMED

Based on Isaiah's record, some people believe that the Creator God is the only god-being in existence and no other god-beings will ever exist:

"You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen; and that you may know and believe, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isa.43:10 Para.).

Although Isaiah's record does raise some questions as to the eternal past of the Creator God, because it seems to imply that the Creator may have himself been created, there are a number of things which should be considered before making any conclusions as to the meaning of what Isaiah recorded:

- Questions about the eternal existence of the Creator God do not eliminate the clear scriptures which show two individual god-beings in the Family of God at this present time.
- It is very possible there may be some senses or inflections of the Hebrew word *yatsar*, which may mean *fashion, form, or make*, which are not understood at this time, therefore, it is impossible to correctly translate this scripture.
- The being Isaiah speaks of is obviously the Creator, and if we accept the fact that the Creator was the One who became Jesus, then there must have been another God who did the forming of the Creator. Therefore, we can establish that there was another God besides the one who was formed.
- Although this scripture is often quoted to put forth the idea that the God family is a closed unit and no more god-beings will be added, it actually only says that no more will be 'formed' created), which imposes no restriction against others being born into the God family.

ONE GOD

"Thus says the Lord [Yahweh] the king of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord [Yahweh] of Host, I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God [Elohim: Gods]" (Isa.44:6 KJV).

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for both the Lord of Israel and its redeemer is *Yahweh*. When the last half of verse 6 is translated without the extra words which were added to the text by the English translators, the intended meaning becomes clear. *"I the first and I the last and beside me no God [Hebrew, Elohim. English, Gods]."*

"Fear you not neither be afraid: Have not I told you from that time, and have declared it? you are even my witnesses. Is there a God [Eloah] beside me? yes, there is no God [rock]; I know not any" (Isa.44:8).

Here we find Eloah [God] describing himself as the rock, which indicates that he is a protector, a stabilizing force, solid, and enduring.

In much of Isaiah, chapters 44 and 45, the Creator God is telling the Israelites not to worship false gods.

"And there is no God [elohim: gods] else beside me and a just God [El, A Mighty One or The Almighty] and a Savior there is none beside me. Look to me, be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God [El], and there is none else" (Isa.45:21-22 KJV).

National Israel only knew the Almighty One. To them the Creator was the only Sovereign (Psa.83:18). There was none other beside him, because he had not yet come as the Messiah to reveal God the Father.

THE ONENESS OF GOD

The scripture most used to prove God the Father and Christ are one and the same being is John 10:30, which states, *"I and my Father are one."* Although this statement is true, there is a problem with what has been taught about what it means. Traditionally it has been taught that this statement means that the Father and Christ are a single spirit-being.

It is a scriptural fact that the Father and Christ are one: one family, of one kind, of one purpose, of one thought pattern and attitude, of one opinion, and of one spirit-energy and power. However, they are not one spirit-being, they are two distinct spirit-beings.

The Greek language in this verse shows the concept of oneness, but it does not denote a single being. If this verse were saying that these two beings were encompassed in one entity, what do we do with all of the scriptures which clearly show they are separate individual beings in the sovereign spiritual Family of God? See Jn.14:28; Eph.3:14-15.

Another scripture used to prove that there is only one God, is John 17:3:

"These words spoke Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you: As you have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life, to as many as you have given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn.17:1-3 KJV).

The English words *only* and *true* are from the Greek words *monos*, which means *alone*, or *solidarity*, and *alethinous*, which denotes *true*, in the sense of *real*, *ideal*, or *genuine*.

Given the meanings of these two Greek words, John 17:3 takes on a different meaning from the English translation:

"That they might know you, a genuine God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn.17:3 Para.).

Continuing to speak to his heavenly Father, Jesus said the following about the work he was given to do and his return to the heavenly realm:

"I have glorified you on earth: I have finished the work which you gave me to do. And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (Jn.17:4-5).

What John records in verses 1 through 5 only make sense when one understands that the people of Christ's day did not know God the Father and for the most part, they had a perverted concept of God and how to worship him, which Christ tells us in Matthew 23:1-3 and John 8:54-57.

COMMENT

When one compares the various beliefs about the identity of the God of the Bible with the many clear scriptures which speak of a father-son relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, only one conclusion can be reached concerning the identity of the God of the Bible. Two god-beings—the Sovereign God and the Creator God—comprised the Family of God before the advent of the Messiah, and there are two god-beings that presently comprise the Family of God—the Sovereign Father, and Jesus Christ. Moreover, these two Gods have a father-son relationship (God the Father and God the Son).

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— CHAPTER —

SIX

THE IMMORTAL SOUL
Popular Concepts Versus Biblical Reality

Many people believe there is life after physical death. It seems that no one really wants to believe that when a person dies, they are truly dead. During many funerals, people refer to the deceased as having passed away or passed on. Not many people want to believe that a person ceases to exist as a conscious living being at death.

Almost all religions of the world teach that humans and spirit-beings have eternal life and an immortal consciousness in one form or another. But is this true? Do humans or spirit-beings have an eternal and immortal existence?

Because the subject of eternal life and immortality and how to obtain them is the most important topic in the Bible, it is vital for everyone who seeks these qualities of life to understand what God's word has to say on the subject. It is obvious by the fact of physical death that humans are not immortal, but mortal in the flesh and subject to death and decay.

This chapter examines the scriptures to determine what eternal life and immortality are, who has them, and how they can be obtained.

THE SOVEREIGN GOD

Before one can begin to understand the subject of eternal life and immortality, one must understand who controls eternity and immortality and what constitutes being eternal and immortal.

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1.Tim.1:17 KJV).

In Paul's acknowledgment of the majesty of God, he reveals that the God he refers to is the king. Here, the English word *king* is translated from the Greek word *baslou*, which conveys the sense of one who is the foundation of power (i.e., the sovereign authority).

Paul also says this sovereign God is eternal, immortal, invisible, and must be given honor and glory forever. In this verse, the English word *eternal* is a translation of the Greek word *aion*, which means *ages* (i.e., perpetuity or eternal). And the English word *immortal* is a translation of the Greek word *aphthartos*, which means *will not decay, continuance of life, or ever-living*.

The God Paul refers to in this verse is God the Father, the Sovereign God, who has authority and control over all that exists and over all that is eternal or immortal.

As Paul continues to instruct Timothy he says,

"I charge you before God [God the Father] who makes all things alive, and before Christ Jesus, who gave a good witness for God to Pontius Pilate, that, you keep the commandment, spotless and blameless, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; Who in his own time will reveal the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords; the only One who has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach to; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen" (1.Tim.6:13-16 Para.).

Verses 13 through 16 show that God the Father is sovereign over all things including Jesus Christ and the qualities of life defined as eternal and immortal.

Verse 13 reveals that there is a God who has the power to give life to all things and that this God is someone other than Jesus Christ.

Verses 14 and 15 show that it is Jesus Christ who reveals the Sovereign God who is *"the only potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords."* Although Jesus Christ is also called the King of kings and Lord of lords, he is never called the only potentate. In these verses, the English word, *potentate* is a translation from the Greek word *dunastes* and means *one of great authority*.

In verse 16 Paul also reveals that the Sovereign God (God the Father) who is the only potentate, and King of kings and Lord of lords, has all authority and control over immortality. The English word, *has* in verse 16 is a translation of the Greek word *eho*, which means *to hold, to possess or to own*. Moreover, the English word *immortality* in verse 16 is a translation of the Greek word *athanasia*; which means *deathlessness, never dying, a continuance of life*.

Jesus was to reveal the one with great authority. And the only being who is greater than Jesus is God the Father. Jesus refers to God the Father as the sovereign over all things in heaven and earth:

"You have heard how I said to you, I go away, and come again to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice, because I said I go to the Father: for my Father is greater than I" (Jn.14:28 KJV).

"And the Father himself, which has sent me, has borne witness of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape" (Jn.5:37 KJV).

No Man has Seen the Sovereign God

"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him" (Jn.1:18 KJV).

Here, John cannot be referring to the Mighty One of the ancient Israel, because men did see, hear, and speak to him face to face; John is speaking of the Sovereign God—God the Father. For details about the identity of God and the God family obtain a copy of the book, Who is God? and What is the Bible and its Message?

It is clear from what Paul says in 1.Timothy 1:17 and 6:13-16 that God the Father is not only eternal and immortal, but also he has sovereign authority and control over the conditions of existence defined as eternal life and immortality. The following are qualities of the Sovereign God to whom Paul refers:

- He is eternal.
- He is immortal.
- He is invisible.
- He is the only wise God.
- He is able to give life.
- He is the only potentate.
- He is superior to all other kings and lords in heaven and earth.
- He is revealed by Jesus Christ.
- He has absolute authority and control over eternal and immortal life.
- He lives in unapproachable light.
- No man has seen or can see him.

What are Eternal Life and Immortality?

Eternal life is a continuance of life which is sustained by God the Father and is conditional based on obedience to God and his law. Immortal life is life which springs forth from itself; it is not dependent on any other source to sustain it because it is self-sustaining.

Who Controls Life and Death?

The following will show that God the Father has reserved to himself the power to destroy spirit-beings, as well as humans who violate his principles, precepts, and laws. The following scriptures show beyond a doubt that God the Father has absolute control over life and death:

"See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever" (Deut.32:39-40 KJV).

"The Lord kills, and makes alive: he brings down to the grave, and brings up" (1.Sam.2:6 KJV).

"And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he tore his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man does send to me to recover a man of his leprosy?" (2.Kg.5:7 KJV).

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28 KJV).

Although the Creator God who became Jesus Christ had authority and control over all life, God the Father has absolute control over all life:

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (Jn.5:21 NIV).

The God Who Cast Off Immortality

The apostle John reveals that Jesus as the Creator God cast off his immortality in order to become human and experience life and death as a human:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . . He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:1-5,10,14 KJV). See also Matt. chps.1-4.

Despite the many scriptures which speak of Jesus being a member of the God family, many people still feel that he was only a human being who did not pre-exist. John records Jesus telling the Jews of his pre-existence:

"Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn.8:58 KJV).

Jesus told these Jews that he had pre-dated and existed before Abraham, which meant that he was the Creator God of Abraham. This angered the Jews so much that they immediately tried to kill him for speaking what they considered to be blasphemy.

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (Jn.16:28; 3:13 KJV).

Here, Jesus says that he came from the Father into the world *again*. What did Jesus mean by *again*? If we understand that Jesus was the Creator God (Jn.1:1-12; Heb.1:1-3), this statement will not be a mystery. The word *again* is translated from the Greek word *palin*, which means *once more, repetition, or again*. As the Creator and the God of ancient Israel, he came to earth many times. Remember, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and many others talked, ate, and fellowshiped face to face with the Creator.

"And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (Jn.17:5 KJV). See Jn.8:38-59; 17:24.

Clearly as the Creator God, Jesus had existed before his creation of humanity. Moreover, he set aside his position as second in authority in the God family to become a human.

Jesus, The God Who Died

In the first chapter of Revelation, the apostle John records his encounter with Jesus Christ who says he is the God Alpha and Omega (Rev.1:8).

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying to me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev.1:17-18 KJV). See also Rom.6:8-10; Acts 2:24-32; 3:15,26.

The Greek Interlinear translates the Greek phrase *ginomia nekros* as *I became dead*. The English word *dead* in verses 17 and 18 is translated from the Greek word *nekros*, which means *a corpse*. The Alpha and Omega said he was a dead body and now is alive forever. These words are very important when one considers that some believe that the totality of Jesus did not actually die and that only his flesh died. This statement, however, documents that he was totally dead.

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the first and the last: who became dead [was a corpse], and lived" (Rev.2:8 Para.). Notice again that the Alpha and Omega (the Savior) says that he was totally dead at one time.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb.2:9 KJV).

"Your attitude should be the kind that was shown to us by Jesus Christ, who, though he was God, did not think it was wrong to be as the Sovereign God. Jesus did not cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his power and glory, taking on the form of a man: And humbled himself even further, by allowing himself to unjustly be put to death as a criminal on the cross" (Phil.2:5-8 Para.).

Jesus Christ, the Creator of all things (Jn.1:1-3), was an immortal spirit-being that inherently possessed the highest form of existence: life that springs forth from itself, never dying or decaying. A being who was not subject to death emptied himself of his glory, power, and immortality to become a mortal man. Then, he, allowed his creation to murder him. Not only did this immortal being voluntarily give up his life but also he died an agonizing physical death and completely ceased to exist as a living entity for a short time. See Lk.24:1-7.

"Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (Gal.1:1 KJV). See also Acts 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30.

Jesus was completely dead; he ceased to exist. All that remained of him was the spirit and physical records of his existence. Even these could have been completely destroyed and erased, if the Father had willed it (Matt.10:28; Lk.12:4-5). It is important to understand that Jesus would have remained dead forever—never to live again—if his Father had not resurrected him from the dead.

It is also important to understand the enormity of what had taken place during Jesus' life and at his death. During this time, God the Father was the only immortal being in existence.

CAN SPIRIT-BEINGS DIE?

The Bible says that God the Father and Jesus Christ are immortal and the Father controls who is given eternal life and immortality. Presently the only immortal spirit-beings are God the Father and Jesus Christ. Although many people believe that all spirit-beings are immortal because they are composed of spirit, this is not true. As Jesus explained the rewards of a righteous life to his disciples, he also explained the punishment that will be given those who refuse to live righteously after they are called to salvation:

"Then shall he say also to them on the left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt.25:41 KJV).

Why is a fire prepared for Satan and the evil spirits under his control? It makes no sense to prepare a fire to cast evil spirits into unless they can be harmed by this fire.

Angelic Beings are Eternal, not Immortal

Many assume angels have immortal life and cannot die because of the following statement Jesus made about those accounted worthy of eternal life not being subject to death and being equal to the angels:

"And Jesus answering them said, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, nor are given in marriage: Nor can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Lk.20:34-36 Para.).

In verses 34 and 35, Jesus is only answering the Sadducees' question of marital status in the Kingdom of God; he is not addressing the question of eternal life or immortality. He explains that marriage is only for humans and is not necessary in the spirit world. Angels are created beings, which do not procreate as humans do. Likewise, when the

children of God are transformed into spirit-beings, they will neither marry nor procreate.

Verse 36 does not say angelic beings are immortal. It just says that the resurrected saints will be in a condition similar to the angels. However, unlike the angels who have eternal life which can be destroyed, people who participate in the first resurrection are given immortal life as sons of God. Because these children of God are immortal they have life that springs forth from itself, which never dies or decays and is not dependent on any other source to sustain it; therefore, they cannot die (1.Tim.1:17; 6:12-16; 1.Cor.15:50-56).

Angels are not immortal spirit-beings, they are eternal beings, which have their life sustained by the power of God. Eternal life can be terminated, which is documented by the many scriptures which show the destruction of evil spirits.

Notice how Mark relates this account:

"For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven" (Mk.12:25 KJV).

The angels Jesus refers to in answering the Sadducees, are the righteous angels in heaven. These spirit-beings do not die because they have not committed anything worthy of death. However, the rebellious angels have disobeyed God and will be punished for their disobedience.

Spirit-beings Can Die

Can spirit-beings die? Yes, spirit-beings are subject to death under certain conditions. God the Father has ultimate power and authority over all that he has caused to be created, including evil spirits. However, evil spirits want us to believe that they are immortal beings which will live forever. Nevertheless, they are not immortal; they are only eternal.

While explaining the necessity for a child of God to have faith with works, the apostle James makes an interesting statement about evil spirits and their fear of God:

"What does it profit, my brethren, though a man says he has faith, and has not works? Can faith save him? [Obviously not!] If a brother or sister is naked and destitute not having daily food, and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, and does not give them the things which are needful to the body. What does it profit? Therefore, faith, without works, is dead, being alone. Yes, man may say, You have faith, and I have works: show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jms.2:14-19 KJV Para.).

What is it that evil spirits know about God that would make them tremble in fear? This question is answered in Mark's account of Jesus meeting a man in a synagogue who was possessed with a demon:

"And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with you, you Jesus of Nazareth? are you come to destroy us? I know you, you are the Holy One of God" (Mk.1:23-24 KJV; Lk.4:33-35).

In verse 24, the English word *destroy* is a translation of the Greek word *apollumi*, which means *to destroy fully, complete destruction, to perish, or to die*. This same word is used many times to describe the utter destruction of individuals and places (Matt.10:28; 12:14; 21:41; Lk.17:29). All of these examples of the word *apollumi* are used to convey utter or complete destruction. Both the Hebrew and the Greek words for *destroy* mean *the destruction and cessation of existence*.

The question the demon asks is important because it tells us three essential facts about evil spirits:

- Evil spirits know they can be destroyed
- Some evil spirits know they are going to die for their rebellion
- Jesus has the power to destroy evil spirits

SATAN'S PUNISHMENT

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Rev.20:1-3 KJV). See also Isa.24:21-22.

At the beginning of the millennium, this powerful evil being will be bound and held in a prison for a thousand years, after which he will be released for a short time. But what will happen to him after his release? Will he be allowed to continue his existence or will he be destroyed?

"When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev.20:7-10 NIV).

If this translation of verse 10 is taken at face value, it seems to say that Satan will be cast into a lake of fire to be tortured for eternity. But, does the phrase *for ever and ever* mean an eternity in the original Greek language?

For Ever and Ever

The English phrase *for ever and ever* in verse 10 is a gross mistranslation of the original Greek phrase *eis tous aeonas ton aionon*, which means, *to the ages of the ages*.

A more correct translation of verse 10 is as follows:

"And the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet were. And shall be tormented day and night until the age of ages."

Satan will not endure everlasting punishing; he will have his existence terminated; he will cease to exist forever. The age spoken of in verse 10 is the termination of an age. It is the time when the existence of physical humans on earth will end. Moreover, it is a time when a new age will begin and the mystery of what God is doing here on earth will be fully revealed.

Satan Will Die

After Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit, the Creator God gave a prophecy about the termination of Satan's existence:

"And I will put enmity [separation] between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen.3:15 KJV). Note, the woman's seed is a reference to Christ.

The English word *bruise* in verse 15 is translated from the Hebrew *shoof*, which means *to crush* or *strike at*. Because Satan is referred to as a serpent, it makes sense that Satan is the serpent that would try to destroy the Savior.

Almost all Bible scholars agree this verse is speaking about the Savior who would come and triumph over Satan. Satan would strike at the heel and damage it a little bit. But, Christ will crush the head of Satan; thereby, he will destroy him.

"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (Rom.16:20 KJV).

The English word *bruise* in verse 20 is translated from the Greek word *suntribo*, which means *to crush* or *to completely shatter*. In other words, it means *to destroy*.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;" (Heb.2:14 KJV). See also 2.Thes.2:8.

In verse 14, the English word *destroy* is a translation of the Greek word *katargeo*, which comes from the root *argeo*, which means *to render entirely useless*. It can also mean *abolish, cease, vanish away, or to utterly destroy*. Christ will utterly destroy Satan.

There is nothing in the Greek word *katargeo* that indicates anything other than destruction; it does not show that Satan will continue to live. Indeed, it indicates he will be utterly destroyed. Verse 14 also shows that Jesus has the power to destroy Satan.

Satan the Lawbreaker

"You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (Jn.8:44 KJV).

Satan and other evil spirits were cast out of the Kingdom of God because of their rebellion (Rev.12:1-9). They are against God's law and will not conform to it willingly. Moreover, they willfully break God's law and obey only what God imposes upon them by force.

A Covering Cherub Will Die

Ezekiel, chapter 28, contains the prophecy about the physical king of Tyrus and the destruction of the evil cherub who possessed the king.

"Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say to him, Thus says the Lord God; You seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You have been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of your tabrets and of your pipes was prepared in you in the day that you were created. You are the anointed cherub that covers; . . ." (Ezk.28:12-14 KJV).

Verses 13-14 do not describe the physical King of Tyrus; they describe someone completely different. The only kind of being that could fit this description has to be from the spirit-realm of existence. These verses show the magnificence and beauty of a powerful spirit-being who was created to hold a powerful position within the Kingdom of God.

"And I have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity [lawlessness] was found in you. By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of you with violence, and you have sinned: therefore I will cast you as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire" (Ezk.28:14-16 KJV).

The English word *destroy* in verse 16 is translated from the Greek word *abad*, which is translated 57 times in the Old Testament as *destroyed*, 79 times as *perished*, and 36 times as *to destroy* or *to perish*. The word *abad*, as used in Ezekiel 28, cannot mean anything other than total destruction. These scriptures prove beyond doubt that this powerful spirit-being will have his life terminated and will cease to exist.

"Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness: I will cast you to the ground, I will lay you before kings, that they may behold you. You have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of you, it shall devour you, and I will bring you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold you. All they that know you among the people shall be astonished at you: you shall be a terror, and never shall you be any more" (Ezk.28:17-19 KJV). A more correct translation of the last part of verse 19 is, "You shall never be a terror anymore."

The fire that will come from within this powerful spirit-being will consume him; he will be destroyed and turned to ashes. The judgment and punishment for this spirit-being has already been made—his fate is sealed. He will be destroyed by fire for his rebellion. Remember, the penalty for committing willful sin is death (Rom.6:23).

It is important to understand that the Lake of Fire in which evil spirits and humans will be cast is a physical place that burns with physical fire. Because both evil spirits and people will be destroyed by the same physical fire (Matt.25:40-41; Rev.20:7-10) and turned to physical ashes that will be trodden under the feet of the righteous (Mal.4:1-3), it seems likely that God will change both evil spirits and people into fleshly beings before they are destroyed by this fire.

ARE HUMANS IMMORTAL?

The reality of death is one of the most terrifying thoughts that can come to the human mind. It is so frightening and distasteful that most people try to avoid talking or thinking about it. Life is our most precious possession, but no matter what we do or how hard we try to preserve it, the inevitable will happen—we will eventually die.

At the Beginning

At the very beginning of human history, God warned the first man that if he disobeyed his instructions he would die:

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it, for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (Gen.2:15-17 KJV).

Satan Enters the Garden

"And the serpent [Satan] was cunning above every animal of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, Is it true that God has said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the trees of the garden, but the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it nor touch it, lest you die" (Gen.3:2-3 Para.).

Satan who is a master of deception questioned Eve to see if she understood what God had said regarding the trees of the garden and he discovered that she did understand that disobedience would cause her death.

The Big Lie

"And the serpent said to the woman, You shall not really die" (Gen.3:4 Para.).

The first humans believed this lie; they believed they were immortal and could not die. However, they were not immortal; they did die. Throughout human history the vast majority of their descendants have believed this same lie, and many will face the final death because they preferred to believe a lie instead of the truth.

The scriptures show beyond a shadow of a doubt that, when wicked individuals are punished with death, they cease to exist from all dimensions of God's creation. Death is the absence of life; it is not existence in another form.

God Can Destroy the Spirit in Man

The apostle Paul was inspired to speak of the temporary condition of the flesh and the hope of the continuance of life as a spirit-being:

"Therefore we do not faint, but if indeed our outward man is being decayed, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day—for the lightness of our present affliction works out for us a far more excellent eternal weight of glory; we are not considering the things seen, but the things not being seen; for the things seen are not

lasting, but the things not seen are everlasting" (2.Cor.4:16-18 Para.).

Although there is hope of eternal and immortal life in the spirit-realm, the reality is that the spirit can be destroyed if a person is incorrigibly wicked and does not repent of their sin.

Jesus says, "*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Matt.10:28 KJV). See Gen.6:1-7; Lk.12:4-5.

The English word *body* is translated from the Greek word *soma*, which means *a physical human/animal, body, or corpse*. The English word *soul* is translated from the Greek word *psuche*, which means *breath, life, or mind*.

Here, there are two distinct elements of physical and non-physical human life and both elements can be completely destroyed by God. There is nothing in either of these two words that indicates anything immortal.

The English word *destroy* is translated from the Greek word *apollumi*, which means *destroy fully, to kill, to perish, to completely do away with, or to die*. The word *apollumi* is used many times to describe the utter destruction of individuals and places (see Matt.12:14, 21:41; Lk.17:29). In every context where *apollumi* is found in the New Testament, it means to completely destroy and it is used to convey utter and complete destruction.

There is no doubt as to the meaning of the words used in Matthew 10:28. The point is clear that men only have the power to kill the body, but God has the power to completely destroy all aspects of his human creation.

Unrepentant Sinners Shall Die

"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezk.18:4 KJV) See also verse 20.

The English word, *soul* in verse 4 is a translation from the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which means *a breathing creature or animal, vitality, beast, body, or breath*. There is absolutely nothing in the word *nephesh* which indicates anything other than physical life, whether human or animal. And there is nothing throughout the entire Bible that indicates humans are immortal. *Nephesh* literally means *a state of being alive*.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

"Brothers, if anyone among you goes astray from the truth, and anyone turns him back, know that the one turning a sinner from the error of his way will save the soul from death" (Jms.5:19-20 Para.).

"Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1.Jn.3:15 KJV).

Sin is defined as the violation of the physical and spiritual law of God; sin is lawlessness (Rom.14:23; 1.Jn.3:4; Jms.4:17). The violation of God's law requires the death penalty for the incorrigible, unrepentant lawbreaker.

The Finality of Death

"For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." . . . "And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.4:1, 3 KJV).

Malachi does not say whether these wicked individuals are evil spirits or humans. What is clear from many other scriptures is that there is a time in the future when both evil spirits and humans who oppose God will be destroyed in a lake of fire, and that those who are destroyed by fire will never live again.

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev.21:8 KJV). See also Rev. 20:12-15).

The destruction of wicked humans will be accomplished in the same manner as the destruction of evil spirits; they will be consumed by fire.

Humans are Mortal

Regardless of what people believe or want to believe about the spirit in man, the evidence from the Bible shows that humans are mortal; they do not possess immortality in any way, shape, or form. Notice what the apostle Paul says about the endeavor to obtain eternal life and immortality:

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereto you were also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1.Tim.6:12 KJV). See also verse 19.

"To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life:" (Rom.2:7 KJV). See also Matt.19:16-17; Lk.10:25-27;18:18-20.

"Behold I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this

mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1.Cor. 15:51-54 KJV). See also 1.Cor.15:26; 2.Tim.1:9-10; 2.Pet.1:4; Rev.20:6, 21:1-4.

If humans already possess immortality, these scriptures would make no sense. Why must a person continue to strive for eternal life and immortality if they already have it? It is apparent from what Paul says that eternal life and immortality is only guaranteed if a person lives a righteous lifestyle. It is also obvious from what Paul says that those who are called to the first resurrection must be changed into immortal beings in order to continue life in the spirit-realm:

"And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit, who [i.e.,which] lives in you" (Rom.8:11 NIV).

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible that shows humans have an eternal or immortal spirit. In fact, the scriptures show just the opposite; they clearly show human life as a temporary condition. See 2.Cor.4:17-18.

SUMMARY

Although many would like to believe they will gain immortality by virtue of being human or by belonging to one religious organization or another, this is not what the word of God says.

God says that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked:

"Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezk.33:11 KJV). Please read the entire 33rd chapter of Ezekiel to see the concern God has for Israel, and the finality of the of the punishment for being wicked. See also Ezk.18: 20-32; 2.Pet.2:1-22; 1.Cor.6:9-10.

All wicked individuals, whether humans or evil spirits, will be punished for their wickedness and will eventually be eliminated from the Father's realm of existence. The scriptures clearly show that when a human or an evil spirit is punished with death in the Lake of Fire, their life will be terminated, and all traces of their existence will be erased; they will totally cease to exist (Mal.4:1).

Eternal and immortal life represent the highest form of existence. This is the kind of life that God the Father offers to those he calls to participate in the first resurrection. He is offering people eternal life and immortality as sons of his in his kingdom and family.

Jesus said, *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn.10:10 KJV).*

No form of existence can be more abundant and filled with joy than eternal and immortal life on the divine spirit-plane of existence in the Family and Kingdom of God (see 1.Cor.2:9). What gift could be greater than to have immortal life, which springs forth from itself and does not depend on any other source to sustain it because it is self sustaining?

"Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:" (2.Tim.1:9-10 KJV). See also 1.Jn.2:24-25.

Concerning eternal and immortal life, the choices for anyone called to salvation today are the same as those called before and during the Old Covenant with ancient Israel. Anyone who is called to salvation today and chooses to live a righteous life will be rewarded with eternal and immortal life. However, those who refuse to keep their agreement with God will be punished with a death from which there is no return. The Creator God who became Jesus Christ had these choices summarized and recorded so that there would be no doubt as to what he was offering for righteousness:

"See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the Lord your God shall bless you in the land where you go to possess it. But if your heart turn away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce to you this day, that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land, where you pass over Jordan to go to possess it" (Deut.30:15-18 KJV).

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live" (Deut.30:19 KJV).

It is God the Father's and Jesus Christ's earnest desire for people to choose life instead of death.

The biblical record clearly shows individuals who choose to live in disobedience to the Sovereign God's righteous laws, precepts, and principles will have their existence terminated in the Lake of Fire and cease as a living being, but those who live in obedience to his righteous laws, precepts, and principles will live forever in his Kingdom of spirit-beings. The choice is yours to make.

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____ CHAPTER ____
SEVEN

HELL FIRE AND THE PUNISHMENT OF SINNERS

For centuries, in order to motivate converts and prospective converts to strive to 'go to heaven' when they die, religious leaders have tried to frighten them with the threat of eternal punishment in a place called hell. As fearful as many are of going to hell, most people do not have the slightest understanding of what the Bible actually teaches about this subject. This chapter investigates the myth of hell as a place where people are tormented with fire for eternity and what the Bible really says about hell.

In most Christian theologies, Hell is a place of punishment after death. Although there are many different and confusing explanations as to exactly what and where hell is, there are three widely accepted beliefs surrounding punishment in hell:

- Hell is generally believed to be under the earth.
- Hell's fire burns forever.
- Hell is where the wicked are tormented forever.

Although Catholic and Protestant theology differ radically in many respects, the foundation for the Protestant belief in 'hell-fire' is firmly fixed in early Catholic theology. The main difference between the two is that Catholics believe in an interim conditional stay in Hell, which they call 'purgatory', but Protestants believe that the wicked go straight to Hell and stay there for eternity.

The translators of the Authorized King James Version of the Bible lived at a time when the doctrine of 'hell-fire' and damnation was generally accepted. When it came to translating the original Hebrew meaning of the word *sheol* (i.e., grave or pit) they used the English word *hell* (i.e., to conceal, cover; hide); thereby, they effectively concealed the true meaning of scriptures while confirming their preconceived belief in a place where unrighteous people would be punished forever.

However, the translators found it impossible to use the word *hell* in every instance as a translation of the Hebrew *sheol*, because to do so would place some of the most righteous individuals in the Bible in a place of torment with the wicked. Therefore, whenever necessary, they used other words in place of *sheol* that would not conflict with their belief system. Had these translators simply left the word *sheol* untranslated, the concept and meaning of each verse where it is used would have been readily understood by any serious reader.

In order to expose the false teaching of hell as a place of eternal torture and fiery torment, it is important to review many of the scriptures in which the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek word *hades* are translated into the English word *hell*.

The Word Sheol

The Hebrew word *sheol* appears 65 times in the Old Testament and is translated many times as *hell*, which confuses the meaning of the text in which it is used. The word *sheol* simply refers to a hole in the ground, a pit, or a grave. Many times *sheol* is also translated as *grave* which makes its meaning clear. See Gen.37:35; 42:38; 44:29-31; 1.Sam.2:6; 1.Kg.2:6; Psa.49:14-15.

The Biblical Sheol

Both Job and the Psalmist indicate that *sheol* is a place where the body resides to rot and decay in the dirt of the earth. Job also says that God has the power to bring one out of sheol and back to life:

"Are not my days few? Then cease, and set me alone, that I may take little comfort before I go; and I shall not return; to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; a land of obscurity, the darkness of the shadow of death, and not any order; even the shining is as darkness" (Job 10:20-22 Para.).

"But man dies and is cut off, and expires; and where is he? As waters go from the sea, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. Who will grant that you would hide me in sheol; You would hide me until your anger turns back; that you would set a limit for me and remember me? If a man dies, will he revive? All the days of my warfare will I wait, until my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer you; you shall complete the work of your hands" (Job 14:10-15 Para.).

"If I wait for sheol [the grave] as my house; I have spread out my bed in the darkness; I have said to corruption, you are my father, to the worm my mother and my sister. And where is my hope? they shall go down to the bars of sheol, when our descent together is in the dust" (Job 17:13-16 Para.).

"Like sheep, they are appointed to sheol [the grave]; death shall reign for them; and the upright ones shall rule over them in the morning; and their form is for rotting; Sheol is home for them. But God will redeem my soul from the hand of sheol; for he will take me. Selah" (Psa.49:14-15 Para.). See also Psa.6:5; 30:3; 89:48.

When Korah and his sons rebelled against Moses and Aaron, God opened the earth and they descended into sheol (Num.16:20-30):

"For my soul is full with evils; and my life touches sheol. I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I have been like a feeble man, free among the dead, as pierced ones lying in the grave, whom you remember no more; yea by your hand they are cut off. You have laid me in the lowest pit in the dark places; in the deeps" (Psa.88: 3-6 Para.).

The Condition of Death

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible that indicates humans have an immortal soul or that any human life function continues after death. The Bible indicates just the opposite; it clearly shows that the physical life of a human is a temporary condition which can be terminated forever.

At death, the cerebral functions cease, the brain dies and there are no more thought processes, no reward, no memory, no knowledge, no access to this world; the dead are simply dead, not alive:

"For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in any thing that happens under the sun" (Ecc.9:5-6 NIV).

"All that your hand finds to do, do it with your strength. For there is no work, or planning, or knowledge or wisdom, in sheol, where you go" (Ecc.9:10 Para.).

"Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for your mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?" (Psa.6:4-5 KJV).

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down in silence" (Psa.115:17 KJV).

The reason they cannot praise God is that they are no longer alive; their life has been silenced. In death there is no thought process:

"Put your trust not in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa.146:3-4 KJV). See also Isa.38:17-19.

Where is Sheol?

Although the Bible does not indicate a specific geographical location on earth for sheol, there are many descriptions of the location of sheol. It is said to be under the mountains, the earth, the waters, and it is a place to where people descend.

Sheol is a place of darkness, silence, and rest; moreover, it is a condition of unconsciousness. It is a place where there is no communication between God and people. See Job 10:21-22; Psa.6:5; 31:17-18; 94:17; 115:17; Ecc.9:5-6;10.

Sheol is also a place where only the physical element of a human resides, but not the spirit of man (Ecc.12:7). It is a place where both the righteous and the wicked go to await a resurrection to immortality, an opportunity for salvation, or the second death.

From the context of the many scriptures that speak of sheol, it is evident that sheol is not limited to one specific geographical location on earth. Instead, it is often used to describe a physical resting place for a dead body. It is also used to describe a condition of rest. In the broadest sense, sheol simply means 'where dead bodies are.'

In most English translations, *sheol* has been translated *hell* with the conceptual meaning of a place of torture and suffering. However, *sheol* does not even remotely denote a place of fiery torment.

There is no contradiction in the usage of the word sheol in the Bible; the contradiction is between what people believe and what the Bible actually teaches.

HADES

The Greek word *hades* refers to the same place as the Hebrew word *sheol* (i.e., the realm of the dead, a hole in the ground, a pit or grave).

Jesus Went to Hell

If hell is a place of eternal torment for the wicked as is commonly taught, we have a problem of monumental proportions, because the Bible clearly shows that Jesus went to hell after he was crucified and before he was resurrected:

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in hell; neither will you suffer your Holy One [Jesus Christ] to see corruption" (Psa.16:9-10 KJV).

Both Peter and Paul spoke of this prophecy in reference to Christ's resurrection:

"Because you will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One [Jesus Christ] to see corruption. . . "He [David] seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:27, 31 KJV). See also Acts 13:35-37.

In Psalms 16:9-10, the King James translators used the word *hell* instead of the Hebrew word *sheol*, which can mean grave or pit. In Acts 2:27 and 31, they used *hell* for the Greek word *hades*, which means grave.

In these statements by King David, and Peter, there is irrefutable proof that hell (sheol), or hades (grave) is not a place of eternal fiery torture. Was Christ sent to a place of torture before his resurrection? Of course not! Christ was buried in a tomb, which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek word *hades*. He did not go to a place of torture; his body lay in a tomb and his spirit went back to God the Father until his body was resurrected and his spirit was placed back into it.

When translating the prophecy of Christ's death and resurrection, the translators found themselves in a doctrinal dilemma. A correct translation of the words *sheol* and *hades* as *grave* would not harmonize with current theology concerning the immortality of the soul. It would have shown that Jesus did not have an immortal soul, but that he was dead in a grave on earth until God the Father resurrected him. In order to solve their problem they used the word *hell* to obscure the true intent of the scriptures.

Clearly, when Jesus died he went to hell (i.e., sheol, the grave). Moreover, Jacob said that he too would go to sheol (hell) where he thought his son Joseph was (Gen.37:31-35). Even righteous Job requested to go to sheol (Job 14:13-15).

If hell is a place of fire and torment for the wicked, why would Jesus and other righteous individuals be found there? The simple fact revealed in scripture is that all humans who die go to the same place at death.

"The Lord kills, and makes alive: he brings down to the grave [sheol], and brings up" (1.Sam.2:6 KJV). See also Job 21:23-32; 30:23; Psa.30:3; 49:15; 86:13; Hos.13:14; Nah.1:14.

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet, as dead. And he put his right hand on me, saying to me, do not fear. I am the first and the last, and the Living One; and I became dead; and behold, I am living forever and ever. Amen. And I have the keys to Hades [grave], and of death" (Rev.1:17-18 Para.).

Jesus has the authority and power to unlock the grave and resurrect those who reside there. See Acts 10:42; Rom.14:9.

In 1.Corinthians 15:55 KJV *hades* is translated as *grave*, "*O death, where is your sting? O grave [hades], where is your victory?"*

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (Rev.20:13 KJV).

This is an important scripture because it contradicts the traditional teaching of the immortality of the soul and that hades is a place of eternal torment from which there is no escape.

A short study into the references where the word *hades* is used will easily show that it means the *grave* and not an ever-burning place of eternal torture.

GEHENNA/GEHINOM

The Greek word *gehenna* and the Hebrew word *gehinom* are translated as *hell* in the New Testament and come from the Hebrew phrase *Gay Ben Hinnom*, which means *The Valley of the Son of Hinnom*. This small valley was located south of Jerusalem on one of the borders between the territories of Judah and Benjamin (see Josh.15:8). Periodically, during the times of the Kings of Israel, the sacrificial burning of children was practiced there:

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father: For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel" (2.Chron.28:1-3 KJV). See also 2.Kg.23:7-10; 2.Chron.33:1-6; Jer.7:31, 32:35.

These sacrifices were a part of the worship of Molech. Jeremiah and many other prophets condemned this practice and prophesied that the valley would be called 'The Valley of Slaughter' because of the prophetic events which will transpire there (See Jer.19:5-6). The location in the Valley of Hinnom where the children were burnt in sacrifice to pagan gods was called *topet*, which means *a burning place*.

The Gehenna of Christ's day was the name of a deep ravine about a thousand yards south of the temple area just outside of the city of Jerusalem. This ravine was used as the city's garbage dump. It is said that all sorts of things were disposed of there, such as bones and the bodies of animals and criminals. Fires were kept continually burning in the Valley of Gehenna in order to consume whatever was thrown there.

Because of the circumstances associated with Gehenna, the Hebrew word *gehinom* became an idiomatic expression for *a place of fiery destruction*. When Jesus spoke of Gehenna it was for the purpose of describing destruction, not torture:

"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [gehenna]" (Matt.10:28 KJV). See also Gen.6:1-7; Lk.12:4-5 KJV.

The English word *destroy* is translated from the Greek word *apollumi*, which means *to destroy fully, to kill, to perish, to completely do away with*. The usage of the word *apollumi* in the New Testament always indicates complete destruction. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for *destroy* mean *the destruction and cessation of existence*.

There is no doubt that Christ's audience knew exactly what he was referring to when he spoke of gehenna. His symbolic usage of gehenna in portraying destruction was a very graphic illustration and an unmistakable reference to total destruction.

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened graves which outwardly indeed appear beautiful, but within are full of bones of the dead, and of all uncleanness. So you also indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but within are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the tombs of the righteous. And you say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. So you witness to yourselves, that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. And you fill up the measure of your fathers. Serpents, offspring of vipers! How shall you escape the judgment of gehenna?" (Matt.23:27-33 Para.).

Here, Jesus gives a powerful rebuke and warning to these wicked religious leaders. Notice that, if they do not repent, there is no escape from the punishment for sin, which is utter, final destruction by fire.

The destructive power of fire was used many times to destroy those who opposed God or his people. There are many warnings in the biblical record, which show that those who oppose God, his prophets, and his people will be destroyed with fire. See Gen.19:24; Deut.4:23-24; 9:3; Isa.9:18-19; 30:26-28; Matt.3:10; 5:21-22; 2.Thes.1:7-8.

The Gehenna fire that Jesus warned of is not a place of eternal torture; it is a place where the death penalty will be administered. It is a place of the final destruction of wicked humans and spirits.

Every time Jesus referred to gehenna, those listening knew exactly what he was saying. They did not imagine a place of fiery torture under the earth or anywhere else. They visualized a foul, stinking garbage dump where refuse and unwanted waste of all kinds was thrown to be destroyed by fire.

The Worm of Gehenna

In another reference to Gehenna, Jesus makes the picture of destruction more graphic by referring to the ever-present worms that infested the garbage and dead bodies that were thrown there:

"And if your hand offend you, cut it off. For it is profitable for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go away into the fire of gehenna that cannot be put out: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out. And if your foot causes you to offend cut it off, for it is well for you to enter into life lame, than having two feet to be thrown into gehenna, into the fire that cannot be put out: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out. And if your eye offends you, cast it out. For it is profitable for you to enter into the kingdom of God one-eyed, than having two eyes to be

thrown into the fire of gehenna: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out" (Mk.9:43-48 Para.). See also Matt.5:29-30; 18:8-9.

Somehow many think that these scriptures say that wicked people will be tortured forever. However, Jesus uses the city dump where garbage was burned as an example of the destruction of the wicked.

But what about the worm that does not die? Some feel that because Jesus says 'their worm does not die', there must be eternal punishing for sinners? However, Jesus is using the city dump and its fires as a symbolic representation of final punishment.

The English word translated *worm* is the Greek word *skolex*, which refers to a *grub*, *maggot*, or *earth worm*, which fits perfectly into the symbolism of the Gehenna-fire garbage dump. When a carcass was thrown into Gehenna, but it was not totally consumed by the fires or did not reach the fires to be burned, it would be consumed by animals, birds, insects, maggots, or worms.

When dead flesh is infested with worms/maggots, their endless reproductive life cycle (e.g., egg, pupa, larva, insect) will eventually totally consume the flesh. This is what Jesus meant when he said 'their worm does not die'. He did not mean that the worm was eternal, he was using the city dump and its destructive nature as an allegory for the finality of the punishment for sinfulness.

The prophet Isaiah also used the symbolism of a worm and fire when he foretold the total destruction of the wicked during the millennial reign of Christ:

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, says the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (Isa.66:22-24 KJV).

When Jesus spoke of Gehenna and worms that did not die, he was giving a graphic description of the finality of the destruction of the wicked to his audience. They knew he was speaking of a most foul and miserable destruction in a Gehenna type garbage dump where worthless things were disposed of.

TARTAROO

The Greek word *tartaroo* appears only once in the Bible: *"For God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down into hell [tartaroo], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved to judgment;" (2.Pet.2:4 KJV). See also 1.Pet.3:19-20; Jude 6.*

The beings who will be sent to hell (tartaroo) are not people; they are wicked angels. Tartaroo is neither gehenna nor hades; it is a place of darkness and restraint and its literal meaning is *incarceration* or *restraint*. It does not necessarily mean a place at all. Moreover, in no way whatsoever can this word be applied to a place of punishment for humans.

SUMMARY

The Bible is very clear in stating that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God:

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral or idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1.Cor.6:9-10 NIV). See also Gal.5:19-21.

The Incurably Wicked

What will happen to the incurable sinners? Are they all to be tortured with fire forever? No, they will not be tortured forever. The wages of sin is death (Rom.6:23)—not eternal life in torment.

Those who willfully disobey and reject God will receive eternal punishment, not eternal punishing. They will be cast into a fire that will terminate their existence forever (Matt.13:38-42), and they will be ashes under the feet of the righteous (Mal.4:1-3):

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev.20:13-15 KJV).

"But for the cowardly and unbelieving, and those having become foul, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all the lying ones, their part will be in the Lake burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev.21:8 Para.).

Hell Fire

It is evident that the popular concept of hell as an ever-burning place of torture for the wicked cannot be substantiated by honestly translating the Bible. Because it cannot be proven from scripture, it is obviously a false teaching and a deception of Satan who is the God of this world's religions. The traditional teaching of an eternal 'hell-fire' torture reserved for the wicked is false. Such a place simply does not exist as a teaching of the Bible. Although Jesus and the prophets did not teach ever-burning torture, they did teach a final punishment for the wicked.

The wicked will be punished by fire. However, this fire is far hotter and more permanent than most believe. The fire that will be used to punish the wicked will consume both body and spirit; therefore, it will terminate the totality of their existence forever:

"For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch . . . And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.4:1, 3 KJV).

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— CHAPTER —

EIGHT

PURGATORY

Biblical Fact or Philosophical Fantasy

Purgatory is a teaching concerning a place or condition of temporary punishment for the dead who are not entirely free from sin, or have not fully paid the penalty for their transgressions of God's law. The dead in this place supposedly reside in a temporary state until they are purged of all things that would prevent them from entering God's heavenly realm.

The English word purgatory is taken from the Latin word *purgare* that means *to make clean* or *to purify*.

This teaching assumes the following:

- That there is a place of eternal punishing.
- That the righteous go directly to heaven at death.
- That there is a second opportunity for salvation after death.
- That penitential works are required in order to gain forgiveness of sin.
- That the living can have a positive impact on a dead person's eternal destiny.

Although an argument for a doctrinal position may be cleverly written and firmly rooted in tradition, the true test of a teaching's validity is that it conforms to the biblical record. Let us see if the teaching of a place of purification after death stands this test.

PRAYING FOR THE DEAD

Before Christ

Although not a single reference about forgiveness of sin after death can be found in the biblical record, the proponents of the doctrine of purgatory assume that it was a tradition of the Jews at the time of the Maccabees to offer sacrifice and prayers for the dead. This assumption is because a Jewish commander named Judas supposedly sent money to Jerusalem for the purpose of offering sacrifices and prayers for the sins of the dead in the hope that they would rise in the resurrection of the just. See II Maccabees, xii, 43-46.

Although this point may sound like a rock solid basis for a doctrine of purgatory, it is not. For one thing, tradition is a very shaky basis on which to predicate one's eternal destiny, especially when Christ said to the Jews, "*Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition*", "*You have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition*", and "*You reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition*" (Matt.15:3, 6; Mk.7:9).

It seems unlikely that the record in II Maccabees intended to show that sacrifices and prayers were being offered for the dead, because such an action would have been in opposition to the sacrificial system the Creator God gave to national Israel, which makes no allowance for sacrifices or prayers to be made for the dead. Moreover, neither the prophets, Christ, or the apostles refer to this book or its record as having any validity as a guide for understanding truth or the way of truth.

New Testament

There are two passages in the New Testament that are used as proof that the teaching of a place of purification exists and that in this place individuals who die with unresolved issues concerning violations of God's law can have these issues resolved in order to enter the heavenly realm.

Proponents of the teaching of a purgatory point to the following statement of Jesus in the Book of Matthew as confirmation that there is an opportunity for a person to be forgiven of sin after they are dead:

"Therefore I say to you, All manner of sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men: but blasphemy against the holy spirit will not be forgiven men. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it will be forgiven him: but whosoever speaks against the holy spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt.12:31-32 KJV Para.).

The problem with using this scripture as a proof that a person can have their sins forgiven after death is that it only speaks to forgiveness of sins, not to an after death forgiveness through another person's intercession on the behalf of a dead person.

Another argument for the teaching of purgatory, is the apostle Paul's statement to the Corinthians about the things built on the foundation laid by Christ:

"For another foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1.Cor.3: 11-15 KJV).

Paul's comments in verses 11-15 have nothing to do with the forgiveness of sin before or after death. His comments are within the context of a reprimand to some of the Corinthians for their lack of spiritual growth, their causing disunity and strife within the congregation because of their forming exclusive groupings around individual ministers, and the work of the ministry and their eternal rewards or the lack thereof.

In verses 11-15, Paul explains that a minister's work either yields a productive or an unproductive end result. A minister's work that endures into eternity is equated as gold, silver, or precious stones, but work that is unproductive is destroyed like wood, hay, and stubble in a fire and is without reward.

The Dead

Along with the assumption that the problematic dead are in a place of further purification, it is also assumed that the living can commune with the dead. The assumption is that the dead have the ability to think and act. However, this assumption is in opposition to the following statement made by king Solomon:

"Anyone who is among the living has hope, even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun- all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Eccl.9:4-10 NIV).

King David said this about the dead:

"The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any that go down into silence. But we will praise the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord" (Psa.115:17-18 Para.).

The biblical fact is that when a person dies they are not alive in another form, they are dead and without conscious thought.

Some might say, What about the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11 that cried out for judgment and vengeance? Are not they alive in heaven? No, they are not alive. The things the apostle John saw were in vision and were symbolic and prophetic images of future events.

FORGIVENESS OF SIN

The doctrine of purgatory is predicated on the assumption that lower value sins can be purged away after death. The doctrine assumes that some individuals die with small sins for which there was no true repentance, and that some individuals die having a need to finalize the payment for small sins which were not wholly paid in this life. Therefore, in order for these individuals to enter the heavenly realm, these issues must be resolved in a positive manner—hence a place of purging. But what does the Bible have to say about repentance and the forgiveness of sin?

Ancient Israel

The Creator God was always willing to set ancient Israel's sins aside if they would repent:

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land" (Isa.1:18-19 KJV).

"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby you have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, says the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live" (Ezk.18:30-32 KJV). See also Ezk.33:11.

Repentance Before Forgiveness

For those who desire to become a son of God, repentance, baptism, and conversion are three extremely important steps in the process of obtaining salvation, because they are the steps that lead to a covenant relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

On the first festival of Pentecost, after the death and resurrection of Christ, the apostle Peter spoke to a great assembly of people after the holy spirit had been given to the first Christians. This was a truly unique time in history because it was the beginning of the gospel age of salvation.

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:37-39 KJV). See also Rom.11:27-29.

On this festival, through Peter, God revealed the New Covenant method by which a person could be saved and obtain eternal life and immortality. Peter said that a person must repent, be baptized, and receive the holy spirit. No other method through which a person can obtain salvation is noted in the New Testament.

Terms and Conditions

A person cannot earn salvation or eternal life through works, because it is a gift (Rom.6:23); however, God the Father has set forth a number of terms and conditions which must be complied with before he will bestow the gift of salvation and eternal life.

Many times, people give gifts to others that have terms and conditions, which must be fulfilled before the person actually receives the gift. An example of a gift with terms and conditions is a will or a trust which is made prior to the death of an individual. One of the prerequisites in order to obtain the gift of eternal life is repentance.

Repentance and Conversion

"Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19 KJV).

What Peter was inspired to preach about repentance on the festival of Pentecost was nothing new, because God has always required repentance of sin in order for a person to be in harmony with him.

While Jesus was speaking to a group of people, he used examples from their time to admonish them to repent and obey God:

"About this time he was informed that Pilate had butchered some Jews from Galilee as they were sacrificing at the Temple in Jerusalem. "Do you think they were worse sinners than other men from Galilee?" he asked. "Is that why they suffered? Not at all! And don't you realize that you will also perish unless you leave your evil ways and turn to God? "And what about the eighteen men who died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? Not at all! And you, too, will perish unless you repent" (Lk.13:1-5 LBP).

There is no doubt that repentance is necessary in order for a person to receive forgiveness of sin; however, a dead person cannot repent, because according to the Bible, a dead person does not have the ability to think or act. See Eccl.9:4-10; Matt:22:31-32; Acts 2:29-34.

"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38KJV).

The English word *repent* in Acts 2:38 is translated from the Greek word *metanoia*, which is a very complex word because it deals with the mind and thought process. In the context of Acts 2:38, the word *metanoia* clearly refers to changing from that which is evil to that which is good.

True repentance requires a total change in a person's life, a change which leads away from all aspects of evil and leads toward that which is of God. True repentance also requires an unconditional surrender to the rule and authority of the Sovereign God. A dead person cannot do this, because according to the Bible, a dead person does not have the ability to think or act.

The Creator inspired the prophet Isaiah to encourage the people of Israel to repent of their sins so he could bless them:

"Wash yourselves, purify yourselves, put away the evil of your doings from my sight, stop doing evil. Learn to do good; seek justice; reprove the oppressor; judge the orphan; strive for the widow. Come and let us reason together, says the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing to hear, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isa.1:16-20 KJV Para.).

According to the Bible repentance is for the living, not the dead. See Ezk.18:19-31.

FREE OF SIN

The apostle Paul said the following about being freed from sin:

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom.6:22 KJV).

A person who is free from sin has no need for further purging of sin. A person without sin is sinless. This is an important truth, because only the sinless will enter the Kingdom of God.

"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom.5:7-11 KJV). See also Col.1:2-21; Heb.9:1-19; 10:1-10; 2.Pet.1:1-9.

There is no doubt from the many scriptures which speak about the atoning power of Christ's sacrificial blood that once it is applied to the sinner, all past sin is forgiven. There is no sin left to be atoned for or purged away.

The teaching of a need for a further purging of sin after death denies the ability of Christ's sacrificial blood to totally purge away sin and render the person atoned for sinless.

By requiring penitential works for the forgiveness of sin after death or prayers to be offered for the forgiveness of a dead person's sin, the doctrine of purgatory denies the power of Christ's atoning blood to purge away all sin while a person is alive.

Just before he was crucified Jesus said the following about his atoning blood:

"For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt.26:28 KJV).

The writer to the Hebrews said of Christ's sacrifice:

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb.1:1-3 KJV). See also 1.Jn. 2:1-2.

"Every priest stands daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man [speaking of Christ], after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb.10:11-12 KJV).

NO SECOND CHANCE

The teaching that there is a second chance to have one's sins purged away in a place of purification after one's death is in total opposition to what is recorded in the Bible about the process of salvation and the finality of the punishment for sin.

The Creator God said through the prophet Ezekiel:

"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezk.18:4 KJV). See also Ezk.18:1-32.

The apostle Paul said the following about the result of sin and gift of God through the sacrifice of Christ:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

There are dozens of scriptures that describe in great detail the future punishment and destruction of wicked humans and wicked spirits by fire. Fire is the most destructive force known to man, because it can reduce physical things to their lowest form and destroys the form and function of whatever is consumed by it.

Job said the following in reference to the finality of a wicked person's death:

"The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out; the flame of his fire stops burning. The light in his tent becomes dark; the lamp beside him goes out. . . . He is torn from the security of his tent and marched off to the king of terrors. Fire resides in his tent; burning sulfur is scattered over his dwelling, his roots dry up below and his branches wither above. The memory of him perishes from the earth; he has no name in the land. he is driven from light into darkness and is banished from the world" (Job 18:5-6;14-18 NIV). See also Job 15:20-30; Psa.106:16-18.

The NIV translators have powerfully captured the essence and meaning of what Job revealed about the finality of the death of a sinful person. Job clearly shows that the destructive force of fire will be used to terminate the sinner's existence.

The Day That Burns as an Oven

The prophet Malachi was inspired to show that the fate of the wicked will be complete and utter destruction, without a continuance of life. Malachi does not say whether or not these wicked are humans or spirit-beings. He merely states that the wicked will be destroyed by fire and cease to exist.

"For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.4:1, 3 KJV). See also Psa.37:20; 97:3-5; 112:10; 119:119; 145:20; Isa.47:13-14; Nah.1:2-6; Matt.3:10-12; 13:36-42, 47-50; 2.Thes.1:6-10;.

The scriptures simply do not support a place of purging away of a person's sin after death. The clear voice of scripture tells us that either a person is righteous or unrighteous at death and that in the day of final judgment the unrighteous have their life terminated forever in the lake of fire. See Rev.20:11-15; 21:6-8.

SUMMARY

The Sovereign God has provided one method through which an individual can be forgiven of their sins and obtain salvation. And this method requires a person to be alive in order to perform it. If after a person has received forgiveness of sin through Christ's atoning blood, there is no sustained effort to live according to God's truth and way of truth, God will not grant eternal life; instead, he will destroy the wicked person with fire. The apostle Paul said:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

Death is the absence of life; it is not existence in another form or another place. When God administers death to the unrepentant, they will die for eternity and simply cease to exist. See Rev.21:8.

Those who believe and teach the doctrine of purgatory readily admit that there are no clear scriptures that define a place of purging for the dead and that this teaching is based on tradition and the opinions of men.

The doctrine of purgatory seems to be an attempt to circumvent the method prescribed by God for salvation by eliminating an individual's personal responsibility to reject a life of sin and live righteously. If the doctrine of purgatory were true, then all of the instructions in the Bible requiring a person to live righteously in order to obtain salvation have no merit.

By B. L. Cocherell

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

CHAPTER

NINE

THE ONLY DAY OF SALVATION

Many believe and teach that the only opportunity for salvation is the period of time between the birth of Adam and the return of Christ. To support this belief and teaching, these individuals quote the following from Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

"For he says, In an acceptable time I heard you, and in a day of salvation I helped you, Behold now is the acceptable time! Behold now is the day of salvation" (2.Cor.6:2 KJV Para.).

From Paul's statement, it seems that indeed now is the only day of salvation; however, with a small amount of study it can easily be shown Paul did not intend to say that today is the only day of salvation.

SALVATION NOW OR NEVER?

Most of Christianity believes that there are only two categories of people on earth: the saved who are assured heavenly bliss and the lost who are to be tormented forever in an everlasting hell-fire. Is today the only day of salvation? Have God the Father and Jesus Christ been trying to save all of humanity from the time of Adam to this present day?

Many worry that if their loved ones do not accept Christ in this life, they will loose out on salvation. Many grieve over their dead relatives, because they think these loved ones are going to burn in a hell-fire for all of eternity, because they never acknowledged Christ as their Savior.

Billions Have Never Heard

If it were true that this is the only day of salvation, the vast majority of humanity is lost without hope because most of humanity has never heard of Christ or the way to salvation.

Despite the tremendous missionary and evangelistic efforts throughout history, most of humanity has never heard God's true message of salvation. Even in this age just before the return of Christ, many millions and perhaps billions will neither hear nor understand the awesome truth about salvation.

However, this is not *the* only day of salvation, it is only *a* day of salvation.

THE ONLY WAY TO OBTAIN SALVATION

"Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the

stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12 KJV).

The Bible states that the only way to receive salvation is through the Messiah and his sacrifice. However, how will people—past, present, and future—who have never even heard of Christ or his sacrifice obtain salvation?

Does God have another method of salvation that does not involve a person accepting Christ as their savior, repenting of sin, being baptized, and receiving the holy spirit? Is there another method to obtain salvation besides the one clearly specified in the Bible? See Mk.16:16; Lk.13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; Rom.8:7-18.

The answer is no! There is no alternate method of obtaining salvation to the one clearly stated in the Bible. There is only one method by which one can obtain salvation, and that way is through Jesus Christ. The simple truth is that billions of people have not yet had their opportunity for salvation.

JESUS CAME TO SAVE HUMANITY

Jesus spoke the truth when he said, *"For the Son of man [Christ] is come to save that which was lost"* (Matt.18:11 KJV; Lk.19:10). The problem is not with what Jesus said, it is with what most think he said. Most believe Jesus meant he came to save all of humanity at that time; however, he did not say this. He only stated that it was his reason for coming.

The Parables and Conversion

Many believe the reason that Jesus spoke in parables was to make his meaning clear; however, this was not what he said. He said that he spoke in parables to conceal information that could lead people to conversion:

"And when he was alone, those around him, with the Twelve, asked him as to the parable. And he said to them, To you has been given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God. But to these outside, all things are being given in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand, lest they should be converted, and sins be forgiven to them" (Mk.4: 10-12 Para.). See also Isa.6:8-10; Matt.13:10-15; Lk.8:10; Jn.12: 37-40; Acts 28:25-27.

The English word *mystery* in verse 11 is translated from the Greek word *mysterion*, which means *mystery* or *secret*. Jesus clearly said that those outside of his group were not permitted to understand the secret plan of God that would lead them to salvation.

The apostle Paul spoke to the Colossians about this same mystery and he told them that it was only revealed to the saints:

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and I fill up in my flesh the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ, on behalf of his body, which is the church; of which I became a minister, according to the administration of God given to me for you to fulfill the word of God, the mystery having been hidden from the ages, and from the generations, but is now revealed to his saints [the elect of God]; to whom God desired to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations which is Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col.1:24-27 Para.). See Rom.16:25-26; Eph.1:8-9.

WHY THE SECRECY?

But why would this information that leads a person to salvation be kept secret and why is it only revealed to God's elect?

Although the mystery of salvation has been preached since the time of Adam, only a very few have been allowed to understand its secrets, and for very good reasons. God the Father and Jesus Christ love their human creation much more than most people can begin to comprehend. It is this love and concern for each individual that prevents God the Father from offering salvation to all of humanity before the establishment of his kingdom on earth.

God the Father and Jesus Christ want everyone to become a part of the God family; they want everyone to obtain salvation:

"Who will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of truth" (1.Tim.2:4 KJV).

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2.Pet.3:9 KJV). See also Psa.136:1-26.

This love and concern is the reason that God the Father and Jesus Christ have formulated a plan that will afford each individual the optimum opportunity for success. The Father knows the potential and character of each individual and in which phase of his plan to offer them the opportunity for salvation. In order for each person to have the best possible conditions for success in obtaining salvation, they must be allowed to live in a time and environment in which they can succeed if they so desire.

The Gospel Preached for a Witness

Jesus said the Gospel was to be preached only as a witness; he said nothing about trying to convert all of humanity during this present age:

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations: and then shall the end come" (Matt.24:14 KJV).

The end that is spoken of here is the end of human rule on this earth. With the end of human rule, begins a New Age in which the Kingdom of God will reign supreme on earth with Jesus Christ as its ruler.

Today, many people are called and exposed to the opportunity for salvation, yet those who are called are very few in comparison to the earth's population. Moreover, among those who are called, few are chosen to participate in the first resurrection:

"So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many are called, but few chosen" (Matt.20:16; 22:14 KJV).

The Sovereign God's overall plan for the salvation of humans has not changed from the foundation of the world. Part of this plan is that humans must come into conformity with his law before being granted salvation.

IS GOD FAIR AND JUST?

Jesus said that a person must obey and practice his heavenly Father's commandments in order to live forever. Moreover a person must also obey and practice the things he taught during his ministry (Matt.19:16-17; 28:20). But, how can a person obey and practice what they have never heard? Obviously they cannot unless they are taught (Rom.10:13-15, 17). Therefore, it is logical to ask whether or not God is fair and just in his dealings with humanity?

Somehow, many have the impression that God is unfair and that he enjoys the suffering and death of humans. Nothing could be further from the truth. This misunderstanding comes from a false teaching about God and a lack of knowledge about his plan for humanity.

God the Father and his son Jesus Christ are the epitome of love and kindness. They have enormous love for humanity:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that through him it might be saved" (Jn.3:16-17 KJV).

Would God be fair or just if he consigned people to eternal life or death without allowing them the freedom to make this decision for themselves? Of course not! Why would God create beings with the ability to think, reason, and choose, and then not allow them to choose their own destiny? If God wanted automatons, he would have created man with instinct and predictable responses to stimuli, which is what he did with the rest of his physical creation. But, God does not want automatons in his family. He wants to share eternity with thinking, reasoning beings who have righteous character.

Yes, God Is Fair And Just

"Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. Hear now, O house of Israel. Is my way not fair? Are your ways not unfair? When a righteous one turns from his righteousness and does injustice, and dies in them; he shall die for his injustice which he has done. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness that he has done, and does justice and righteousness, he shall keep his soul alive. Because he considers and turns from all his transgressions that he has done, surely he shall live; he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, The way of the Lord is not fair. Are my ways not fair, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not fair?" (Ezk.18:25-29 Para.).

"Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord, I do not have pleasure in the death of the wicked, except in the wicked turning from his way, and so to live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! For why will you die, O house of Israel? And you, son of man, say to the sons of your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his trespass. And the evil of the evil; in the day he turns from his wickedness, he shall not fall by it. And the righteous shall not be able to live by it, in the day he sins. Though I say to the righteous, he shall surely live; yet he trusts in his own righteousness, and shall not be remembered. But he shall die for his iniquity which he has done. And though I say to the wicked, you shall surely die; if he turns from his sin and does justice and righteousness; if the wicked returns the pledge; he repays the thing stolen; he walks in the statutes of life, not doing iniquity; he shall not die. All his sins which he has sinned shall not be remembered to him; he has done justice and righteousness; he shall surely live. Yet the sons of your people say, The way of the Lord is not fair. But they, even their way is not fair. When the righteous turns from his righteousness, and does iniquity, he shall even die by them. But if the wicked turns from his wickedness, and does justice and righteousness, he shall live by them. Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. I shall judge you, each man by his ways, O house of Israel" (Ezk.33:11-20 Para.).

God says that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, because it is his earnest desire for all human beings to have eternal life:

"Cast away your transgressions from you by which you have transgressed in them; and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit; for why will you die, O house of Israel? For I do not have pleasure in the death of him who dies, declares the Lord. So you turn and live" (Ezk.18:31-32 Para.).

THE GREAT JUDGMENT

"Do not marvel at this: for an hour is coming, in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice, And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment" (Jn.5:28-29 KJV).

Many assume this verse shows that there is only one specific time and one specific resurrection in which all of humanity will be judged by God. And because there is a single final judgment, all must have their opportunity for salvation during this lifetime. However, this is not what Jesus said. He said that there will be an appointed time when all those in the grave will be judged for the way they have lived.

Some also assume that because Jesus clearly divides these people into two distinct categories—good and evil—there are only two categories of people who will be resurrected. In the context of John 5:28-29, the English word *judgment* is translated from the Greek word *krisis*, which refers to the condemnation of those who habitually practice evil. However, Jesus was speaking to the Jews who were well versed in God's law, which clearly defines the difference between good and evil.

A DAY OF SALVATION

The prophet Isaiah spoke of a time when each individual will have their opportunity for salvation, and he referred to it as an acceptable time:

"Thus says the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you: . . ." (Isa.49:8 KJV).

The English word *acceptable* is translated from the Hebrew word *rason*, which basically means *pleasure, delight, or favor*. It also has the following nuances in meaning: *favor or good will* of God, *delight or acceptance* of an individual in a religious sense, and *desire, or pleasure* in the specific sense of *will*, as in the *will of God*.

Isaiah was inspired to use the word *rason* because it conveys more than just an appointment of time. It also conveys the tremendous depth of the Sovereign God's concern, desire, and pleasure in granting the opportunity to humans to enter his heavenly family as his sons.

Today is not the only day of salvation. It is a day of salvation for those God the Father is calling during this age. See Isa.49:8; 1.Pet.4:17.

An Acceptable Time

"For he says, 'In an acceptable [Greek: dektos] time I heard you, and in a day of salvation I helped you', Behold now is the acceptable [Greek: euprosdektos] time! 'Behold now is the [a] day of salvation'" (2.Cor.6:2). See also 1.Pet.4:17.

The first English word *acceptable* in 2.Cor.6:2 is translated from the Greek word *dektos*, which means *of ten* or *acceptance*, and the second English word *acceptable* is translated from the Greek word *euprosdektos*, which means *approved* or *favorable*.

When the proper article in front of the word *day* is used in the translation of verse 2, its meaning becomes clear. Paul is saying that it is a day of salvation, not the only day of salvation. If the translators of the King James version of the Bible had used the article *a instead of the* in verse 2, their translation would have been in conformity with what Isaiah recorded.

When Paul quoted Isaiah to the Corinthian Church, he did so in order to remind them that this was their opportunity for salvation. It was the time of salvation for the elect of the church at Corinth and others whom God the Father was calling to salvation at that time. It certainly was not a day of salvation for all people.

THE CALL TO SALVATION

An important point to note is that it is God the Father who determines those he will call to salvation during this age and that he only calls those he wants to use for a specific purpose in this age:

"No man can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draw him" (Jn.6:44,65 KJV).

Jesus Christ does not determine who is to be called to salvation during this age; only God the Father makes this determination:

"For the promise is to you, and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). See also Rom.8:26-30; 1.Cor.1:9,23-28; Eph.1:5-9; 1.Thes.5:23-24; 2.Tim.1:8-9; Heb.9:14-15.

"And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

The scriptural record of the early church clearly shows a selective calling to the opportunity of salvation. It also shows that only those who should be saved are called to salvation. But what about those who were not called in the past, or are not being called at this present time? If this is the only day of salvation as many believe, all of those not called do not have an opportunity for salvation.

THE RESURRECTIONS

In the Book of Revelation, we find the statement, *"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished, this is the first resurrection"* (Rev.20:5 KJV). Logic tells us that if there is a first resurrection, there must be a second. A diligent study of the Bible will reveal that there are a number of resurrections of the dead.

In his infinite wisdom, the Eternal God has designed his plan for mankind very carefully in order to give every person an opportunity to have eternal life. The vast majority of people who have lived throughout history have died without hearing or understanding God's plan.

The comforting truth is that the majority of humanity is neither saved nor lost. Most people simply have not yet been given an opportunity for salvation:

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming" (1.Cor.15:22-23 KJV).

The popular belief of a single resurrection for all humanity has no merit. The Sovereign God's plan for the salvation of humanity is far more complex and fair than commonly believed.

God is fair, loving, merciful, and true to his promises. He is not the cruel and merciless monster that so many preachers depict. Because he is a God of love (1.Jn.4:8), he has designed a plan which will give all humans an opportunity for salvation. There is no doubt that each person will have an opportunity to obey God's code of righteous conduct. The only question is when will each individual be given their opportunity?

CONCLUSIONS

The scriptures concerning the requirements for salvation cannot be reconciled with the facts of history or the rest of the Bible if God the Father and Jesus Christ have been trying to save all of humanity from the time of Adam to this present age. But, because God is not trying to do this before the establishment of his kingdom on earth, the scriptures can be understood to mean what they say.

If The Sovereign God were trying to save mankind now, he would save them! God's plan for the salvation of humanity is right on schedule; no human or evil spirit can stop him from fulfilling his purpose for humanity.

The Sovereign God has not been calling all of humanity to salvation because he knows the vast majority would not do what is required to repent and live according to his law. However, he will, at the proper time and during the right sequence of events, present this opportunity to all who have not been called to salvation.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming" (1.Cor.15:22-23 KJV).

Everyone will someday have the opportunity to fulfill this scripture, but not all at the same time. Every individual who has ever lived and died will have that opportunity.

Surprising as it seems, this is not the only day of salvation for humanity, it is only the day of salvation for those called to salvation in this age.

By B. L. Cocherell

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____ CHAPTER ____
TEN
BAPTISM

There are a host of different beliefs about baptism and its rituals which are taught and practiced by professing Christian denominations, many of which have no biblical bases. In this chapter we will review the biblical record concerning baptism and the following four basic issues:

- Baptism by Water
- Baptism of the Spirit
- Baptism of Infants and Young Children
- Baptism for the dead

REPENTANCE, BAPTISM, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:38 KJV).

The baptismal ceremony with its various steps is the process by which a person makes and ratifies an eternal agreement between themselves, God the Father, and Jesus Christ. Upon completion of the final ritual of the baptismal ceremony, a person becomes a child of God the Father and a brother of Jesus Christ in the holy and divine Family of God.

The baptismal ceremony is not for the purpose of becoming a member of a physical organization; it is for the purpose of becoming a child of God in the Family of God. No earthly organization of humans can offer the immense privilege of sonship in the Family of God; only God the Father can bind a person to himself and place them into his family.

The allegiance one makes at baptism is to God the Father and Jesus Christ, not to anything or anyone else. Baptism is a serious commitment to make. From the moment a person is baptized and receives the holy spirit, a total commitment is made to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The baptized person has committed to an endeavor that will lead to eternal life as a member of the family and government of God (Rev.3:5, 21; 5:10; 20:4-6) or to eternal death if this commitment is not kept (Lk.9:62; Heb.6:4-6; 10:26-27; Rev.20:13-15; 21:8). God the Father and Jesus Christ have committed themselves to help the newly begotten son through the power that sustains the universe and all that exists. See Matt.6:25-34; Jn.14:12-14; Heb.13:5-6.

BAPTISM BY WATER

The Water

The following are symbolic and literal meanings of the baptismal water into which a person is immersed:

- A grave
- The purifying blood of Christ
- The washing away of sin

The water is also a medium through which God the Father performs the purification of the person's spirit and body prior to implanting his spirit within them.

The Ceremony

The water portion of the baptismal ceremony has several different symbolical and literal meanings:

- Death, burial, and resurrection
- Sins forgiven and washed away
- Purification of the body

Death, Burial, and Resurrection

Baptism is not only a symbolic representation of our death, burial, and resurrection to a new life in Christ but also it is a physical and spiritual reality. Notice how Paul reminds the elect at Rome of their baptism and their sinless condition before God when he exhorts them to live a sinless life before God and man.

Romans 6:1-11 KJV

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (vs.1-3).

As a person descends beneath the baptismal waters, their old life symbolically dies and is buried. The baptismal water symbolizes a grave and truly would become a grave if the person being baptized were held under the water for very long:

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism to death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:" (vs.4-5).

When a person is raised out of the water, they are symbolically and literally raised to a new life. After baptism, the repentant person has become sinless and is no longer under the penalty of death for violating God's law. Moreover, their spirit and body have been purged of all sin and defilement:

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over him" (vs.6-9).

Dead to Sin

"For in that he died, he died to sin once: but in that he lives, he lives to God. Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (vs.10-11). See also Rom.7:6; Heb.9:13-14.

As Christ is dead to sin, so are those who have God's Spirit dwelling within them; they are free from the penalty of sin and can look forward to becoming a spirit-being in their heavenly Father's kingdom and family:

"For in baptism you see how your old, evil nature died with him and was buried with him; and then you came up out of death with him into a new life because you trusted the Word of the mighty God who raised Christ from the dead. You were dead in sins, and your sinful desires were not yet cut away. Then he gave you a share in the very life of Christ, for he forgave all your sins, and blotted out the charges proved against you, the list of his commandments which you had not obeyed. He took this list of sins and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross" (Col.2:12-14 LBP). See also Col.3:1-4.

Sins Washed Away

Although baptism is symbolic of a physical death and a resurrection, it is much more. During this ceremony, the person being baptized is washed clean and purged of all sin by the power of God's spirit through the sacrifice of Christ and, at that moment, the baptized person—devoid of sin—is righteous before God.

Prior to the advent of Jesus Christ, washing with water as an act of purification was a part of the sacrificial system. During the gospel age of salvation, it is the water of the baptismal ceremony and the blood of Jesus Christ that picture and perform this purification. It is, in fact, through the sacrificial blood of Jesus that we are forgiven of our sins and washed clean of all defilement that would prevent us from coming before the Father to receive his spirit. The following texts all document the washing away of sin by pure water, the blood of Jesus, and the cleansing power of God's spirit:

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb.10:22 KJV).

"Do you not know that the unjust ones will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be led astray, neither fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, abusers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous ones, drunkards, revilers, or plunderers shall inherit the Kingdom of God. And some of you were these things, but you are washed; but you were sanctified; but you were justified in the nature of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God" (1.Cor.6:9-11 KJV Para.).

"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works in righteousness which we had done, but according to his mercy he has saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the holy spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior" (Tit.3:4-6 KJV Para.).

"And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev.1:5 KJV). See also Rom.5:9; Eph.2:13; Heb.13:12; 1.Jn.1:1-7; 3:5-6; Rev.5:9; 7:13-14.

Purification of the Temple

Under the first agreement with national Israel, the priesthood, the people, and all things that came into close contact with God had to be purified and kept clean, because God will not dwell where there is sin or impurity. See Lev.19:2; 1.Pet.1:15-16; Deut.23:14; 1.Cor.3:17.

Many do not realize that God has not changed and that, under the new agreement with the elect of God and national Israel, God the Father requires all things that come into close contact with him to be free from all sin and impurity. This is why it is vitally important to become sinless and pure through the blood of Christ:

"And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? for you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2.Cor.6:16-18 KJV).

Because God will not allow his spirit to inhabit an impure place, a physical, as well as a spiritual change takes place during the baptismal ceremony. In the baptismal water, God purifies the body through the power of his spirit so that his holy spirit can dwell within a person's physical body. See 1.Tim.5:22; Tit.1:15-16; Heb.10:14-22; 1.Pet.1:22; 1.Jn.3:1-3.

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1.Cor.3:16 NIV).

"Haven't you yet learned that your body is the home of the holy spirit God gave you, and that he lives within you? Your own body does not belong to you. For God has bought you with a great price. So use every part of your body to give glory back to God, because he owns it" (1.Cor.6:19-20 LPB).

Notice that the body of a child of God is a temple of God; it is God's Holy Place where his spirit dwells.

Because God will not allow his spirit to inhabit a sinful person, the first thing one must do in order to receive his spirit is to repent (i.e., stop violating God's laws, precepts, and principles). The second step is to sincerely ask God the Father to forgive one's sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The third step is to be immersed in water for the washing away of sin through the blood of Christ and for the purifying of the physical body that is to become a temple where God will place his spirit.

THE BIBLICAL METHOD OF BAPTISM

The scriptures are very clear as to how to perform the death, burial, and resurrection rituals of the baptismal ceremony.

The Word Baptize

The English word *baptize* is translated from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means *to immerse, to plunge into, to put into, to dip*. It cannot mean *sprinkle* or *pour* because the Greek word, which means *to sprinkle* is *rantidzo*, and the Greek word, which means *to pour* is *cheo*.

Much Water Required

"And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized" (Jn.3:23 KJV).

Here, it is shown that John required a place where there was a lot of water in order for people to be completely submerged when they were baptized.

The Example of Jesus

"Then comes Jesus from Galilee to Jordan to John, to be baptized of him. But John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of you, and come you to me? And Jesus answering said to him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allowed him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him" (Matt.3:13-16 KJV).

Here, Christ comes up out of the water of the Jordan River, which shows that he was immersed (baptizo), not sprinkled or poured upon (rantidzo or cheo). Jesus left us an example of how to be baptized, and at the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus told his followers to immerse others who accepted his Father's offer to follow him.

Not only did Jesus leave us an example of how to be baptized, but also gave clear instructions to his disciples to perform the ceremony by total immersion in water:

"Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing (baptizo) them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit:" (Matt.28:19). See also Mk.16:16.

The Early Church

The Book of Acts is full of accounts of baptisms. One interesting account is when Philip baptized the treasurer of Queen Candace. (Acts 8:27-39). Notice, there was enough water so that both men could get into the water and still have enough room for the eunuch to be totally covered with water:

"And the treasurer of Queen Candace secured his chariot: and Philip and the eunuch went into the water, and Philip baptized [Greek: baptizo] him. And as they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch did not see him anymore: and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:38-39 Para.).

The scriptural and historical records show very clearly how to use water in the baptismal ceremony. The method taught by Christ and his disciples was total immersion. Any other method of baptism is a counterfeit and is not authorized or recognized by God the Father or Jesus Christ. See Matt.3:13-16.

BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

The final step in becoming a son of God is the baptism of the holy spirit. After a person is made sinless and pure through Christ's sacrifice, God the Father can ratify the New Covenant with them by placing his spirit within them.

Upon receiving the holy spirit, the baptized person becomes a son of God, and an eternal agreement between the person, God the Father, and Jesus Christ has been ratified and sealed. See Rom.8:16-19; Jer.31:31-33; Heb.8:8-11.

Notice what John the Baptist says about being baptized with the spirit:

"I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the holy spirit" (Mk.1:8 KJV).

"And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said to me, Upon whom you shall see the spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizes with the holy spirit" (Jn.1:33 KJV). See also Lk.3:16; Acts 11:15-16.

It is interesting that the Greek word *baptizo* was used in translating John's prophecy about spirit-baptism, because the scriptures clearly show that when a person is baptized they are totally immersed in the purifying power of God's spirit, and when God's spirit merges with their spirit, it totally transforms the person into a new creation.

SENDING OF THE SPIRIT

"If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will petition the Father, and he will give you another comforter that he may remain with you forever, the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see him, nor know him. But you know him, for he abides with you, and shall be in you" (Jn.14:15-17 KJV Para.). See Jn.16:13-14.

Paul Said:

"Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom.8:9 KJV). See also Jn.14:21-24.

"For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom.8:14 KJV).

Paul said that only those who have the spirit of God are his sons. Having the holy spirit is so important that one cannot have salvation if they do not have it.

A GIFT FROM GOD THE FATHER

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask?" (Lk.11:13 KJV).

Remember that the apostle Peter said the following:

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:38 Para.).

"And we are his witnesses of these things, and also the holy spirit, whom God gives to those obeying him" (Acts 5:32 KJV Para.). See also Acts 8:9-24; Gal.3:1-2.

The holy spirit is a gift and God the Father wants to give it to those he calls to salvation. Moreover, the apostle Paul clearly records that one cannot have salvation without the spirit of God; therefore, it is important to understand exactly what God's spirit is, what it does, and how to receive it.

What is The Holy Spirit?

One of the most confusing teachings today concerns the definition of who or what the holy spirit is and is not. This confusion surrounds the false teaching that the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit are somehow a composite of two or three personalities that are one being, which has no individual personality. Because of this and other similar teachings, the world's concept of the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit is very confusing.

Below is a list of some of the attributes and functions of the holy spirit:

- Is an advocate and helper
- Is Truth
- Is a guide to truth
- Reveals prophetic events
- Gives discernment
- Is a teacher and a reminder
- Places God's law within the mind
- Is power
- Is a witness of Christ
- Transforms a person into a son of God

It is unfortunate that many English translations of the Bible use the pronoun 'he' when referring to God's spirit. In reality, because God's spirit is a thing and not a personage, it should be referred to as 'it'. The spirit of God and the holy spirit are the same thing, and both God the Father and Jesus Christ have this spirit.

God the Father and Jesus Christ are spirit-beings who inhabit a spirit dimension of existence. It is through God the Father's spirit-power, energy, and force that he animates, creates, controls, and sustains all that exists. It is this spirit that God the Father gives to those whom he has called to salvation.

The Spirit of Adoption

One important function of the holy spirit is to transform a person into a son of God. When this function of the spirit of God is applied to a person, they are transformed into a son of God and made a member of the Family of God. This transformation places a person at the starting point of eternal life. This is the time of spiritual conception from which one can grow toward spiritual maturity and perfection into an immortal spirit-being.

In his letter to the Church at Rome, Paul draws upon the example of the Roman adoption system to illustrate how a person becomes a son of God:

"For as many as are led by the spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear, but you received a spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba! Father! The spirit itself witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God" (Rom.8:14-16 KJV Para.).

Roman adoption was extremely difficult to accomplish, because the Roman father was the absolute controlling power over the family. No matter how old a son became, he was still in absolute possession and under absolute control of his father. This made adoption into another family a very serious and difficult thing to accomplish.

Under Roman law, there were a number of symbolic ceremonies and rituals with many witnesses, that had to take place before any adoption was considered legal and binding. Moreover, once a son was legally adopted into his new family, he lost all rights to his old family and gained the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. By law, his old life was completely wiped away (e.g., all debts were canceled). He was regarded as a completely new and different person who was entering a new life upon which the old life had no meaning or importance. Under Roman law, he was, in fact, the son of his new father.

Paul said the holy spirit is the witness of the adoption into the Family of God, whereby the past life is wiped away—it is gone. After this adoption, all debts are canceled and the new son of God begins a new life in the Family of God, with all the rights of sonship.

HOW TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Receiving the holy spirit is the most important event that can ever happen to any human because it is at this point in time that a person is transformed into a son of God and their body literally becomes a temple of the living God.

The Laying on of Hands

After being immersed in water, having one's sins washed away and one's body purified, the next ritual in the conversion process is the laying on of hands for the receiving of the holy spirit, which is promised by Jesus Christ.

The Converts at Samaria

Shortly after the holy spirit had been given on the Feast of Pentecost, the gospel began to be preached with great zeal. Moreover, after hearing the preaching of Philip, many in Samaria were baptized, but they did not receive the holy spirit:

"Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the holy spirit: (For as yet he [it] was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord

Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the holy spirit" (Acts 8:14-17). See also Acts 9:10-18; 19:1-6.

These people were baptized correctly yet they had not received God's spirit. They had repented and been baptized yet they had not been transformed into sons of God. However, when the apostles laid their hands upon them, they received the holy spirit.

The Converts at Ephesus

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said to them, Have you received the holy spirit since you believed? And they said to him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any holy spirit. And he said to them, to what then were you baptized? And they said, to John's baptism. Then Paul said, John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Jesus Christ. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the holy spirit came on them" (Acts 19:1-6 Para.). See also 2.Tim.1:6-7.

Again, we find people who were sincere in their desire to follow God and had followed the admonition of John the Baptist to repent and be baptized. Although they had the right attitude, they lacked the knowledge of how to obtain salvation through the sacrifice of Christ. After Paul explained salvation through Jesus Christ, these people accepted the call to salvation and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that each could become a son of God. Notice that it is through the laying on of hands that the holy spirit is received.

Is the Laying on of hands necessary?

Some might feel that the laying on of hands is not necessary because of the examples where some people received God's spirit without this ritual (See Matt.3:13-16; Acts 2:1-3). However, while it is true that on special occasions God gave the holy spirit prior to baptism, there is no promise from God that he will ever make these exceptions again.

It is clear that the apostles felt that it was necessary to lay hands on a baptized person so that this person could receive the holy spirit. Therefore, it is obvious that the laying on of hands is a necessary and important part of the baptismal ceremony.

Transformation into a Son of God

Upon receiving the spirit of God, a person is literally transformed from the original human creation into a new and different being. The old person with only the spirit of man ceases to exist, and a new person who has the spirit of God dwelling within them is born. See Matt.3:1-7; 2.Cor.5:17.

Although a child of God still appears to be human, a transformation that makes a person who has received the holy spirit different from other humans has taken place. They have been converted into a son of God with the genetic imprint of the God family, and although they are not yet an immortal spirit-being, they are certainly a child of God and a member of the Father's spiritual family. Moreover, at some time in the future they will shed their bodies of flesh and receive an immortal spirit-body. See 1.Cor.15:51-54; 1.Thes.4:13-17; Rev.20:6.

Those who respond to God's call to salvation, repent, are baptized, and receive his spirit can look forward to tremendous rewards and happiness forever as an immortal being in the Family of God.

Questions About Baptism

- Who has the authority to baptize?
- Must a person be baptized by an ordained minister or can any of the elect of God baptize a repentant believer?

"Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the holy spirit" (Matt.28:19 Para.).

Although the apostles baptized, there are scriptural references that show others who were not ministers were also authorized to baptize. Philip baptized and Paul was baptized by Ananias. See Acts 8:27-38; 9:10-18.

The responsibility of anyone who wants to be baptized is to diligently seek out a man who is truly a follower of Jesus Christ. Moreover, this man must baptize using the method set forth by Jesus Christ.

Because it is impossible for someone to know the spiritual condition of the person who is performing the baptism, salvation does not depend on the man performing the ceremony. However, it does depend on an individual's personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. The importance of baptism lies within the reason it is being performed and not within the person performing the ceremony. Although these physical acts are required, spiritual baptism is the responsibility of God the Father.

The agreement made at the time of baptism is not between the man performing the ceremony and the person being baptized; it is between God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the person being baptized.

Once a person has been baptized in the way that is set forth in scripture and has received God's spirit, that person has fulfilled the requirement of baptism for all time.

If after a person's baptism, the person who performed the ceremony departs from the faith, or the baptized person loses confidence in him, the baptism is still valid.

Speaking in Tongues

Must a person speak in tongues in order to have God's spirit?

God has a reason for everything he does, and so it is with the gift of languages. There are a number of reasons why this gift is given to God's elect. Contrary to popular belief, speaking in tongues does not mean to babble in unintelligible gibberish upon receiving of the holy spirit or at any other time during one's spiritual life.

The ability to speak in foreign languages was given on the Feast of Pentecost and thereafter as a witness that the holy spirit had been given as prophesied to both the Covenant People and to the Gentiles, and that it was given for the purpose of preaching the gospel to people who spoke foreign languages. For a detailed analysis of the gift of languages see Chapter 19, The Tongues Question.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

Why is a person baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit, and what does it mean to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit?

Jesus Christ commanded that it be done this way (Matt.28:19). And because he is the author and finisher of our faith, he has the right to set the rules.

Although Jesus said to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, he does not refer to names in particular, rather he uses an idiomatic expression to show the authority by which baptisms are to be performed. Those who perform this ceremony for the God family are authorized to do so by God the Father and Jesus Christ through the power of their spirit.

How Long Should You Wait Before Baptism?

How soon should a person be baptized after they come to an understanding of the gospel and truly desire to follow God? Is there a given period of time a person must wait between the time they decide to repent and the time of baptism? If so, how long should a person wait?

Some might think there should be a probation period for the repentant believer to reflect on their decision to follow God's direction and somehow show others they are worthy of baptism.

As in all spiritual matters, we must let God's word be our guide. After Peter's inspired sermon on the festival of Pentecost, there were almost 3,000 people baptized:

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41 KJV).

These people heard the gospel of Christ, made a decision to change their lives by following Jesus Christ, and were baptized all in the same day.

During this particular Festival of Pentecost, the vast majority of the people in Jerusalem at that time were observing a commanded festival. Just 50 days before, they had observed the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

These people were aware of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Additionally, most of them had a good understanding of the holy scriptures and were practicing the laws of God; otherwise, they would not have been observing the Festival of Pentecost.

Upon hearing the explanation of the events that had transpired concerning Jesus, they were given a new dimension in understanding by God the Father—they were called to repentance:

"For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39 KJV).

Philip and the Eunuch

The situation between Philip and the eunuch is very similar to the event recorded in Acts, chapter two. Philip explained God's word to the eunuch, the eunuch believed, accepted the call of God, and was baptized immediately. (Acts 8:27-38).

In explaining the circumstances surrounding his own baptism, Paul says that Ananias urged him to be baptized quickly. (Acts 22:12-16). On one occasion a man and his entire household were baptized at night after hearing and believing the gospel. (Acts 16:16-33).

It is apparent that God did not intend for a person he has called to go through some probation period. In every instance where repentant individuals requested baptism, the baptismal ritual was administered immediately or as soon as possible. Therefore, a truly repentant person should be baptized as soon as possible in order to fulfill the scriptural example and receive the gift of the holy spirit.

Unable to be Baptized

What if a person has repented of their sins and wants to be baptized, but for some reason beyond their control they cannot find a man of like faith to baptize them?

When God the Father calls a person to participate in his earthly family of believers, he will also provide an opportunity for that person to be baptized and receive his spirit of power, comfort, and sonship, otherwise he would not have opened that person's mind to his truth and way of truth.

Baptism is the ritual in which a person seals an agreement with God the Father and Jesus Christ. Once this agreement is made between a person and the God family, the baptized individual embarks on a journey which will lead to eternal life or eternal death, depending upon the individual's faithfulness to the agreement.

This is why we are admonished by Jesus Christ to count the costs before we make an agreement to follow his and the Father's way of life.

BAPTISM OF INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

There are a number of professing Christian churches that teach and practice the baptism of infants and very young children as a valid and necessary ritual. The question is, Does this teaching and practice have any biblical validity or have any spiritual benefit to a baptized infant or a very young child?

At the beginning and at the end of his earthly ministry Christ said the following:

"After John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the gospel" (Mk.1:14-15 Para.).

"You go and teach all races. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be damned" (Mk.16: 15-16 Para.).

These statements concerning repentance and belief are extremely important to the subject of infant and childhood baptism; because, in order to repent and believe in the Sovereign Father's good news message, a person must have an understanding of what to repent and what constitutes the good news message in which to believe. Clearly, understanding, repentance, and belief are interdependent and a prerequisite prior to baptism:

In all of the acts of baptism recorded in the New Testament, those who were baptized understood the circumstances surrounding Jesus and what he preached. Moreover, they were able to make their decisions based on the facts presented.

Accountability

The age a person must be before they are spiritually accountable is impossible for humans to establish with certainty, because this is God the Father's decision and it is predicated on belief, understanding, and repentance. All three of these are mental conditions and are prerequisites to conversion and baptism. All three are dependent on each other. For a person to have belief, there must be some understanding of what is to be believed.

Jesus said to repent and believe the gospel. But, repent of what? Be sorry for what? Desire to change what? In order to repent, a person must first understand something about the plan of God.

In order to repent, a person must have an understanding of what to repent (literally, re-think) and know and understand the gospel (good news) of the Kingdom. The people spoken of in Acts 16:31-33 and Acts 8:27-38 understood the circumstances surrounding Jesus and what he preached; therefore, they were able to make their decisions based on the facts presented.

It is evident that a person cannot have the kind of belief, understanding, and repentance necessary for baptism unless he or she is old enough to have developed the mental capacity to make intelligent decisions based on the information presented. It is also evident that infants and young children have not developed the life experience and emotional stability to make and stand behind decisions of the magnitude which must be made before and after baptism. All of the scriptural examples show only adults (including young adults) being baptized. There are no examples of infants or young children being converted.

Did Jesus, the apostles, or the early church teach or practice infant baptism? No they did not. Infant baptism is a tradition of man having no attributable spiritual benefits to an infant. According to the Book of Acts, the holy spirit is only given to those who obey God (Acts 5:32) and in order to obey, a person must know what to obey and have the mental capacity and willingness to obey.

After Christ's death and resurrection he gave the 11 remaining disciples who were later to be known as apostles their commission which says:

"You go and teach all races. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be damned" (Mk.16:15-16 Para.).

Notice that the first part of this command is to teach. If a person is to teach someone, the teacher presupposes that the person is teachable. It is illogical to assume that infants and very young children can be taught the complexities of the Sovereign God's good news message and the issues pertaining to a righteous lifestyle.

The second part of this command concerns belief. Believing is more than just an acknowledgment that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that the message of salvation he brought from his heavenly Father is true. True belief is manifested in one's life through loyalty to God the Father and obedience to the laws and rules of conduct he has set forth for his earthly children to live by. If there is no loyalty and obedience there is no true belief. See Titus 1:15; Rev.21:7-8. Infants and very young children do not have the mental maturity in order to manifest this kind of belief in their life.

Little Children Brought to Jesus

Some who practice the baptism of infants and young children point to Matthew 18:1-4 and 19:13-14 to support their belief that infants and young children are granted salvation by virtue of their youth, therefore they should be baptized. Notice what Jesus actually said:

"At the same time came the disciples to Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child to him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Truly I say to you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.18:1-4 KJV).

Jesus did not say that little children will enter the Kingdom of God nor did he imply they are automatically granted salvation. In this example, Jesus noted two things that are necessary in order to enter the Kingdom of God. First, a person must be converted. Second, a person must become child-like in humility. It is very clear that Jesus was merely using young children as an example of the attitudes and attributes a person should have if they expect to enter the Kingdom of God.

"There were brought little children to him, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, allow the little children, and do not forbid them to come to me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.19:13-14 Para.).

Matthew says that Jesus prayed while he held the children and Mark says he blessed the children (Mk.10:14-16). There is nothing in these accounts that would indicate that Jesus' action had anything to do with baptism or salvation. What seems more likely is that the children were ill and required healing or their parents were asking Jesus to confer some type of blessing on them.

The major problem with the beliefs and teachings that infants and very young children are sinless is that no scriptural conformation can be found to support these beliefs. Regardless of the belief concerning the spiritual status of infants and very young children, the practice of baptizing infants and young children is performed in an attempt to secure salvation for them.

Households Baptized

There are a number of scriptures in the New Testament which speak of adults and their households being baptized (Acts 16:15;16:33; 1.Cor. 1:16). However, just because it is speculated that there were infants and very young children in these households, does not prove that infants and very young children are to be baptized.

You and Your Children

"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38-39 KJV Para.).

Because Peter said that the promise was to you and your children, does not prove that infants and young children are to be baptized. The English word *children* in verse 39 is translated from the Greek word *teknon* and just refers to a person's offspring and not to a specific age group.

Salvation Now or Never?

The underlying reasons and justifications for baptizing infants and very young children is that most of professing Christianity believe the following:

- The only opportunity that a person will have to obtain salvation is during this lifetime.
- There are only two categories of people on earth: the saved who are assured heavenly bliss and the lost who are to be tormented forever in an everlasting hell-fire.

The basic reasoning of those who baptize infants and very young children is that this baptism assures salvation and entry into the kingdom of God. The problem with this belief is that the Bible clearly shows only one method through which a person can be granted salvation.

Despite the tremendous missionary and evangelistic efforts throughout history, most of humanity has never heard of Christ or the good news message of salvation. Even in this age just before Christ returns, many millions and perhaps billions will neither hear nor understand the awesome truth about salvation.

Setting a Minimum Age

Setting a minimum age requirement for conversion is impossible because of the differences in the speed with which each individual grows into mental and emotional maturity. The ability to make decisions concerning conversion depends entirely on a person's maturity level, understanding of the gospel, and a desire to follow God's way of life. See Luke 3:8.

Clearly, infants and young children, do not have the knowledge, understanding, or life experience necessary to make an informed decision regarding their eternal destiny. Therefore, the spiritual condition of infants, and young children is the same as any unconverted person who has never had the opportunity for salvation.

Infants and young children who die before the return of Christ will be resurrected in the resurrection of national Israel (Ezk.37:1-28) or in the resurrection of the rest of the dead (See Rev.20:5). Those who remain alive at his coming will live into the first thousand years of Christ's reign and have their opportunity for salvation at that time.

Logic tells us that the practice of infant baptism is not valid and is an attempt to circumvent the process that God has established in order for a person to be granted salvation. Additionally, all of the scriptural examples of baptism show only young or older adults being baptized. There are no scriptural examples or evidence that support the belief that infants or very young children should be baptized.

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

Proxy baptism is taught and practiced by some people as a means of assuring that individuals who have died without being baptized are granted entry into the Kingdom of God. The basis of this belief and practice is 1.Corinthians 15:29:

"And when all things shall be subdued to him, then shall the Son also himself be subject to him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" (1.Cor.15:28-30 KJV).

The King James Version of the Bible translates verse 29 from the Greek, "*Epei tis poieo baptizo *huper* ho nekros ei nekros egeiro ou holos*" into the English as, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all?"

What Paul told the elect at Corinth would be easily understood if it were not for the Greek word *huper*; a primary preposition; which means *over*, i.e., (with the genitive case) *of place, above, beyond, across, or causal, for the sake of, instead, regarding*; with the accusative case *superior to, more than*. Plus the word *huper* can infer other things, such as, *in defense, favor or with reference to* depending on the context in which it is used.

The word *huper* presents a problem only because of the uncertainty of its exact meaning in verse 29; otherwise, what Paul said is in perfect harmony with other scriptures which detail the only method God has prescribed through which a person can gain salvation.

If indeed the correct translation of *huper* indicates being a proxy for another person. Paul would not only have contradicted many things he taught about sin and its consequence, but he would have also contradicted Christ, other apostles, and many biblical texts which clearly show that a person who sins is totally accountable for their own sin, repentance, and salvation and that a wicked person shall die the second death from which there is no return as a consequence of their violation of God's law (Rev.20:14-15; 21:8).

The whole context of 1. Corinthians, chapter 15, is the resurrection of righteous individuals and specifically speaks to why those who have lived a righteous life will be resurrected to immortality. What Paul says in context is only relevant to righteous individuals and their baptism. Also keep in mind that the apostle Peter said of Paul's writings:

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given to him has written to you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet.3:15-16 KJV).

The apostle Paul being educated in the law as a Pharisee, many times wrote in concepts that were tied to the law with the assumption that those to whom he was writing understood the underlying principles concerning the subject at hand. This is clearly the case concerning Paul's statements in 1. Corinthians, chapter 15, about the resurrection of the righteous which included their change to an immortal spirit-being at the return of Christ.

In verse 12 through 19 Paul explains the futility of living a righteous life if there is no hope of a resurrection from the dead. In verse 32 Paul says in reference to his fighting wild beasts at Ephesus:

"What value was there in my fighting wild beasts at Ephesus it was only for what I gain in this life down here? If we will never live again after we die, then we might as well go and have ourselves a good time: let us eat, drink, and be merry. What's the difference? For tomorrow we die" (1. Cor. 15:32 TLB).

In the context of the resurrection of the righteous, verse 28-30 would be better rendered in the English as follows:

"When all things are brought under his [i.e., the Sovereign God's] control, then shall the Son [i.e., Christ] also be subject to him [the Sovereign God] that put all things under him [Christ], that God [the Sovereign God] may be all in all. Otherwise what is the performance of immersion regarding the dead? If the dead are not resurrected? Then what purpose is there in being baptized regarding the dead? And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?" (1. Cor. 15:28-30 Para.).

Paul is simply explaining that, if there is no resurrection, then why bother being baptized. And if there is no resurrection, why are he and others putting their life in jeopardy by supporting such a belief.

Paul's statement in reference to the baptismal ritual in 1. Corinthians 15:29 is indeed difficult to understand if one is constrained by the popular teaching today that does not consider that today is not the only day of salvation and that there will be a resurrection in which all who have never known the Sovereign Father or his son will have an opportunity for salvation.

Personal Accountability

The following are just a few of the scriptures which leave no doubt that each individual is personally accountable for their violation of God's law:

"I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins" (Jn.8:24 KJV).

"Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19KJV).

"For if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom.8: 13-14 KJV).

"For it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom.14:11-12 KJV).

"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved to fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2.Pet.3:7 KJV).

Regardless of the various opinions as to the exact meaning of the Greek word *huper* in 1.Corinthians 15:29. It cannot mean that a person can become a proxy for the forgiveness of another person's sin or expiate another person's sin through the performance of a ritual on their behalf. Moreover, the following scriptures clearly show that each individual is totally responsible for their own sin and must pay the penalty for their violation of God's law.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

It is only through the method prescribed in the Bible that a person's sin can be forgiven and that method requires that each person fulfill these requirements for themselves.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad" (2.Cor.5:10 KJV).

"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezk.18:4 KJV).

Historically, there is little doubt that proxy baptisms were practiced by some people who professed to be Christians after the demise and disappearance of the early church as a powerful unified entity. However, this fact does not make this practice valid. There are many practices among people who profess to follow the teaching of the Bible that are diametrically opposite to what the Bible teaches.

Just because people believe something is true, does not make it true. Moreover, there is no historical or biblical evidence that a practice of proxy baptisms for the dead existed during the time of Paul or the early church.

The teaching of a proxy baptism is an attempt to usurp the Sovereign God's authority to determine whom he will or will not allow to enter his kingdom.

Proxy baptism also assumes that decisions determining a dead person's eternal destiny can be made by a living person without the dead person's consent. If proxy baptism were true, which it is not, the ritual would usurp an individual's right and free agency and also discharge the individual's responsibility to conform to God's method by which a person can enter his kingdom as a spirit-being; thereby, circumventing the process that God has established in order for a person to be granted salvation.

By B. L. Cocherell

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

— CHAPTER —
ELEVEN

**ARE CHRISTIANS REQUIRED TO PRACTICE
BIBLICAL LAWS, PRECEPTS, AND PRINCIPLES?**

Most individuals who profess to follow the teaching of the Bible do not believe or teach that strict adherence to God's laws, precepts, and principles is necessary in order to please God or to obtain eternal life. But is this true? Can one live one's life as one pleases and still be assured of entry into the Kingdom of God?

Most professing Christians sincerely believe that Christ's sacrifice brought an end to all the laws given to national Israel and that his sacrifice removed any obligation to practice these laws. Is this true? Did the ten commandments and the other laws codified in the Bible cease to exist with the death and resurrection of Christ?

Today, the world is filled with hatred, murder, violence, wars, lying, cheating, and sexual perversion and promiscuity, yet most professing Christians claim that they are not required to diligently practice the laws, precepts, and principles noted in the Bible. Few seem to realize that the problems of the world are a direct result of not practicing these laws.

Numerous books and studies have been written in an attempt to explain, or explain away God's law. And the explanations are as diverse as the people doing the writing. Many people believe that none of God's laws need to be practiced. Some people believe that all of God's laws are binding upon Christians today, while others believe that only some of these laws must be practiced.

Who is right in their belief about God's law? Or does it really matter who is right and who is wrong concerning the practice of God's law? Well, it only matters if there is a Sovereign God who has the power of life and death over humans and requires that we practice his laws in order to gain eternal life.

Clearly the Sovereign God put much thought into the laws he had recorded in the Bible and none were frivolous or unnecessary at the time that he gave them to the tribes of Israel. But which of these laws, if any, must be practiced by true Christians today? Why is there so much confusion about God's law and its application?

Today, most people who profess to follow the God of the Bible know virtually nothing about the hundreds of statutes, judgments, and commandments codified in the Old Testament or the oral law that explains them. This condition exists because most professing Christians have been taught to dismiss these laws as ancient Jewish law which have no relevance to Christians today and even less to do with one's salvation because of the sacrifice of Christ.

Not only do most people who profess to follow Christ know little about the laws he gave to Israel while he was the Creator God; they know virtually nothing about the laws which Jesus and the apostles codified for the elect to practice during the gospel age of salvation.

Just a short review of the first five books of the Bible will clearly reveal that the Creator God was a God of law. The agreement with the twelve tribes of national Israel contains 613 plus statutes, judgments, and commandments, depending on who is doing the counting. Plus the special agreement the Sovereign Father has with his earthly family of ambassadors, kings, and priests contains laws and instructions that govern their relationship with him, their relationship with their brothers and sisters in his holy family and with other people.

When the Creator God began to reveal the agreement he was ready to make with the tribes of Israel, the very first thing he insisted on was an unconditional surrender to his will. The Creator God said:

"If you will obey my voice and keep my agreement, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people, for all the earth is mine: And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation . . ." (Ex.19:5-6 KJV).

This is also the first and most important of all the conditions contained in all of the agreements that God has made with people, concerning the granting of salvation. Without obedience the agreement is void, and none of the benefits contained in the agreement can be accessed or distributed.

Moses Speaks For God

Upon hearing the voice of God from Mount Sinai, the people became so frightened that they asked Moses to speak to God and then tell them what he said. From that time on, God revealed everything to Moses that would be in the agreement with Israel between himself and national Israel.

The only reason God spoke through Moses was that the people were afraid to listen to him directly (Ex.20:19). Also remember that God had already given the people the Ten Commandments before he began to speak through Moses. Therefore, the Ten Commandments are definitely a part of the agreement between the Creator God and national Israel.

Since the demise of the early church, the Sovereign Father's earthly children and many others have wondered why the Creator God required the Israelites to practice many seemingly unnecessary, and unimportant rituals and laws and what some of these physical laws have to do with one's salvation or the building of spiritual character. What benefit do these laws bestow on those who practice them? The answer is that these laws are the basis for being holy and practicing holiness. Moreover, these laws define holy attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics that holy people must have in order to live and maintain a holy lifestyle.

In the Book of Leviticus, chapter 11, the Creator God told Moses and Aaron to speak to the whole nation of Israel and tell them which animals they could and could not eat. In the middle of this instruction, God said the following about why they had to follow these rules:

"You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps, neither shall you make yourselves unclean with them, that you should be defiled thereby. For I am the Lord your God: you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall you defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the Lord that brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev.11:43-45).

The Israelites were to be a holy people because God had separated them from among the peoples of earth in order for them to represent him and his way of life to all other people on earth:

When the Creator God said to the Israelites, "You shall be holy; for I am holy" he did not expect them to become holy as he is holy in his spirit realm of existence (that is, to become a spirit-being and live on earth as a spirit-being).

If the Israelites were to actually become as God, they would have to become totally spirit. Moreover, there were no instructions given to the Israelites concerning how to enter into the spirit realm of existence during their lifetime; therefore, becoming holy for the Israelites had to do with their physical existence and the way they were to conduct their lives in the physical world as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The word *holy* sounds very spiritual and for most people it is an undefinable concept. Most people probably believe that this word means *to be sacred, good, or godly*. Although these definitions may be true, they do not give a detailed explanation of what it means to be holy or what it means to practice a holy lifestyle.

Being holy and practicing holiness are not just abstract thoughts; they are something tangible that can be understood if one is willing to search the scriptures. Otherwise, the instruction *to be holy as God is holy* would not have been given. Being holy as God is holy not only requires one to clearly understand what the condition of being holy is, but also to understand and practice the laws, precepts, and principles that govern being holy.

The Key

The Key to understanding how the Israelites were to be holy in a physical sense is understanding that the law God gave to the Israelites set forth the rules and standards for being holy.

The only concepts and principles in the entire Bible that explain the condition of being holy and the practice of holiness before and after the advent of the Messiah are contained in God's law. Therefore, being holy and being righteous are inexorably bound to God's law, because it is God's law that sets forth the rules and standards for being holy.

God has set the rules and standards by which all that is holy is to be measured. Any deviation from these rules and standards is in opposition to the nature of God who is a holy spirit-being. Therefore, a person who is not in harmony with God's law cannot have an intimate interaction with him.

The law explains what is holy and what is unholy. It explains the attitude, behavior, and character that a holy person must have in order to remain holy. The law gives detailed instructions about how to acquire the divine attributes and behaviors of holiness and how to practice them. The command to be holy as God is holy is always given in the context with a list of God's laws or in an instruction urging compliance with God's law. It is very important to carefully consider the context in which the instruction to be holy as God is holy is always found, because it tells us that it is God's law that instructs us in how to be holy and how to maintain the holy state of existence.

Benefits Of God's Law

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving [i.e., restoring] the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (Psa.19:7-11 NIV).

The Creator's instructions to the Israelites concerning being holy shows us that being holy and being unholy are not compatible states of existence, and that the physical must be transformed into the holy in order to safely interact with God's sacred realm of existence. Moreover, there are tremendous benefits for those who maintain a holy state of existence.

Spiritual Israel

Although those whom the Sovereign Father calls to salvation during the gospel age have a different agreement than ancient Israel had with the Creator God, this agreement still requires the Sovereign Father's earthly children to be holy as he is holy.

Concerning the state of being holy, the apostle Peter wrote:

"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, being sober, perfectly hope in the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not in ignorance fashioning yourselves after your former lusts, but according to the Holy One who has called you also become holy in all conduct. Because it has been written, Be holy; because I am holy" (1.Pet.1:13-16 KJV Para.).

The Sovereign Father's earthly children are his holy nation of kings who are waiting to rule in his kingdom; they are his holy nation of priests who offer him holy sacrifice through his holy temple in which the holy spirit resides; they are also his ambassadors who are to represent him and his way of life to humanity.

Although the Father's earthly children are intrinsically holy because they have his spirit dwelling within them, they are still required to perfect and maintain their holiness through practicing a holy lifestyle:

The apostle Paul and the writer to the Hebrews said the following about practicing a holy lifestyle, Paul said:

"For God has not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness" (1.Thes. 4:7 KJV).

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2.Cor.7:1 KJV).

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb.12:14 KJV).

Clearly, according to the Bible, if a person does not maintain a holy lifestyle they will not be granted eternal and immortal life in God's kingdom. But what are the rules for living a holy lifestyle?

In order to live a holy lifestyle and practice god-like attitudes and behaviors, a person must first know and understand God's law, because it is the law that defines and governs the sacred holy state of existence. It is impossible to imitate god-like behavior unless one knows what it is and how to practice it.

One of the reasons why the scriptures say to study the law and meditate on God's law is in order to know and understand god-like attitudes and behaviors. It is through the study of the law and meditation on it that one comes to understand God and why he is holy, righteous, and superior to all that he has caused to come into existence. Notice what King David said about the law and its importance in one's life:

"O how love I your law! it is my meditation all the day. You through your commandments have made me wiser than my enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep your precepts" (Psa.119:97-100 KJV).

Is it important to practice God's law? It is only important if you want to live forever as a spirit-being in the kingdom of God and not suffer the second death in the Lake of Fire.

On the first festival of Pentecost, after the death and resurrection of Christ, the apostle Peter preached the gospel message to a great assembly of people. After hearing what Peter had to say, these people said to Peter and the apostles that were with him:

"Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:37-38 KJV).

There can be little doubt that some of those whom Peter addressed understood that they had participated in the murder of their Messiah, Savior, and Redeemer just as the prophecies had foretold. In great fear and shame, they ask Peter, *What shall we do?* Notice that the first thing Peter said was that they needed to repent.

After healing a lame man at the temple, Peter said the following to the people who ran over to see what had happened. *"Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19 KJV).*

The question is, Of what did these people need to repent?

What Peter was inspired to preach about repentance was nothing new, because God has always required repentance of sin in order for a person to establish a harmonious relationship with him. What was new, was the process through which one could establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with the Sovereign Father for all eternity.

Many today feel that to repent means to feel sorry for being a sinner and ask God to forgive one's sins. Others feel repentance is just a matter of going through the ritual of baptism. Still, others feel that it is a matter of the heart and they believe that all one must do is give one's heart to the Lord. Whatever that means?

However, to truly repent is far more than just being sorry about the fact that you have violated God's law, feeling remorseful, saying a few words, and participating in a ritual.

True repentance is extremely important, because it is the first step in the process of receiving salvation. If a person is not truly repentant, they will not receive God's spirit and will not be saved.

True repentance requires a total change in one's life, a change that leads away from all aspects of evil, and leads toward that which is of God. True repentance also requires a total commitment and an unconditional surrender to the rule and authority of God.

It is easy to say that one must repent, but the question to be answered is, exactly of what must one repent?

If a person does not first know and understand exactly of what to repent, how can that person accomplish repentance? Obviously they cannot. True repentance involves knowledge and understanding. A person must know of what to repent and understand why they should repent.

Repent of Sin

God inspired the prophet Isaiah to encourage the people of Israel to repent of their sins so that he could bless them: God said through the prophet Isaiah:

"Wash yourselves, purify yourselves, put away the evil of your doings from my sight, stop doing evil. Learn to do good; seek justice; reprove the oppressor; judge the orphan; strive for the widow. Come and let us reason together, says the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing to hear, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isa.1:16-20 Para.).

What is Sin?

In past centuries there has been much debate and confusion as to what sin is and is not. The apostle John defines sin this way:

"Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1.Jn.3:4 KJV).

"All unrighteousness is sin" (1.Jn.5:17 KJV)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1.Jn.1:9 KJV). See also Isa.1:18.

So what is the biblical definition of sin?

Sin is the violation of the physical and spiritual law of God; sin is lawlessness. Sin is any deviation from God's righteous laws, precepts, and principles, which define how a person should live their life and worship God. It is this deviation from the law of God for which a person must repent and ask forgiveness before they will be given God's holy spirit.

A person cannot be a true child of God by the biblical definition unless that person is practicing God's ten commandments and other laws, precepts, and principles.

A person cannot pick and choose which of God's laws they will or will not obey; all that apply to them must be obeyed. The apostle Paul said the following about God's law:

"For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom.2:13 KJV). See also Psa.119:172; 2.Jn.5-6.

The English words *Shall be justified* are translated from the Greek word *dikaioo* which means *to render* (i.e. *show or regard as*) *just or innocent*.

It is those who diligently practice God's laws, precepts, and principles to the best of their ability who are found innocent of sin before God. These are the individuals who will be found worthy to enter into the Kingdom of God at Christ's return.

The Ancient Israelites

In the agreement that God made with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, he promised that if they would keep his law (Deut.5:29-33; 30:15-20), they would be righteous and sinless before him.

Maintaining a right-standing with the Creator God was a major part of the terms and conditions of the agreement that God made with national Israel. God told the Israelites that if they would obey him, he would bless them, but disobedience would bring curses (Deut.28:1-68).

It is very important to understand how those who lived before Christ maintained a good relationship with their Creator because it is this good relationship or right-standing with God the Father that ensures a person salvation under the terms and conditions of their agreement with God the Father.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses said this of righteousness and God's law:

"And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us" (Deut.6: 22-25 KJV).

Here, we see that the commandments are defined as righteousness. If a person could always keep the commandments perfectly without ever violating one of them, he or she would be a righteous individual in God's eyes and would escape the second death.

God's Decree Concerning Sin And Wickedness

The apostle Paul said that the wages of sin is death. The prophet Ezekiel recorded God's decree concerning a wicked person who remains wicked and the wicked person who repents of his wickedness:

"When a righteous one turns from his righteousness and does injustice, and dies in them; he shall die for his injustice which he has done. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness that he has done, and does justice and righteousness, he shall keep his soul alive. Because he considers and turns from all his transgressions that he has done, surely he shall live; he shall not die" (Ezk.18:26-28). See also Ezk.3:18-21; Jer.4:14.

Are Gods laws, principles, and precepts evil? Were they designed to bring harm to individuals?

The answer is absolutely not! Obviously, Gods laws, principles, and precepts are very good! There is nothing bad, evil, or wrong about these laws. They do not cause pain or suffering. Instead, they were designed to benefit mankind.

God created his law for our benefit. It was designed to bring us happiness, joy, and prosperity during our lifetime and beyond. Ancient Israel was not willing to accept these laws as an expression of his love; instead, they rebelled in their hearts, minds, and attitudes and therefore they received curses instead of blessings:

Moses recorded the following word's of God concerning his desire for his people to live in obedience to his laws, precepts, and principles:

"Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!" (Deut.5:29 NIV).

For every effect there is a cause. All of the evil, pain, and suffering in this world is the effect of people breaking God' law.

The apostle Paul wrote the following to the elect at Rome concerning the result of sin and the result of practicing God's laws:

"When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom.6:20-23 NIV).

The apostle Paul leaves no doubt as to what is sin! Sin is the violation of God's law. From the beginning of mankind, the penalty of sin has always been death from which there is no return. But, through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sin is possible. However, just because the Sovereign Father has offered the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, it does not mean that his laws, principles, and precepts have been canceled and no longer need to be practiced.

DID CHRIST ABOLISH GOD'S LAW?

Is it true that because of Christ's sacrifice that a person called to salvation during this gospel age is not required to diligently practice God's law including the Ten Commandments? Is it true that a follower of Christ need not be concerned with these precepts and principles?

Matthew 5:17 is the scripture that is most quoted in order to show that Jesus did away with the Law. However, Jesus himself said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*" (Matt.5:17 NIV).

Some theologians and professing Christian leaders say that, in fulfilling the law, Jesus did away with it. However, does this make any sense? How could Jesus not destroy the law and still destroy it?

In order to prove that this scripture does not say that the law has been done away with, it is important to research the original language of the text. The English word *abolish* in verse 17, is translated from the Greek word *kataluo*, which means *tear down, demolish, do away with, abolish, annul, make invalid*. Jesus said that we were not even to think that he would destroy or abolish the law! Yet, how many millions of professing Christians not only think he did, but actually believe it?

The English word *fulfill* in verse 17, is translated from the Greek word *elaruoo*, which means *to fill to the full, to complete, to make full, to fulfill by doing*. It is impossible to fill something up and empty and destroy it at the same time.

When studying the Bible, it is necessary to read scriptures in context, which helps to give the complete meaning to whatever subject is being studied. Therefore, it is important to research the rest of what Jesus says about the law.

"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smaller letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt.5:18 NIV).

Is heaven and earth still here? Yes! Has everything in God's Word been fulfilled? No! Is the Law of God still in effect? Yes! Jesus says it is!

Jesus continues to explain the laws and commandments of God:

"Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least [Greek: less than nothing] in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.5:19 NIV).

What Did Jesus Fulfill Concerning God's Law?

We know that Jesus Christ came to fulfill (bring to pass) all the prophecies concerning his first coming. The prophecies about his second coming are yet to be fulfilled.

But, what did he mean about fulfilling the law and commandments? The prophecy of Christ coming to fulfill the law is found in the Book of Isaiah:

"The Lord [the Sovereign God] is well pleased for his [Jesus Christ] righteousness sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable" (Isa.42:21).

The English word *magnify* is translated from a Hebrew word which literally means *to make great* or *cause to be great*. This is exactly what Jesus Christ did to fulfill the law to its fullest. He magnified the law by showing how good and beneficial it is.

When the Creator God gave the Sovereign God's laws to the Israelites, which included the Ten Commandments, he expected them to practice these laws. In return, they would be blessed with tremendous physical blessings. See Deut. chap.28.

"Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!" (Deut.5:29 NIV).

Although the Israelites understood the physical basis for keeping the law, they did not comprehend the spiritual intent and meaning of God's laws and commandments.

A part of the Sovereign God's plan for the salvation of humanity called for the Creator God to come in the person of Christ and explain the spiritual intent and meaning of these laws and commandments. This is precisely what he did and it is recorded in Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7, and Luke, chapter 6.

All of the teachings of Jesus Christ concerning the Sovereign God's law bring their full spiritual meaning and intent into focus!

Eternal Life and God's Law

The question of eternal life is on the minds of a lot of people today, just as it was on the minds of people during Jesus' day. A young man asked Jesus about this very subject:

"Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments" (Matt.19:16-17 NIV).

If Jesus had come to abolish the commandments, why did he tell this young man to keep them? However, Jesus told the young man in no uncertain terms that, if he expected to receive eternal life, he must keep the commandments!

Jesus continues his answer to the young man:

"Which ones?" [which commandments] the man inquired. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt.19:18-19 NIV).

Part of these instructions are from the Ten Commandments, and the instruction *"to love your neighbor"* is from the covenant between God and national Israel (Lev.19:18). This shows that eternal life is not gained only through obedience to the Ten Commandments, but one must also love one's neighbor because all of the commandments are based on the principle of love (Matt.22:37-40).

The young man answers, *"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"* (Matt.19:20 NIV). Apparently the young man thought that he would receive eternal life immediately, because he had done these things to the best of his ability; however, *"Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matt.19:21 NIV).*

This whole account shows that we must keep the commandments if we are to receive eternal life. Moreover, we must not only keep the commandments but also totally devote our lives to God and follow Jesus Christ without reservation.

VAIN WORSHIP

Jesus was not the soft-spoken person that most people have imagined. Neither was he an insipid and feeble personality, which is falsely depicted in so many artist's conceptions of Jesus (hanging pictures, and setting up idols of Jesus actually violates the second commandment against idolatry). On the contrary, Jesus was a dynamic, powerful, personality who spoke his heavenly Father's truth without reservation.

Jesus spoke openly to the Pharisees and Scribes (the religious leaders of his day) who were in opposition to his teachings:

"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men. And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" (Mk.7:6-9 NIV).

Jesus emphatically argued that people are hypocrites if they reject God's law and claim to worship him.

Do You Love God? How Do You Know That God Loves You?

Jesus says that if we love him and his God, the Father, we will keep his commandments:

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. . . . Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me" (Jn.14:21, 23-24).

Consider also how Jesus says that we can remain in his love: *"If you obey my commands, you will remain [remain and live in] in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" (Jn.15:10 NIV).*

This shows that we are commanded by Jesus Christ to follow his example. This was understood and taught by the apostle Peter: *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1.Pet.2:21 NIV).*

BE HONEST

An honest review of what Jesus and the apostles taught leaves no doubt that, if we want to follow God's way of life, we must practice God's laws, precepts, and principles as codified in the Bible.

The reason most people, which includes most professing Christians, do not want to practice God's law, is not because these laws are harsh or bad, it is because of the hostility people hold in their minds toward God and his law:

The apostle Paul told the elect at Rome: *"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Rom.8:7-8 NIV).*

God intended for the Israelites to strictly practice the laws, precepts, and principles that he gave them as a part of the terms and conditions of the agreement that he made with them.

The prophets clearly show that when Christ establishes the Sovereign Father's kingdom on earth that all people will be required to practice God's law.

Jesus and the apostles said that if a person expects to live forever, that person must comply with God's law.

In the Book of Revelation, there are four texts that show beyond doubt that at the end of the age the practice of God's law is extremely important to a person's eternal destiny:

"And the dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev.12:17 KJV Para.).

It should be obvious that the only reason that Satan would make war with God's people is because they oppose his evil ways by living righteous lives through practicing God's law.

The following statement tells us that those who are followers of Christ are those who diligently practice the Sovereign God's laws precepts, and principles:

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev.14:12).

The obvious implication of this text is that people who do not keep the commandment are not saints and are not keeping the Faith of Jesus. Notice that those who practice God's law are promised everlasting life:

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev.22:14).

Those who practice God's law will have everlasting life, all others will meet their fate in the Lake of Fire, which is the second death as noted in Revelation, chapter 21, which says:

"He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev.21:7-8).

Should a person who professes to follow the teachings of the Bible practice God's law? The answer from the Bible is that a person cannot be in harmony with God the Father or his son the Savior of mankind, unless a person is practicing all of the Ten Commandments and other biblical laws which define a person's relationship with them.

King Solomon summarized the answer to the question of whether or not to practice God's law, when he said:

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl.12:13-14 NIV).

A Counterfeit

The message of those who teach a counterfeit of God's truth and way of truth is that Christ has released humanity from the obligation to practice any of God's laws, precepts, and principles noted in the Bible and that a person can believe most anything a person wants to believe about God and the Bible and still reap the rewards that are promised in it. Although this deception is taught as freedom, it actually leads to spiritual bondage, because this message encourages people to live in rebellion against the Sovereign Father's truth and way of truth and to practice lawlessness. Lawlessness is sin; sin is bondage. And according to the apostle Paul, The wages of sin is eternal death from which there is no return (Rom.6:23).

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Now that you know the biblical truth about the necessity to practice God's laws, precepts, and principles, what will you do? James, the brother of Jesus Christ, writes:

"Therefore to the one who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin" (Jms.4:17).

Will you choose the way of sin, which leads to eternal death: *"For the wages of sin [the transgression of the law] is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom.6:23). Or will you chose God's way, which leads to eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The choice is yours - choose life!

By B. L. Cocherell

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

— CHAPTER —
TWELVE

THE JEWISH SABBATH

Many professing Christians contend that the weekly Sabbath noted in the Bible is the Jewish Sabbath and holds no importance for the followers of Christ who are not constrained by the laws that the Creator God gave the ancient nation of Israel. But is this true? Is the weekly Sabbath the Jewish Sabbath or is the weekly Sabbath a day that was created for all of mankind to observe? Let's see what the Bible and the historical record have to say about the weekly Sabbath.

The Genesis record shows that the Sabbath was created more than three thousand years before the descendants of Judah were called Jews (See Gen.2:1-3). Three thousand years is nearly half of all human history.

While explaining the nature of the Sabbath to the legalistic Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus Christ who was the Creator God before he became the Messiah (Jn.1:1-26, 1.Cor.8:6; Heb.1:1-3) said the following:

"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk.2:27 KJV).

Because the Sabbath was created by God to benefit all of mankind and since the Jewish people did not exist at creation, it is not correct to call the Sabbath the Jewish Sabbath.

IS SABBATH OBSERVANCE NECESSARY?

For centuries, the majority of theologians and others who profess to believe and teach a biblically based theology, have taught, that those who follow Christ have the option to observe the first day of the week or any day of the week as their Sabbath or not to observe the Sabbath if they so choose. Because, Christ's sacrifice removed the necessity to strictly follow the Laws that the Creator God gave to ancient Israel.

At the opposite end of the Sabbath issue are those who teach that in order to follow the teaching of Christ, one must not only strictly observe the Sabbath, but one must also observe it on the correct day. Because Christ told those he taught to keep the commandments, of which the fourth is the Sabbath commandment.

Does it really matter if you observe the Sabbath or not? And if you observe it, does it matter which day of the week you observe it? The answers to these questions may surprise you, because the answers are not what is popularly believed or taught today.

A Few Facts About The Weekly Sabbath

In the Book of Genesis, we find the following record of the creation of the seventh day of the weekly cycle:

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Gen.2:1-3 KJV).

There are two Hebrew words in verses 2 and 3 that need to be understood, because they hold a vital key to understanding how God the Father and Jesus Christ view the seventh day of the weekly cycle.

The English word *sanctified* is translated from the Hebrew word *quadash*, which is a denominative verb that means *to be hallowed, or holy, to consecrate, to prepare, or to dedicate*. The verb *quadash* connotes the state of something belonging to the sphere of the sacred. Thus, the Sabbath is different from and outside of that which is common or profane.

The English word *blessed* is translated from a Hebrew word that means *to kneel, praise, or salute*. This word's major function seems to confer abundant and effective life (longevity). To bless as used in Genesis 2:2-3 means to imbue with power for success, prosperity, and longevity.

The divine act of sanctifying and blessing the seventh day was not merely a pronouncement; it was the creation of a specific period of time for a divine purpose. This period of time has a divine attribute of holiness as a part of its existence; therefore, it places the Sabbath in a unique relationship with God.

It is apparent that the seventh day of the week is very different from the other six. It is a span of time created and set apart from normal time and it has a spiritual quality within its existence for the benefit of humanity.

The Sabbath Command

Exodus, chapter 20, verses 8 through 11 contains the Sabbath commandment and verse 8 clearly says, *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."*

A point that is lost on most people who study the Sabbath issue is that one cannot keep something holy unless that thing is already in a state of holiness.

Exodus 31:13-17 KJV

"Speak you also to the children of Israel, saying, Truly my sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the Lord that does sanctify you" (v13).

The observance of the Sabbath was to be an identifying mark that would set God's people apart from other nations. The Sabbath was to be observed by the descendants of Israel forever in order for them to be continually aware that it was the Creator God who had set them apart from all other nations.

"You shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy to you: every one that defiles it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever does any work therein, shall be cut off from among his people" (v14).

Not only is it mandatory to observe the Sabbath it is also mandatory to keep it holy before God. Because of the importance of the Sabbath observance, God states twice in verse 14 that anyone who violated it must be put to death:

"Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever does any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (v15).

Only the first six days of the week are work days. The seventh day is holy time that must be devoted to God. Notice again in verse 15 that the violation of the Sabbath requires the death penalty be administered to the violator. See also Num.15:32-36.

"Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant" (v16).

Again, we see that the requirement to observe the Sabbath was not a temporary command; it was to remain as a perpetual covenant relationship and sign between God and his people forever. See Isa.56:1-6; 58:13; 66:22-23.

A Weekly Festival

"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; you shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings" (Lev.23:1-3 KJV).

Leviticus 23 shows that the weekly Sabbath was to be a day of festivity and a day on which the people were to assemble together to worship God. It was a holy convocation and a commanded assembly. God, the Creator of time, made this specific period of time holy and he proclaimed that it is his and is to be used for his divine purpose. See also Num.chps.28; 29; Deut.chp.16.

Calendars Today

As we know, the calendar we use today is not the same used by the ancient Israelites, nor is it the one used in the days of Christ. However, a careful study of historical and existing calendars will reveal that the seven-day weekly cycle has never changed. Moreover, the Jewish people adamantly claim they have not lost track of the weekly Sabbath and have continued to worship God on the correct day from the time of their exodus from Egypt centuries ago to this present time.

Since the Sabbath day was revealed to the nation of Israel through the Creator God's repetitive miracle of providing manna six days a week and withholding it on the Sabbath (See Ex.16:4-36), the consciousness of this holy time has remained with God's people. Moreover, the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week has been a part of most of the world's calendars to this present day. The seven-day weekly cycle has not been broken or lost, it remains as it was from Creation.

It is interesting to note that when the Creator God said that he would rain bread (manna) from heaven to feed the Israelites, he also said that this would be a test to see if they would practice his law or not (Ex.16:4). Some of the Israelites failed the test and went hungry the first Sabbath that the manna did not come, because they did not follow God's instructions to prepare enough manna on the sixth day of the week to eat on the Sabbath.

People who believe and teach that the Sabbath day has been lost over time are sorely mistaken. To claim the Sabbath day has been lost is ludicrous and discounts the written records of the Jewish peoples' ethnic, religious, and secular history, as well as the scientific discoveries of archeology and astronomy concerning the Sabbath. All of these records have abundant evidence that show time has not been lost, and that the day we call Saturday is still the seventh day of the weekly cycle.

Did Jesus Abolished The Sabbath Commandment?

Many theologians believe and teach that Jesus abolished the Sabbath commandment, because the apostle John records that the Jews sought to kill Jesus because they thought he had violated the Sabbath, and also said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

Did Jesus break the Sabbath? Or was this just an accusation of the Jewish religious leaders who hated Jesus because they felt that their power and influence over people was threatened by his teachings?

Many theologians also assume that the fourth commandment was merely the Law of Moses; and ignore the fact that Jesus was the Creator God who spoke the Ten Commandments from the top of Mount Sinai (Jn.1:1-18; Eph.3:8-9; Heb1:1-3) and that Jesus said, "*If you love me, keep my commandments*" (Jn.14:15).

Did Jesus Sin?

A little logic is a useful thing. This is especially true in dealing with what is written in the Bible. God is a logical being and the Bible is a very logical book. While he was a human being, could Jesus have broken the law and still have qualified to be our Savior?

In order to know if Jesus broke the Sabbath, one must first understand the biblical definition of sin.

The apostle John said, "*Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law*" (1.Jn.3:4 KJV). Many scriptures define sin as the violation of God's law, and the observance of the Sabbath is one of these laws. Therefore, if one does not keep the Sabbath holy to God, one is guilty of sin according to the law.

If Jesus broke the law that he was obligated to keep as a man and an Israelite, he sinned! And if he sinned, he died for his own sins, not ours! And if he did not die for our sins, we have no Savior and no hope of salvation.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus was sinless! See 2.Cor.5:20-21; 1.Pet.2:21-24; 1.Jn.3:4-5. Therefore, he kept all the law, which includes the Sabbath. The death of Jesus did not abolish, break, or rescind God's law. Jesus gave his sinless life in place of our sinful lives and paid the penalty that was ours for violating God's law.

Future Observance

There are many prophecies which foretell that the weekly Sabbath will be observed after Christ returns to the earth as conquering King. The following are two such prophecies which show beyond doubt that observance of this day will be required after the government of God is established on earth.

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, says the Lord" (Isa.66:22-23 Para.).

"This says the Lord God; The gate of the inner court that looks toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened. And the prince shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate without, and shall stand by the post of the gate, and the priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold

of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening. Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the Lord in the Sabbaths and in the new moons" (Ezk.46: 1-3 KJV)

Historians

Historians who research the early church find that the apostles and these first followers of Christ practiced the observance of the weekly Sabbath until this church disappeared from the historical record. But why did the early church observe this day, especially when they were persecuted for doing so? Their observance of this day makes no logical sense, unless this practice was required under their agreement with their Heavenly Father.

Is there something of which the apostles and the early Church were not aware that would eliminate the need for the heavenly Father's earthly children to practice the observance of the weekly Sabbath today? What new truth have theologians of today found that would allow one to cast aside the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles in regard to this observance? There are no satisfactory answers to these two questions. An honest search of the Bible will reveal that the observance of the weekly Sabbath has not been canceled or suspended.

Because the observance of this day was required prior to and during the life of Christ, was observed by the early church, and will be required to be observed when the God Family rules the earth, it should be obvious that, in this age anyone who professes to follow the God of the Bible should also be observing the weekly Sabbath.

A short review of the historical record of the early church before its demise and disappearance will show that, wherever one found the followers of Christ, they were found to be following a way of life which was not markedly different from that of the Jews. They took for granted that the good news message Christ and the apostles taught did not conflict with the Creator God's covenant with national Israel. They also understood that the agreement they had with their heavenly Father incorporated many of the laws, precepts, and principles given to national Israel.

The biblical and historical record clearly show that the weekly Sabbath, as well as all of God's commanded observances and holy convocations were observed by the early church, they also continued to be circumcised and practice the dietary laws given to Israel through Moses.

The Disappearance of the Apostolic Church

If the early church practiced much of the same law that was given to Israel at Mount Sinai, why is it, that this law which includes the weekly Sabbath is not taught today by the majority of those who profess to believe and teach biblical concepts and principles? The answer is that the early church and its ministry disappeared from the world scene as a powerful united entity. And along with their demise and disappearance

went most of the knowledge and understanding of the importance of God's law and the weekly Sabbath to God's plan for the salvation of humanity.

SABBATH OR SUNDAY

Father T. Enright, Roman Catholic Priest, Kansas City, Missouri made the following statements concerning the seventh-day Sabbath and Sunday:

"My brethren, look about you upon the various wrangling sects and denominations. Show me one that claims or possesses the power to make laws binding on the conscience. There's but one on the face of the earth - the Catholic Church - that has the power to make laws binding upon the conscience, binding before God, binding under pain of hell fire. Take, for instance, the day we celebrate - Sunday. What right have the Protestant churches to observe that day? None whatever. You say it is to obey the commandment, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' But Sunday is not the Sabbath according to the Bible and the record of time.

"Everyone knows that Sunday is the first day of the week, while Saturday is the seventh day, and the Sabbath, the day consecrated as a day of rest. It is so recognized in all civilized nations. I have repeatedly offered \$1,000 to any one who will furnish any proof from the Bible that Sunday is the day we are bound to keep, and no one has called for the money. If any person in this town will show any scripture for it, I will tomorrow evening publicly acknowledge it and thank him for it. It was the Holy Catholic Church that changed the day of rest from Saturday to Sunday, the first day of the week. And it not only compelled all to keep Sunday, but at the Council of Laodicea, A.D. 364, anathematized those who kept the Sabbath and urged all persons to labor on the seventh day under penalty of anathema.

"Which church does the whole civilized world obey? Protestants call us every horrible name they can think of - antichrist, the scarlet colored beast, Babylon, etc. - and at the same time profess great reverence for the Bible, and yet by their solemn act of keeping Sunday, they acknowledge the power of the Catholic Church.

"The Bible says: 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' But the Catholic Church says, 'No, keep the first day of the week,' and the whole world bows in obedience."- Father T. Enright, Roman Catholic Priest, Kansas City, MO.

No Proof

"Incidentally, there is no proof in scripture that God willed the Sabbath to be changed from Saturday to Sunday, so that those non-Catholics who do not accept the value of tradition as a source of faith, should logically still observe Saturday as the Sabbath." This Is The Faith - Catholic Theology For Laymen, Francis J. Ripley, p.176).

By their own admission, most Sunday-keeping churches know, understand, and freely admit that the first day of the week, which is Sunday has never been God's seventh-day Sabbath. They know the Bible teaches the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

The Biblical Truth

The biblical truth is that Jesus never changed the Sabbath day from the seventh day of the week to the first day, the apostles never changed or eliminated the requirement to worship God on the true Sabbath, and they never taught that it could be observed on just any day of the week.

The historical record of the early church shows that these people practiced the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath; moreover, they believed that Jesus Christ meant exactly what he said when he said that he was the "Lord of the Sabbath day" (Mk.2:27-28).

The seventh-day is still correctly observed in this age by those who are the Father's obedient children and who truly believe what the apostle Paul said when he told the evangelist Timothy:

"And that from a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works" (2.Tim.3:15-17).

The Sabbath day is the day God says is his. He created it, blessed it, sanctified it, and gave the commandment that says, *"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."* This has been and still is the only teaching concerning the Sabbath in the Bible.

The Bible and the historical record clearly shows which day is the holy Sabbath of God. Sunday is not the Sabbath day. It never has been; it is not now, and it never will be the seventh-day Sabbath at any time in the future.

Jesus said to the young man who asked him what he should do in order to have eternal life, *"If you will enter into life, keep the commandments"* (Matt.19:17).

The apostle John said, *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (1.Jn.2:3-4). According to John, If a person does not keep the commandments, of which the Sabbath commandment is the fourth, that person is a liar and without God's truth. Any lie accepted in place of the truth of the Bible is truth exchanged for a lie.

Today, the first day of the week (Sunday) is traditionally observed as the weekly Sabbath. The question for people who are serious about their eternal destiny is, Will God the Father and Jesus Christ honor sincerity alone or will they honor sincerity with obedience?

Jesus said, *"This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me. Because in vain they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men . . . It is evident that you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your own tradition"* (Mk.7:6-7,9 KJV).

It is apparent that the seventh day of the week is very different from the other six. It is a span of time created and set apart from normal time and it has a spiritual quality within its existence for the benefit of humanity.

It is also apparent from the sheer volume of words that God had recorded about this single day that the seventh day of the week has a very special meaning to God the Father and Jesus Christ, and that they intend for all of humanity to eventually observe the seventh day as holy time.

From the beginning of creation, God intended the Sabbath to be one of the foundational aspects of his worship system. This one day of the week is so important that it was set apart from the other days of the weekly cycle by pronouncing a blessing upon it and including it in the ten foundational laws which define attitudes and behaviors that mankind should exhibit toward God and their fellow humans. See Ex.20:8-11; 23:10-12; Deut.5:12-15.

The biblical record clearly shows that a person who professes to believe and practice what is written in the biblical record should be observing the Sabbath day as holy time.

Note:

Listed below are some excellent sources of additional reading for those who are interested in the historical documentation and the progression of events which led to the change from worshiping on the Sabbath to worshiping on Sunday.

- The Two Babylons, by Alexander Hislop.
- A History of Sabbath and Sunday, by John Hiesz.
- Sabbath To Sunday, by Samuele Bacchiocchi.

By B. L. Cocherell

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

— CHAPTER —
THIRTEEN

SUN-DAY WORSHIP
Christian or Pagan Practice?

Is the practice of worshiping on Sunday of biblical origin or is this practice borrowed from pagan religions? Does it really matter to the Sovereign God and his son the Savior of mankind which day a person chooses to worship on?

Most professing Christians believe that their substitution of Sunday (i.e., the first day of the week) in place of the seventh day of the week is acceptable to God, even though the early church diligently observed the seventh day Sabbath in conformity to the fourth commandment and Christ's example and instructions (Matt.19:16-17; Jn.14:15-23).

When the Creator God formed the Israelites into a nation he commanded them not to inquire into or practice the religions of the nations they were displacing:

"Be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, . . ." (Deut.12:30-31 NIV).

"Do not learn the ways of the nations [heathens] . . ." (Jer.10:2 NIV). See also Jer.25:6.

Worshiping on Sunday did not begin with the advent of Christianity; it was a religious day of worship two thousand years before Jesus Christ.

Shortly after the flood of Noah, Nimrod and his mother-wife, Semiramis, founded the great pagan religions. From its beginning at the tower of Babel, sun-worship spread through the entire ancient world.

History tells us that all religions, except the true religion of the God of the Bible, originated in Babylon. It is admitted by most Bible scholars and historians that the gods and goddesses of the ancient civilizations were all a part of the same religious belief system.

However, the names of the various deities were different because of the confusing of the languages at the tower of Babel (Gen.10 & 11). See also "The Two Babylons," by Alexander Hislop. This amazing book historically documents sun-worship as the leading religion in all the ancient civilizations:

"Fire was worshiped as the enlightener and purifier. Now, it was thus at the very beginning; for Nimrod is singled out by the voice of antiquity as commencing the fire-worship" (The Two Babylons, Alexander Hislop, p.226).

All the pagan religions, with their many and varied gods and goddesses, worshiped the sun as their main deity. Moreover, sun-worship is the direct worship of Satan the Devil under the symbolism of worshipping the sun. One of the names of Satan in the Old Testament is Lucifer, which means "light bringer." This was Satan's name before his rebellion against God (Isa.14:12-14).

FIRE-WORSHIP

Fire-worship was only one form of sun-worship that was actually Satan worship.

"The sun, as the great source of light and heat, was worshiped under the name of Baal; . . . the sun, under that name was worshiped in the earliest ages of the world. . ." (ibid. p.226).

"The beginning, then, of sun-worship and of the worship of the host of heaven, was a sin against the light [of God and his Word], a presumptuous, heaven-daring sin" (ibid. p.226).

Ancient Israel not only transgressed the Sabbath of God (profaned and secularized it) when they worshiped Baal they also observed Sunday, because Baal worship is sun-worship and Sun-day is the day when the sun is worshiped.

"Baal" is from the ancient Hebrew language and means "lord." Therefore, Sun-day is Baal's day, or the lord's day. But, that lord is not the Lord God of the Bible, rather, it is the lord Satan. Satan is called the god of this world (2.Cor.4:4), and is worshiped as god by those who have been deceived into believing his lies.

SUN AND SERPENT

"Along with the sun, as the great fire-god, and in due time, identified with him, the serpent was worshiped. 'In mythology of the primitive world,' says Owen, 'the serpent is universally the symbol of the sun.' In Egypt, one of the commonest symbols of the sun, or sun-god, is a disc with a serpent around it.'

"As the sun was the great enlightener of the physical world, so the serpent was held to have been the great enlightener of the spiritual, by giving to mankind the 'knowledge of good and evil' . . . at all events, we have evidence, both Scriptural and profane, for the fact that the worship of the serpent began side by side with the worship of fire and sun" (ibid. p.227).

From the very first chapters of the Bible, Satan is pictured as a serpent. And at the end, he is still pictured as a serpent. In Revelation 12:3, Satan is called "a great red dragon," which could also be translated 'a fiery dragon', 'fiery serpent', or 'serpent of fire.'

This historical background is essential to understanding that Sun-worship was the dominant religion in all the ancient civilizations, and that it spread from "Mother Babylon" into all countries: India, China, Africa, Greece, Rome, Mexico, South America, Egypt, and Europe. Sun-worship was a very prominent religion and Sunday was the main day of worship in the Roman empire by the time of Jesus Christ, just as it was in ancient Babylon:

"In pagan Rome, this fire-worship and serpent-worship were sometimes separate, sometimes conjoined; but both occupied a preeminent place in Roman esteem" (ibid. p.236).

"Now if this worship of the sacred serpent of the Sun, the great fire-god, was so universal in Rome, what symbol could more graphically portray the idolatrous power of pagan Imperial Rome than the 'Great Fiery Serpent?' No doubt it was to set forth this very thing that the Imperial standard itself - the standard of the pagan Emperor of Rome, as Pontifex Maximus - head of the great system of fire-worship, was the serpent elevated on a lofty pole, and so colored as to exhibit it as a recognized symbol of fire-worship" (ibid. p.238).

The Babylonian sun-worship system made the king or emperor the direct representative of the sun god. As such, he was the king-god or god-king. He was the only one in whom the highest level of the spirit of the sun-deity resided. This spirit was not the holy spirit of God, but the spirit of Satan the Devil. This is why the pagan emperors were worshiped as gods. The pure form of this kind of sun-worship was transferred from Babylon to the city of Pergamos in Asia Minor after the death of Belshazzar.

In Revelation 2:12-13, Pergamos is called "Satan's seat," and was the headquarters of the original Babylonian sun-worship until Imperial Rome began to take over the leadership. The relocation of "Satan's Seat" began in the person of Julius Caesar when, as emperor, he had supreme civil and religious rule:

"When Julius Caesar, who had previously been elected Pontifex Maximus, became also, as Emperor, the supreme civil ruler of the Romans, then as head of Roman religion, all the powers and functions of the true legitimate Babylonian Pontiff were supremely vested in him, and he found himself in a position to assert these powers" (ibid. p.241).

In the year 46 B.C., Julius Caesar was made "Praefectus Morum" (supervisor of morals), which means he was made the head of Roman religions. And in the year 44 B.C., he was made dictator for life (See Langer's Encyclopedia of World History).

It is essential to understand that from that time forward, the Emperor of Rome was also the head of the state religions. This did not change until Emperor Justinian, who reigned from 527-565 A.D., submitted to the head of the Roman Catholic Church. From that time forward, the Pope was acknowledged by the Emperor to be Pontifex Maximus over all

religions. The Pope now had supreme authority in religious matters, and the Emperors had control of the political power of the state.

SUN-DAY: THE MAIN ROMAN DAY OF WORSHIP

The names of the days of the Roman week are very revealing in understanding about Sun-day worship before it allegedly became a "Christian" institution. Sun-day, or the day of the Sun, was the main pagan day of worship. Although other pagan gods had days named after them, only "dies solis" (Latin for "day of the sun") was proclaimed to be holy:

"There is no question that the existence of the planetary week with its Sun-day ("dies solis") is crucial for determining any influence of Sun-worship on the [professing] Christian adoption of Sunday observance, inasmuch as the Sun before the existence of a weekly "Sun-day" was venerated every morning" (From Sabbath to Sunday, Samuele Bacchiocchi, 1977. p.237).

The prominence of Sun-worship in the Roman Empire was attributed to two factors. First, it had been a part of the religious worship system of pagan Rome for a very long time. It was widespread, but not the official dominant religion." Next, the Eastern cult of sun-worship, "Sol Invictus (Invincible Sun), through the cult of "Sol Invictus Mithra" and "Sol Elagabal," became the dominant religion of the Empire. Notice the "bal" at the end of the name; this signifies that it incorporated ba(a)l worship.

"Mithraism primarily was a private cult, though it numbered among its adherents magistrates and emperors. Sol Invictus Elagabal, on the other hand, was a popular cult with grandiose temples, and during the rule of the young emperor Elagabalus (A.D. 218-222) was made the official cult of the whole empire" (ibid. p.241).

The "Day of the Sun" also had pre-eminence as a day of worshipping the sun. That the day of the Sun enjoyed pre-eminence already by the middle of the second century is clearly indicated by the famous astrologer Vettius Valens. In his Anthology composed between 154-174 A.D., when explaining how to find the day of the week of any given birth date, he states, "And this is the sequence of the planetary stars in relation to the days of the week: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn" (ibid. p.251).

"The 'dies solis' was evidently the most sacred [day] of the week for the faithful of Mithra and the gods have arranged the days of the week, whose names the Romans have dedicated to certain stars. The first day [of the week] they called the day of the Sun because it is the ruler of all the stars" (ibid. p.250, footnote 53).

The foregoing shows that in pagan Roman times (before, during, and after the coming of Jesus Christ), Sun-day was the most prominent day of worship in the Roman Empire. Most of the Christian religions today wrongly assume that this pagan day of worship is holy.

There were many forces and factors involved in the disintegration and abandonment of God's Sabbath. However, the major factor was that of hate. Even today, the majority of Christendom holds the Sabbath in disdain.

Hate is the opposite of love. God is love and his way is a way of love! Everything in God's Word is based on love: love towards God, as expressed by the first four commandments, and love towards neighbor, as expressed by the last six commandments. Jesus made it absolutely clear that all the law and the prophets hang on the two principles of "loving God" and "loving neighbor" (Matt.22:37-40).

Hatred is a powerful tool that Satan has used to divide and conquer. It is natural for the human mind to hate, and especially to hate God and his way: *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you"* (Jn.15:18 Para.).

The Jewish Problem

Long before Jesus Christ was born, the Jews despised the Gentiles (non-Jews). This attitude of hatred towards the Gentiles was particularly heightened during the days of Antiochus Epiphanes when he determined to convert every Jew into a pagan Greek or exterminate the entire nation in the process.

In order to prevent Jews from being assimilated into other races, which would result in having their religion and nation destroyed, the Jewish religious and civil leaders created a closed Jewish society. This was accomplished by legislating many laws which forbade contact with Gentiles. They could not even keep company with anyone who was not a Jew or a Jewish proselyte. This problem carried over into the early New Testament Church when God began calling Gentiles to salvation (Acts 10 and 11; Galatians 1 and 2). Such extremes bred more and more hatred: Gentile toward Jew and Jew toward Gentile.

At times the Romans were amiable toward and tolerant of the Jewish religion, and they even recognized Judaism as a legitimate religion. The Roman Empire even passed laws that forbade discrimination against Jews and the Jewish religion. But this tolerance did not last very long.

Romans, Jews, And The Sabbath

"Some Romans had not only recognized Judaism as a 'religio licita' but had also shown it great respect and some, even admiration for the religious principles of the Jews. But this admiration came to an end about 66 A.D., when the Romans drastically changed their attitude toward the Jews and began to persecute them, both militarily and fiscally.

"Besides military measures, Rome adopted new political and fiscal policies against the Jews. Under Vespasian (A.D. 69-79), both the Sanhedrin and the office of the High Priest were abolished, and worship at the temple site was forbidden.

"Hadrian (A.D. 117-138) . . . went so far as to prohibit any Jew, under the threat of death, to enter the area of the new city [of Jerusalem]. Moreover, he outlawed the practice of the Jewish religion and particularly the observance of the Sabbath" (From Sabbath to Sunday, Samuele Bacchiocchi. p.171).

The hatred of the Jews by the Romans heightened in intensity and bitterness. Even Roman writers began to openly attack all the practices of the Jews.

"Quintilian (ca. A.D. 35-100) alludes to Moses as the founder of the Jewish superstition which is pernicious to other people. Similarly for Martial (ca. A.D. 40-104), the circumcised Jews and their Sabbath are a synonym of degradation.

"Plutarch (ca. A.D. 46-119) labeled the Jews as a superstitious nation and singled out their Sabbath-keeping (which he regarded as a type of drunkenness) [the same] as one of the many barbarian customs adopted by the Greeks.

"Juvenal, in a satire written about A.D. 125, pitied the corrupting influence of a Judaizing father who taught his son to eschew the uncircumcised and to spend 'each seventh day in idleness, taking no part in the duties of life.'

"Tacitus (ca. A.D. 55-120), whom Jules Isaac labels as 'the most beautiful jewel in the crown of anti-Semitism,' surpassed all his predecessors in bitterness. The Jews according to this historian, descend from lepers expelled from Egypt and abstain from pork in remembrance of their leprosy (a disease which, according to prevailing beliefs, was common among pigs). Their indolence on the Sabbath commemorates the day they left Egypt.

"All their customs, Tacitus writes, 'are perverse and disgusting,' and as a people they are 'singularly prone to lust'" (ibid. p.176).

After Judea was conquered by the Romans, there was always some kind of revolt or sedition taking place that was proclaimed as a means of ridding the Jews of Gentile domination. The result was the general hatred in the Roman world toward the Sabbath, because the Jews, who were constantly revolting held the Sabbath holy.

Into this atmosphere of hatred and vengeance, Christianity was born! The early Christians suffered much because they admittedly worshiped the same God and observed the same Sabbath and annual festival days as the Jews.

Yes, Sunday worship is of pagan origin. The substitution of the first day of the weekly cycle in place of the seventh day of the weekly cycle not only violates the fourth commandment and Christ's instructions, this substitution is in fact an acceptance of the worship of false god's which the Sovereign God and Christ find repugnant:

Does the practice of worshiping on Sunday have a positive or negative effect on that person's relationship with the Sovereign God and his son the Savior of mankind?

The answer is that any violation of God's law has a negative impact on one's relationship with the Sovereign God and the Savior of mankind.

Jesus said the following concerning individuals who hear and obey his instructions and those who hear and disobey:

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete" (Lk.6:46-49 NIV).

A major misconception taught today is that God's laws have been canceled by the sacrifice of Christ. However, a small amount of Bible study will show just the opposite. It will show that one of the major identifying marks of God's people is their obedience to his law.

Clearly, God put much thought into the laws he had recorded in the Bible and none were frivolous or unnecessary at the time that he gave them to the tribes of Israel. But which of these laws, if any, must be practiced by true Christians today? Why is there such confusion about God's law and its application? Jesus issued the following warning while speaking of the day of judgment, on which, a person must give an account of their life before him:

"Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work lawlessness" (Matt.7:21-23 KJV).

If what Jesus said about his rejection of lawless individuals does not make a person who is concerned about their salvation do some serious introspection, take stock of their life, and what they believe, nothing will.

In the day of judgment, many people will come before Christ with the false impression that they have lived a righteous life, only to be told by Christ that their effort was wasted and that he does not know them. But, how is it possible to teach what one sincerely believes is truth in Christ's name, and in Christ's name exert power over evil spirits, and do supernatural works in Christ's name, and still be rejected by Christ?

There are many reasons that a person can be rejected by Christ. However, the primary reason for Christ's rejection of people in the day of judgment is revealed in his statement: "*And then will I profess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work lawlessness.*"

Today, many theologians and professing Christian leaders teach that, in fulfilling the Law, Jesus did away with it. However, this is illogical. How could Christ not destroy the Law and still destroy it? Jesus said the following about God's law:

"Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to destroy them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smaller letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt.5:17-18 KJV Para).

Jesus said that we were not even to think that he would destroy law! Yet, how many millions of professing Christians not only think he did, but actually believe it? Is heaven and earth still here? Yes! Has everything in God's Word been fulfilled? No! Is the Law of God still in effect? Yes! Jesus said it is!

The violation of the fourth commandment and its replacement with Sunday worship by the majority of professing Christianity is lawlessness according to the biblical and historical record and if not repented of will lead to the second death in the Lake of Fire.

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— CHAPTER —
FOURTEEN

ADMISSIONS AND CONFESSIONS ABOUT SUNDAY

From the first century A.D. to the present the vast majority of Christians have observed Sunday as a day of rest and worship. However, it is generally known and freely admitted that the early Christians observed the seventh-day Sabbath.

The prophet Daniel explains the basic reason for the change from Sabbath to Sunday when he recorded the prophecy about a powerful evil spirit attempting to change God's holy times and laws:

"And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time" (Dan.7:25 Para.).

Both secular and ecclesiastical history reveal that the observance of the first day of the week in place of the seventh day, was initiated and enforced by the ancient Roman Empire centuries ago. In the Book of Revelation, we are told there will come a time when a powerful world ruler will institute his god's religion and will attempt to destroy the Sovereign God's people and eliminate the observance of his weekly Sabbath, the Passover, and the annual festivals.

Jesus Christ clearly said: *"If you love me, keep my commandments"* (Jn. 14:15 KJV). And the commandments of God include the observance of the seventh day Sabbath as a day of worship of the Sovereign God.

However, most of today's theologians and religious leaders refuse to keep the commandments of God. Instead, they reject and ridicule the Sabbath, which God created for our good, and they keep Sunday, which was never sanctioned by God as his Sabbath.

By their own admissions, they know and freely admit that men, not God, changed this day of worship from the seventh day to Sunday. By rejecting this basic fundamental teaching of the Bible—*"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."*—they stand condemned before God by their own words.

CATHECHISMUS ROMANUS

The Catechismus Romanus was commanded by the Council of Trent and published by the Vatican Press by order of Pope Pius V in 1566. This catechism for priests reads: "It pleased the church of God, that the religious celebration of the Sabbath day should be transferred to 'the Lord's day.'" *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (Donovan's translation, 1867) Part 3, chap.4, p.345. The same, in slightly different wording, is in the McHugh and Callen translation, 1937 ed. p.402.

The following are excerpts from the *Catechismus Romanus* which contains confessions and admissions from many prestigious religious leaders and scholars in regard to the change from observing the Sabbath to observing Sunday.

A CONTRADICTION

"Question - Henry Tuberville asked the following question about the churches authority to change the Sabbath to Sunday: How prove you that the Church has power to command feasts and holy days?"

"Answer, By the very act of changing the Sabbath into Sunday, which Protestants allow of; and therefore they fondly contradict themselves, by keeping Sunday strictly, and breaking most other feasts commanded by the same Church." - Henry Tuberville, *An Abridgment of the Christian Doctrine* (1833 approbation), p.58. (Same statement in *Manual of Christian Doctrine* [ed., by Daniel Ferris [1916 ed.] p.67).

A SUBSTITUTION

"Question, Keeman asked: Have you any other way of proving that the Church has power to institute festivals of precept?"

"Answer, Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her; she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority." Stephen Keenan, *A Doctrinal Catechism* (3rd ed.), p.174.

"The Catholic Church, . . . by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday." *The Catholic Mirror*, Sept. 23, 1893.

THE SABBATH DAY IS:

1. "Is Saturday the 7th day according to the Bible and the 10 Commandments? I answer yes."
2. "Is Sunday the first day of the week and did the Church change the 7th day, Saturday, for Sunday, the 1st day? I answer yes."
3. "Did Christ change the day? I answer no!"
"Faithfully yours, James Cardinal Gibbons." (Gibbons autograph letter)

SUNDAY INSTEAD OF SATURDAY

1. "Question - Which is the Sabbath day? "Answer - Saturday is the Sabbath day."
2. "Question, Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?"
"Answer, We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday"

Peter Geiermann, *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* (1946 ed.), p.50. Geiermann received the "apostolic blessing" of Pope Pius X in his labors Jan. 25, 1910.

NO AUTHORITY

"You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify." James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (1917 ed.), p.72, 73.

NOWHERE IN THE BIBLE

"Nowhere in the Bible is it stated that worship should be changed from Saturday to Sunday. The fact is that the Church was in existence for several centuries before the Bible was given to the world. The Church made the Bible, the Bible did not make the Church.

"Now the Church . . . instituted, by God's authority, Sunday as the day of worship. This same Church, by the same divine authority, taught the doctrine of Purgatory long before the Bible was made. We have, therefore, the same authority for Purgatory as we have for Sunday." Martin J. Scott, *Things Catholics Are Asked About* (1927 ed.), p.136.

IF THE BIBLE IS CONSULTED

"If we consulted the Bible only, we should still have to keep holy the Sabbath Day, that is Saturday." John Laux, *Course in Religion for Catholic High Schools and Academies*, vol.1, (1936 ed.), p.51. Quoted by permission of Benziger Brothers, Inc., proprietors of the copyright.

WHO CHOSE SUNDAY?

"Some theologians have held that God likewise directly determined Sunday as the day of worship in the New Law, that He Himself has explicitly substituted the Sunday for the Sabbath. But this theory is not entirely abandoned. It is now commonly held that God simply gave His Church the power to set aside whatever day or days she would deem suitable as Holy Days. The Church chose Sunday, the first day of the week, and in the course of time added other days, as holy days." Vincent J. Kelly (Catholic), *Forbidden Sunday and Feast-Day Occupations* (1943 ed.), p.2.

CATHOLICS DO NOT ACCEPT THE BIBLE

"Regarding the change from the observance of the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Sunday, I wish to draw your attention to the facts:

"1) That Protestants, who accept the Bible as the only rule of faith and religion, should by all means go back to the observance of the Sabbath. The fact that they do not, but on the contrary observe the Sunday, stultifies them in the eyes of every thinking man.

"2) We Catholics do not accept the Bible as the only rule of faith. Besides the Bible we have the living Church, the authority of the Church, as a rule to guide us. We say, this Church, instituted by Christ to teach and guide man through life, has the right to change the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament and hence, we accept her change of the Sabbath to Sunday. We frankly say, yes, the Church made this change, made this law, as she made many other laws, for instance, the Friday abstinence, the unmarried priesthood, the laws concerning mixed marriages, the regulation of Catholic marriages and a thousand other laws.

"3) We also say that of all Protestants, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is the only major Protestant denomination that reasons correctly and is consistent with its teaching. It is always somewhat laughable, to see the Protestant churches, in pulpit and legislation, demand the observance of Sunday, of which there is nothing in their Bible." Father Peter R. Kraemer, Catholic Church Extension Society, Chicago, IL.

A \$1,000 REWARD

"My brethren, look about you upon the various wrangling sects and denominations. Show me one that claims or possesses the power to make laws binding on the conscience. There's but one on the face of the earth - the Catholic Church - that has the power to make laws binding upon the conscience, binding before God, binding under pain of hell fire. Take, for instance, the day we celebrate, Sunday. What right have the Protestant churches to observe that day? None whatever. You say it is to obey the commandment, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' But Sunday is not the Sabbath according to the Bible and the record of time.

"Everyone knows that Sunday is the first day of the week, while Saturday is the seventh day, and the Sabbath, the day consecrated as a day of rest. It is so recognized in all civilized nations. I have repeatedly offered \$1,000 to any one who will furnish any proof from the Bible that Sunday is the day we are bound to keep, and no one has called for the money. If any person in this town will show any scripture for it, I will tomorrow evening publicly acknowledge it and thank him for it. It was the Holy Catholic Church that changed the day of rest from Saturday to Sunday, the first day of the week. And it not only compelled all to keep Sunday, but at the Council of Laodicea, A.D. 364, anathematized those who kept the Sabbath and urged all persons to labor on the seventh day under penalty of anathema.

"Which church does the whole civilized world obey? Protestants call us every horrible name they can think of - antichrist, the scarlet colored beast, Babylon, etc., and at the same time profess great reverence for the Bible, and yet by their solemn act of keeping Sunday, they acknowledge the power of the Catholic Church.

"The Bible says: 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' But the Catholic Church says, 'No, keep the first day of the week,' and the whole world bows in obedience." Father T. Enright, Roman Catholic Priest, Kansas City, MO.

NO PROOF

"Incidentally, there is no proof in scripture that God willed the Sabbath to be changed from Saturday to Sunday, so that those non-Catholics who do not accept the value of tradition as a source of faith, should logically still observe Saturday as the Sabbath." This Is The Faith. Catholic Theology For Laymen, Francis J. Ripley, p.176).

Note:

All of the quotations noted above are from Catholic authors or published by Catholic publishing houses.

PROTESTANT CONFESSIONS ABOUT SUNDAY

The excerpts that follow are from noted clergymen, scholars and other eminent writers, who probably kept Sunday as a matter of church custom and bear witness that there is no biblical authority for Sunday observance.

ANGLICAN:

"And where are we told in the Scriptures that we are to keep the first day at all? We are commanded to keep the seventh; but we are nowhere commanded to keep the first day . . . The reasons why we keep the first day of the week holy instead of the seventh is for the same reason that we observe many other things, not because the Bible, but because the church, has enjoined it." Isaac Williams (Anglican), Plain Sermons on the Catechism, vol. 1, p.334, 336.

"The Lord's day was merely of ecclesiastical institution. It was not introduced by virtue of the fourth commandment." Jeremy Taylor (Church of England), Ductor Dubitantium, part 1, book 2, chap.2, rule 6, secs. 51,59 (1850 ed.), vol. 9, p.458, 464.

Mr. Morer, a learned clergyman of the Church of England, says: "The Primitive Christians had a great veneration for the Sabbath, and spent the Day in Devotion and Sermons. And 'tis not to be doubted but they derived this practice from the Apostles themselves." A Discourse in Six Dialogues on the Name, Notion, and Observation of the Lord's Day, p.189.

BAPTIST:

Dr. Edward T. Hiscox (Baptist): "There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but the Sabbath day was not Sunday. It will, however, be readily said, and with some show of triumph, that the Sabbath was transferred from the Seventh to the First day of the week. . . Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New

Testament. Paper read Aug. 20, 1893, at a Baptist ministers' meeting at Saratoga, New York.

"The Lord's Day is not sanctified by any specific command or by any inevitable inference. In all the New Testament there is no hint or suggestion of a legal obligation binding any man, whether saint or sinner, to observe the Day. Its sanctity arises only out of what it means to the true believer." J. J. Taylor (Baptist), The Sabbatic Question, p.72.

CONGREGATIONALIST:

Dr. R. W. Dale (British Congregationalist): "It is quite clear that, however rigidly or devotedly we may spend Sunday, we are not keeping the Sabbath. . . .The Sabbath was founded on a specific, Divine command. We can plead no such command for the obligation to observe Sunday. . . . There is not a single sentence in the New Testament to suggest that we incur any penalty by violating the supposed sanctity of Sunday." The Ten Commandments, p.127-129.

Timothy Dwight's Theology (American Congregationalist) says: "The Christian Sabbath [Sunday] is not in the Scripture, and was not by the primitive church called the Sabbath." Sermon 107 (1818 ed.), vol. 4, p.49.

CHRISTIAN (Disciples of Christ):

Alexander Campbell (founder of Disciples of Christ); "But, say some, it was changed from the seventh to the first day. Where? when? and by whom? No man can tell. No; it never was changed, nor could it be, unless Creation was to be gone through again: for the reason assigned must be changed before the observance, or respect to the reason, can be changed! It is all old wives' fables to talk of the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day. If it be changed, it was that August personage changed it who changes times and laws 'ex officio.' I think his name is Doctor Antichrist." The Christian Baptist, Feb.1, 1824, vol.1, no.7.

"The first day of the week is commonly called the Sabbath. This is a mistake. The Sabbath of the Bible was the day just preceding the first day of the week. The first day of the week is never called the Sabbath anywhere in the entire Scriptures. It is also an error to talk about the change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. There is not in any place in the Bible any intimation of such a change." First Day Observance, p.17, 19.

LUTHERAN:

"We have seen how gradually the impression of the Jewish Sabbath faded from the mind of the Christian Church, and how completely the newer thought underlying the observance of the first day took possession of the church. We have seen that the Christians of the first three centuries never confused one with the other, but for a time celebrated both." The Sunday Problem (1923 ed.), a study book of the United Lutheran Churches, p.36.

"Because it was requisite to appoint a certain day, that the people might know when they ought to come together, it appears that the [Christian] Church did for that purpose appoint the Lord's day." Augsburg Confession, part 2, art. 7, in Philip Schaff's *The Creeds of Christendom* (Scribner's, 4th ed.), vol.3, p.69.

"The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a divine command in this respect; far from them, and from the early apostolic church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday." *The History of the Christian Religion and Church*, Dr. Augustus Neander, p.186.

METHODIST:

Methodist Episcopal Theological Compend, by Amos Binney: "It is true there is no positive command for infant baptism. . . Nor is there any for keeping holy the first day of the week." p.180, 181.

"The Lord's Day is not sanctified by any specific command or by any inevitable inference. In all the New Testament there is no hint or suggestion of a legal obligation binding on any man, whether saint or sinner, to observe the Day." (*The Sabbath Question*, p.72).

On who's authority have Protestants decided to observed Sunday? Plainly on the authority of the very Catholic Church, which they claim to have abandoned!

ADMISSION OF ERROR— REJECTION OF TRUTH

Almost all religious leaders who worship on Sunday and claim to follow the teachings of the Bible know they are going against what is written in that book when they teach and practice Sunday worship.

To refuse to change after admittedly being wrong is willful sin. To the elect of God, the writer to the Hebrews said that there is no more sacrifice for this type of sin, but a fearful looking forward to eternal death (Heb.10:26-29).

Jesus Christ said that we can know a person's spiritual condition by their fruits:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore you shall know them by their fruits" (Matt.7:15-20 Para.).

Jesus also said, *"If you love me, keep my commandments"* (Jn.14:15). And the commandments of God include observing the Sabbath.

The apostle Paul also gave a strong warning concerning the apostasy that was to arise after his death (2.Thes.2:1-8). Moreover, he also indicated that there would be eternal damnation for those who follow the traditions and commandments of men in opposition to the truth of God (2.Thes.2:9-12). The standard of righteousness by which all humanity is to be judged is found in the laws of God that too many people disregard as being harsh and burdensome.

The question everyone will eventually have to answer is whether or not they will follow the truth or a lie.

Note:

Listed below are some excellent sources recommended as additional reading for those who are interested in the historical documentation and the progression of events which led to the change from worshiping on the Sabbath to worshiping on Sunday.

- The Two Babylons, by Alexander Hislop.
- A History of Sabbath and Sunday, by John Hiesz.
- Sabbath To Sunday, by Samuele Bacchiocchi.

By B. L. Cocherell

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— CHAPTER —
FIFTEEN

NON-BIBLICAL OBSERVANCES

Easter, Halloween, Christmas, and the national Thanksgiving holiday in the United States are among the most commonly observed religious and secular observances which many people believe are a part of the Christian God's worship system; however, basic research into the origin of these observances shows these observances to be unacceptable to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Anyone who wishes to worship the true God and his Son correctly should understand the seriousness of celebrating these religious and secular observances, because their origin and practice involved fertility rites, sexual licentiousness, and the worship of false gods as the central focus of their celebration.

The Sovereign God and the Creator God (Jesus Christ) give this instruction to those who are serious about following their way of life and serving them:

"Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you"
(Deut.6:14 NIV).

"Be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, . . ."
(Deut.12:30-31 NIV).

"Do not learn the ways of the nations [heathens] . . ." (Jer.10:2 NIV).

"Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; . . ." (Jer.25:6 NIV).

The following will review some of the more popular religious and secular observances which are observed around the world by professing Christians and will show these non-biblical observances to be in violation of God's law and should not be celebrated by individuals seeking to worship and serve the Sovereign God and his son the Savior of mankind.

THE TRUTH ABOUT EASTER

Each year in the spring, masses of worshipers celebrate Easter. Around the world, Easter Sunrise Worship services are held on the tops of hills and mountains, while priests chant and utter incantations, devotees kneel and bow in worship towards the east as the sun crests the horizon.

The places of worship overflow with people dressed in their new Easter clothes. Bells ring from cathedrals and stirring hymns fill the air to inspire and uplift the worshipers. Ministers and priests announce the resurrection of Jesus Christ with great acclaim and joy. And, after the religious rites are over, the children are treated to an Easter egg hunt.

This is a description of a modern-day celebration of Easter. But, as strange as it may seem, a similar description applies to the Easter celebrations in Babylon over 4,000 years ago, in Asia Minor over 2,500 years ago, and in pagan Rome in 100 A.D..

This section presents several studies into the celebration of Easter, which prove that Easter originated from the worship of false gods, and it should not be observed by anyone who wishes to honor and worship God the Father.

Easter Eggs—Ancient and Modern

"The origin of the Pasch [Easter] eggs is just as clear [as the origin of Easter]. The ancient druids bore an egg, as the sacred emblem of their order. In the Dionysiaca, or mysteries of Bacchus, as celebrated in Athens, one part of the nocturnal ceremony consisted in the consecration of an egg. The Hindu fables celebrate their mundane egg as of a golden color. The people of Japan make their sacred egg to have been brazen. In China, at this hour, dyed or painted eggs are used on sacred festivals, even as in this country [England]. In ancient times eggs were used in the religious rites of the Egyptians and the Greeks, and were hung up for mystic purposes in their temples. From Egypt these sacred eggs can be distinctly traced to the banks of the Euphrates. The classic poets are full of the fable of the mystic egg of the Babylonians.'

"An egg of wondrous size is said to have fallen from heaven into the River Euphrates. The fishes rolled it to the bank, where the doves having settled upon it, and hatched it, out came Venus, who afterwards was called the Syrian Goddess—that is, Astarte. Hence the egg became one of the symbols of Astarte or Easter; and accordingly, in Cyprus, one of the chosen seats of the worship of Venus, or Astarte, the egg of wondrous size was represented on a grand scale." (The Two Babylons, p.108- 109).

The True Origin of Easter

"What means the term Easter itself? It is not a Christian name. It bears its Chaldean [Babylonian] origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte [Isthar], one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven." (The Two Babylons, p.103).

"The religious solemnities of April, as now practiced, are called by the name of Easter—that month, among our Pagan [British] ancestors, having been called Easter month. The festival, of which we read in Church history under the name of Easter, in the third or fourth centuries, was quite a different festival from that now observed in the Romish Church, and at that time was not known by any such name as Easter. It was called Pasch, or the Passover, and though not of Apostolic institu-

tion, was very early observed by many professing Christians; in commemoration of the death and resurrection of Christ" (ibid. p.104).

The Passover was instituted by the Creator God when he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moreover, one of the main reasons for killing the Egyptians' firstborn children and animals was God's judgment against the gods of the Egyptians:

"For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord" (Ex.12:12).

The God who went to those lengths to show his power and might over the gods of the Egyptians would never sanction the worship of him by the means of the pagan religious ceremonies or pagan observances:

"That festival agreed originally with the time of the Jewish Passover, when Christ was crucified. . . that festival [of the Passover and feast of Unleavened Bread] was not idolatrous, and was preceded by no Lent . . .' (The Two Babylons, p.104).

"The forty days' abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshipers of the Babylonian goddess [the queen of heaven]. Such a Lent of forty days, 'in the spring of the year,' is still observed by the Yezidis or Pagan Devil worshipers of Koordistan, who have inherited it from their early masters, the Babylonians" (Ibid., p.104). Moreover, the pagan Mexican Baal sun-worshipers observed a solemn fast like Lent for forty days in honor of the sun beginning three days after the vernal equinox.'

"Such a Lent of forty days was observed in Egypt . . . was held expressly in commemoration of Adonis or Osiris, the great mediatorial god. . . among the Pagans this Lent seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual festival in commemoration of the [supposed] death and resurrection of Tammuz [Babylonian name for Adonis or Osiris], which was celebrated by alternate weeping and rejoicing . . ." (Ibid., p.105).

The Death and Resurrection for Adonis—The Pagan Savior

The pagan counterfeit, which was inspired by Satan, has been substituted for the true Christian Passover and has been accepted as the authentic Christian observance. There are variations in the rituals from country to country, but the death on a Friday and a resurrection on Sunday is a consistent theme.

"We have seen that the rites of Tammuz or Adonis were commonly celebrated . . . In the gardens of Adonis are still sown in spring, as well as in summer, from which we may perhaps infer that Sicily, as well as Syria celebrated of old a vernal festival of the dead and risen god. At the approach of Easter, Sicilian women sow wheat, lentils, and canary seed in plates . . . the plants soon shoot up; the stalks are tied together with red

ribbons, and the plates containing them are placed on the sepulchers which, with the effigies of the dead Christ, are made up in Catholic and Greek churches on Good Friday, just as the gardens of Adonis were placed on the grave for the dead Adonis.'

"The practice is not confined to Sicily . . . The whole custom—the sepulchers, as well as plates of sprouting grain—may be nothing but a continuation, under a different name, [the name of Jesus Christ], of the worship of Adonis" (*The Golden Bough*, p.400).

"During the whole of Good Friday a waxen effigy of the dead Christ is exposed to view in the middle of the Greek churches and is covered with fervent kisses by the thronging crowd, while the whole church rings with melancholy, monotonous dirges. Late in the evening, when it has grown quite dark, this waxen image is carried by the priests into the street on a bier . . .'

"This is followed by the ritual mourning by the whole town as the priests slowly carry the wax image, and a great multitude follows. Thus, the community solemnly buries its Christ as if he had just died. At last the waxen image is again deposited in the church, and the same lugubrious chants echo anew.'

"These lamentations, accompanied by a strict fast, continue till midnight on Saturday. As the clock strikes twelve, the bishop appears and announces the glad tidings that 'Christ is risen,' to which the crowd replies, 'He is risen indeed' . . . in the same hour people plunge from the extremity of the fast into the enjoyment of the Easter lamb and neat wine" (*Ibid.*, p.401).

This mockery of the true death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is an example of how far paganism has penetrated professing Christianity. Only the names were changed, not the religion. Yet, this Babylonian religion with some variations has been embraced as the universal Christianity by the world—Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. They all observe Easter, which was previously a day of worship and celebration in commemoration of false gods.

The Myth and Ritual of Attis

"Another of those gods whose supposed death and resurrection struck such deep roots into the faith and ritual of Western Asia is Attis. He was to Phrygia what Adonis was to Syria . . . Attis was said to have been a fair young shepherd or herdsman beloved by Cybele, the Mother of the Gods, a great Asiatic goddess of fertility, who had her chief home in Phrygia. Some held that Attis was her son. His birth, like that of many other heroes, is said to have been miraculous" (*Ibid.*, p.407).

The worship of the mother and son along with its religious rites were deeply entrenched within ancient historical tradition as the established religion. People everywhere in the civilized world believed this was the way to worship God.

God's Teachings About Pagan Practices

"Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them . . . and that you inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so I will do likewise. You shall not do to the Lord your God: for every abomination to the Lord, which he hates, have they done to their gods . . . What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut.12:30-32).

When the apostle Paul and Barnabas preached to the Gentiles who practiced the religion of Diana, Adonis, Attis, and Jupiter, their message was not acceptance and union of these religions with true Christianity. Theirs was a call for these Gentiles to repent and to renounce these worship systems.

"Sirs, why do you these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach to you that you should turn from these vanities to the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past allowed the nations to walk in their own ways . . . And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men every where to repent!" (Acts 14:15-16; 17:30 KJV Para.).

The biblical record shows that the early church opposed the pagan religious practices and the blending of these pagan practices with the worship of the true God.

"But I say, the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that you should have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. . ." (1.Cor.10:20-21 KJV Para.).

The Sovereign God has never given his followers any authority to accept and assimilate pagan religious practices as a means of worshiping him. Any person, organization, or church which does this, rejects the word of God and teaches doctrines that are contrary to God's truth and way of truth. Therefore, anyone who teaches and preaches such practices is teaching a false savior, and a counterfeit Christianity.

Catholic Admissions and Practices

The Catholic church has always used its power and authority to enforce the acceptance of teachings that are contrary to biblical teachings.

"In like manner the Catholic Church has been accustomed to bring before its followers in a visible form the death and resurrection of the Redeemer . . . When we reflect how often the Church has skillfully contrived to plant the seeds of the new faith on the stock of paganism, we may surmise that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon the similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis . . ." (The Golden Bough, p.401).

"To conciliate the Pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and Pagan festivals amalgamated, and, by a complicated but skillful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter, in general, to get Paganism and Christianity—now far sunk in idolatry—in this as in so many other areas, to shake hands" (The Two Babylons, p.105).

"Taken altogether, the coincidences of the Christian with the heathen festivals are too close and too numerous to be accidental. They mark the compromise which the [Catholic] Church in the hour of its triumph was compelled to make with its vanquished yet still dangerous rivals. The inflexible Protestantism of the primitive missionaries, with their fiery denunciations of heathendom, had been exchanged for the supple policy, the easy tolerance, the comprehensive charity of shrewd ecclesiastics, who clearly perceived that if Christianity was to conquer the world it could do so only by relaxing the too rigid principles of its Founder, by widening a little the narrow gate which leads to salvation" (The Golden Bough, p.419).

Granting the practice of pagan beliefs in direct opposition to the clear commandments of God has always been the policy of the Catholic Church.

"In the history of the Church we find that she often christened pagan festivals, making use of dates and ceremonies, and endowing them with an entirely new and Christian significance" (My Catholic Faith, p.416).

"Today the entire of Christendom celebrates Easter Sunday in memory of the Resurrection. It is the Feast of feasts . . . Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday following the first full moon of spring; the feast is moveable, and can fall between March 22 and April 25" (Ibid., p.81).

This variance in the date of Easter was devised to more closely counterfeit the dates of the true Christian Passover and make it easier to replace the Passover with Easter. Also, the observance of the Passover ceremony, as commanded by Jesus Christ himself, was substituted with the Catholic holy eucharist (communion), which is of pagan derivation, by edict of the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

Attendance and taking of the Mass on Easter Sunday is obligatory for all Catholics. Even though the leaders of the Catholic Church have the Holy Bible and claim to teach it, they insist that "under pain of grievous sin" all are to observe this holiday. However, God Almighty commands Christians not to observe such feasts.

"We are obligated to receive Holy Communion during Easter time each year . . . The Church enforces this command by requiring us under pain of grievous sin to communicate [take communion] at least at Easter time" (My Catholic Faith, p.311).

God's Indictment and Condemnation of Pagan Practices

Throughout the biblical record, God shows that he has never allowed his people to worship him by means of pagan ceremonies and rituals. The biblical record show that the Israelites cut themselves off from God whenever they left his worship system. Today, the same applies for the Father's elect who are to worship him in spirit and truth (Jn.4:23-24). If, as Jesus Christ commands, the elect are worshipping their heavenly Father in spirit and truth and are sanctified by this truth, (Jn.15:16;17:17), why would he accept any form of worship other than the one he has established?

The apostle Peter wrote the following to the elect condemning pagan practices and false prophets:

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty . . . But there were false prophets, also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious way; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2.Pet.1:16; 2:1-2 KJV).

God's truth was buried under an avalanche of propaganda which denounced his worship system as being Jewish. Hence, Jesus' castigation of Judaism—a form of Jewish rejection of God's truth—was cleverly and deceptively used to attack true Christianity. The seventh day Sabbath (on Saturday), the true Christian Passover, and the annual festivals of God were labeled Jewish. The truth is that the Passover, the Sabbath, and the annual festivals were instituted by the Creator God, not the Jews.

It is true that, during the days of Jesus Christ, only the Jews were observing these days; however, it does not mean that the Jews originated these commanded days of worship. They were originally commanded by God in the holy scriptures in Exodus, chapters 12, 16, 20, 23, 32; Leviticus, chapter 23; Numbers 9, 28; Deuteronomy 5, 16. Moreover, they were observed by Jesus Christ and the apostles in the New Testament. The true Festivals of God are found in the Bible, not pagan religions. In fact, history shows that many times the Israelites and Jews were just as paganized with Babylonian religions and forms of worship as professing Christians are today. God's condemnation of these practices is still valid today:

"Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem? The Children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes [the hot cross buns of Easter] for the queen of heaven [the great mother goddess of fertility]; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to spite Me. Do they spite Me?, declares the Lord. Is it not themselves they spite to their own shame? Therefore thus saying the

Lord God, Behold My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and on beast and on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched" (Jer.7:17-20, NASB).

These idolatrous practices are violations of the first and second commandments. The New Testament, also reveals that idolaters will not be in the Kingdom of God (Rev.21:8).

Ezekiel, chapter 8, contains God's indictment and stinging rebuke against idolatry and pagan religions.

"Then said he to me, Son of man, lift up your eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up my eyes the way toward the north, and behold the northward gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry. He said furthermore to me, Son of man, do you see what they are doing? even the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? . . ." (Ezk.8:5-6 Para.).

The same is true today. Even churches that claim to be Christian, have driven God away by their idolatry.

Greater Abominations

"Then he said to me, Son of man, have you seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The Lord sees us not; the Lord has forsaken the earth. He said also to me, Turn you yet again, and you shall see greater abominations that they do. Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz!" (Ezk.8:12-14 KJV Para.).

Tammuz was the Babylonian name for Adonis, who was also called Attis and Osiris. All such heathen practices are considered abominable to God the Father.

Sunrise Worship Condemned

"Then he said to me, Have you seen this, O son of man? turn you yet again, and you shall see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord [symbolic of rejecting God], and their faces toward the east; and they worshiped the sun toward the east" (Ezk.8:15-16 KJV Para.).

This is exactly what people are doing when they participate in Easter sunrise services. They think that they are worshiping and honoring God, but in reality they are dishonoring him.

Because most people have been deceived into observing the pseudo-Christian pagan observances, they believe they are doing what is right. They believe they are serving God and are convinced they are true Christians:

"Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Woe to them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink" (Isa.5:20-22 KJV).

"Come here; I will show you the judgment of the great whore that sits on many waters [peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages]: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have made drunk with the wine of her fornication . . . and I saw a woman sit on a scarlet colored beast, full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. (Rev.17:1-3 KJV).

"And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, and having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written Mystery, Babylon The Great, Mother Of Harlots [all the religions of the world, except the true religion of God] And The Abominations Of The Earth [all the pagan religious observances and practices]" (Rev.17:4-5 KJV).

This is the same evil religious system that God condemns throughout the entire biblical record; it is the same satanic system which has rejected the laws of God.

"Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! Therefore as the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel" (Isa.5:23-24 KJV).

They Put the Golden Bough to Their Nose

"Then he said to me, Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations that they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose" (Ezk.8:17). The branch or golden bough is the symbol of pagan religions.

SUMMARY

The historical record and the word of God clearly show the following things about the practice of Easter:

- Easter celebrations did not begin when Christianity began
- The Bible does not command Easter observance
- Early New Testament Christians did not celebrate Easter
- Easter was celebrated by pagans in their worship of evil spirits thousands of years before Jesus Christ was born
- God condemns the practice of Easter-type worship and calls it an abomination
- True Christians are commanded to observe the Passover, not Easter

Many of the leaders of the Christian world know the truth about the pagan practice of Easter, but they refuse to repent. Those who practice this abomination will suffer the wrath of Almighty God as prophesied in Ezekiel 8 and in the Book of Revelation:

"Therefore will I also deal in fury: my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, yet I will not hear them" (Ezk.8:18 KJV).

THE ORIGIN OF HALLOWEEN

Few have taken the time to ask about the origin of Halloween and whether or not Christians should participate in this holiday. The truth is that Halloween is not Christian and should not be celebrated by true Christians:

"The principal fire-festivals of the Celts . . . May Day and the other on All hallow Even or Hallowe'en, as it is now commonly called, that is, on the thirty-first of October, the day preceding All Saints' or Allhallows Day . . . the feast of all souls. At the beginning of November, which under a thin Christian cloak conceals an ancient pagan festival of the dead . . . in the manner of their celebration and in the superstitions associated with them, and alike, by the antique character impressed upon both, betray a remote and purely pagan origin" (*The Golden Bough*, p.733-34).

"Do not pursue after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? I will do likewise. You shall not do likewise to the Lord your God: for every abomination that the Lord hates, they have done to their gods. They have even burned their sons and daughters, in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be sure to do it: you shall not add to it, or take away from it" (Deut.12: 30-32 Para.).

God of the Dead

The following sources show that Halloween was originally a holiday celebrated in honor of the god of the dead:

"The earliest Hallowe'en celebrations [in the British Isles] were held by the Druids in honor of Samhain, Lord of the dead, whose festival fell on November 1" (Halloween Through Twenty Centuries).

"It was a Druidical belief that on the eve of this festival [Hallowe'en], Saman, Lord of the Dead, called together the wicked spirits . . . (Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, "Halloween").

In the ancient pagan world, it was believed that the souls of good people would rise to heaven and the souls of evil people would be turned over to the lord of the dead. And once a year, the spirits of these dead people would be let out.

"Hallows' is an old word for a saint and Allhallows' Eve (31 October) is the vigil of All Saints (1 November), the Christian festival corresponding to an ancient feast of the dead. In many European countries it is traditionally a time when the spirits of the departed visit their former homes; a fire, food and drink are put ready for them.'

"In Sicily the ghostly visitors bring gifts for the children – toys, sweets and clothes stolen from the shops. The Welch believe that a ghost came and sat on every stile when the clock struck twelve. In some parts of Wales the wandering shades [ghosts] appeared as a white lady, while in north Wales and Scotland people feared the spectral Black Sow" (Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Magic, Venetia Newal, p.16).

"In Wales until the eighteenth century it was customary to burn a candle in church to see what the future held. A bright flame meant a prosperous, happy year. An irregular flame foretold trouble, and if it went out this signified one's own death. Hallowe'en divination probably derives from Samhain . . ." (Ibid, p.16).

Halloween is a purely pagan, occult holiday. The symbols of Halloween tell the true meaning of the day. The Jack-O-lantern is an idol to the Lord of the Dead (Satan). The lighted candle within is a remnant of Halloween Fires to light the way for the returning spirits of the dead. The witch represents the high priestess of Satan worship. The full moon is the Sabat night on which witches perform their ritual worship of the spirits and Satan. The black cat is associated with witchcraft and symbolizes a witches' spirit guide (demon).

The skeleton depicts Ankou, Lord of the Dead who allegedly traveled in the dead of night to claim his victims. Superstitious beliefs portray Ankou as living in an underground palace filled with thousand of candles. Each candle is supposed to represent a human life. He claims his victims by blowing out the candles.

Satan Worship

The truth is that when people observe and commemorate pagan observances, they actually worship Satan who wants to be worshiped as God:

"Taken altogether, the coincidences of the Christian with the heathen festivals are too close and too numerous to be accidental. They mark the compromise which the church [not the Church of God] in the hour of its triumph was compelled to make . . ." (The Golden Bough, Frazer, p. 419).

The Bible shows what God has commanded his people to do and not do. He commands his children not to learn the way of the Heathen (Jer.10:2). Moreover, God allows no way to sanctify a pagan festival as Christian:

"But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God: and I would not that you should have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: you cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of demons" (1.Cor.10:20-21 KJV Para.).

Incredible as it may seem, the Catholic church, which professes to worship Christ, admittedly has accepted pagan practices into their worship system.

"On this day the Church honors the Angels and Saints in heaven. It is a holyday of obligation. This day is a great family feast. It has its origin in the year 610, when [Pope] Boniface IV dedicated the [pagan] Pantheon of Rome to the Blessed Virgin and all the martyrs. It is in special commemoration of the millions of Saints in heaven who have not been officially canonized by the Church, and thus have no special commemoration during the year.'

"This day commemorates all the souls in Purgatory. It is a day for pious remembrance of the dead, and for offering Masses and prayers for them. On this day as on Christmas, priests are allowed to say three Masses, for the souls of the departed, that they may be free from Purgatory.'

"From noon of All Saints' Day till midnight of the next day (All Soul's Day), all those who have confessed and received Holy Communion on either of the two days may gain the 'toties quoties' indulgence: a plenary indulgence applicable to the souls in Purgatory every time they visit a church or public chapel, and pray six 'Our Fathers', six 'Hail Marys', and 'six glorias' for the intention of the Holy Father [the Pope]" (My Catholic Faith, 1963, p.417).

Along with being part of the Catholic system of worship, Halloween is also the high Sabat for witches around the world. And the practices of witchcraft are condemned in the Bible (Deut.18:9-14).

True Christians should have absolutely nothing to do with such evil and abominable satanic practices, customs, and days. Additionally, the children of Christians should not be involved nor participate in these holidays and events.

THE TRUTH ABOUT CHRISTMAS

Most professing Christians believe that Christmas is one of the most important observances. Without question, many people blindly follow its observance. Moreover, they assume that Jesus was actually born on December 25th. Because we look to Christ as our Savior, it is important to take a deeper look into his birth. We often hear people say, "Let's put Christ back into Christmas!" Perhaps we should investigate just how Christ got into Christmas in the first place.

Most Bible scholars agree that Christmas is of pagan origin. In his book *4000 Years of Christmas*, Earl W. Count, Professor of Anthropology at Hamilton College, explains the origin of the Christmas celebration:

"We do not know its beginning . . . we do not really know when the Christ child it venerates was born: or the time and place when Christmas was first celebrated: or exactly how it was that, over the centuries, a bishop saint of Asia Minor, and a pagan god of the Germans merged to become Santa Claus."

"Although the Christmas story centers in the Christ child of Bethlehem, it begins so long before his coming that we find its hero arriving on the scene after more than half of the time of the story has gone by. Christmas began over 4000 years ago, as the festival which renewed the world for another year. The 12 days of Christmas, the bright fires and probably the yule log; the giving of presents; the carnivals with their floats; their merry makings and clowning; the mummers who sing and play from house to house, the feasting; the church processions with their lights and song—all these and more began three centuries before Christ was born. And they celebrated the arrival of a new year" (ibid., p.18).

"For that day [25th of December] was sacred, not only to the pagan Romans but to a religion from Persia which, in those days, was one of Christianity's strongest rivals. This Persian religion was Mithraism, whose followers worshiped the sun, and celebrated its return to strength on that day. The church finally succeeded in taking the merriment, the greenery, the lights, and gifts from Saturn and giving them to the "babe of Bethlehem" (ibid., p.27).

"It happened that the date [December 25th] did fall in the midst of the Saturnalia. Far from being an invention to compete against Roman and Persian paganism, the birthday of Christ ran the danger of being swallowed up in pagan merry making. The [church] fathers tried strenuously to keep Christmas strictly a churchly celebration. It was part of their unremitting struggle to break the grip of the pagan gods upon the people. And as they broke, Romans became Christians . . . but the Saturnalia remained" (ibid., p.28).

"When was Jesus born? No one knows. December 25th is no more than the historical date of his birth than is any other" [p. 50]. "Christmas, as we have seen, is of the Mediterranean . . . for the Mediterranean world already had not merely centuries, but millennia behind it, when Christ was born; and even the religion which he founded had traveled several centuries before it discovered its need of Christmas" (p.86).

"Renewal and rebirth: After 4000 years, the festival that has grown about the birth of the Christ child remains an affirmation that all things can be made anew" (ibid., p.91).

Although no one knows the exact date of Christ's birth, there is evidence that he was not born in the winter: "*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night*" (Lk.2:8). This never could have occurred in the month of December in Palestine. The shepherds usually brought their flocks from the mountainsides and fields and corralled them no later than the middle of October to protect them from the cold, rainy season that followed. The Song of Solomon 2:11 and Ezra.10:9, 13 show that winter was a rainy season during which shepherds could not have remained in open fields at night:

"It was an ancient custom among the Jews of those days to send their sheep to the fields, and deserts about Passover [early spring] and bring them home at commencement of the first rain . . . During the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day, . . . The first rains began early in the month of Marchesvan, which answers to part of our October and November [begins in the middle of October] we find that the sheep were kept out in the open country during the whole summer, and as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that consequently, our Lord was not born on the 25th of December, when no flocks were out in the fields by night. On this very ground, the nativity in December should be given up. The feeding of the flocks by night in the field is a chronological fact" (The Adam Clarke Commentary, Volume 5, p.347).

There is no command in the whole Bible that tells us to observe Christmas. Under the inspired teaching of Paul and Peter and the other apostles, the Christians of the first century never observed Christ's birth date. Christmas came to us through the Roman Catholic Church, which is where it gets its authority as a religious holiday. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, which is published by the Catholic Church: "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church . . . The first evidence of the feast is from Egypt."

We find this truth acknowledged further in the Encyclopedia Britannica: "Christmas [i.e., the Mass of Christ] was not among the earliest festivals of the church."

The Encyclopedia Americana states:

"Christmas, . . . it was, according to many authorities, not celebrated in the first centuries of the Christian church, as the Christian's usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than their birth . . ." (The communion, which is instituted by New Testament authority, is a memorial of the death of Christ.)" . . . A feast was established in memory of this event (Christ's birth) in the fourth century. In the fifth century, the Western church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed."

How did the pagan custom get into the church? Most recognized authorities agree that Christmas was not observed by the early church for the first two or three hundred years and that its origin began in the western segment of the Roman Church in the fourth century A.D.. However, it was not until the fifth century that the Roman Church ordered it to be celebrated as an official Christian festival.

The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia:

"How much the date of the festival depended upon the pagan Brumalia (December 25th) following the Saturnalia (December 17-24), and celebrating the shortest day of the year and the "new sun " . . . cannot be accurately determined. The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence. The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and manner. Christian teachers of the West and Near East protested against the unseemly frivolity, while Christians of Mesopotamia accused their western brethren of idolatry and sun worship for adopting as Christian the pagan festival."

"The observance of December 25 (as a Christian festival) only dates from the fourth century and is due to assimilation with the Mithraic festival of the birth of the sun" (World Popular Encyclopedia, Volume 3).

"Gradually a number of prevailing practices of the [heathen] nations into which Christ came were assimilated and were combined with the religious ceremonies surrounding Christmas. The assimilation of such practices generally represented efforts by Christians to transform or absorb otherwise pagan practices" (The Zonderian Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 1, p.805).

"The pagan symbolism was taken over and, in Christian view, elevated. Jesus became the "sun of justice" and the "sun of righteousness" (Celebrations: The Complete Book of American Holidays, Myers, p.310).

"Our annual Christian festival (Christmas) is nothing but a continuation under a different name of this old solar festivity (Saturnalia)" (The New Golden Bough, Frazer and Foster, p.653).

"Christmas was generally celebrated in the West only after the triumph of Constantine when the time of Christ's birth was reckoned with the Day of the Unconquered Sun on 25 December" (From Christ to Constantine, Smith, p.150-151).

"The assimilation of Christ to the sun god, as sun of righteousness, was widespread in the fourth century and was furthered by Constantine's legislation on Sunday, which is not unrelated to the fact that the sun god was the titular divinity of his family" (A History of the Christian Church: Revised, Walker, Section 13, p.154-155).

The Myth of Nimrod

Nimrod, the grandson of Ham and the great grandson of Noah, was the real founder of the Babylonian system of worship and government that continues to thrive throughout the world.

Ancient writings speak of Nimrod as the one who started a great, organized world apostasy against God, which still dominates the world. It is said that he was so wicked that he married his own mother, Semiramis. After Nimrod was killed, his mother-wife propagated the doctrine of the survival of Nimrod as a spirit-being. She claimed that a full grown evergreen tree sprang up overnight from a dead tree stump which symbolized the resurrection of Nimrod. On each anniversary of his birth (supposedly December 25th), she claimed Nimrod would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts upon it.

Mother and Child Theme

Through her scheming and planning, Semiramis became the Babylonian Queen of Heaven, and Nimrod, under many other names, became the Divine Son of Heaven. Through the generations, in this idolatrous worship, Nimrod also became the false messiah, son of Baal, who was the sun-god. In this false Babylonian religious system, the mother and child (Semiramis and the reborn Nimrod) became chief objects of worship. This worship of mother and child spread throughout the world. Only the names varied because of differing languages. In Asia they were known as Cybele and Diorus. In Rome they were Fortuna and Jupiter. In Egypt their names were Isis and Osiris. Long before the birth of Jesus Christ, the counterpart of the Madonna can be found throughout China, Tibet, and Japan.

The following are explanations of the origins of popular practices and symbols of the Christmas celebration.

Yule Logs

The yule log is in reality the *sun log*. Yule means wheel, which is applied as the pagan symbol of the sun. Today, professing Christians speak of the sacred yuletide season. There is nothing sacred about it! The symbols come from the worship of false gods.

The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree was equally common in pagan Rome and pagan Egypt. In Egypt that tree was the palm tree and in Rome it was the fir tree. The palm tree denotes the pagan messiah, Baal-Tamar (Jdg.20:33), and the fir tree denotes the same pagan messiah under the name Baal-Berith. The mother of Adonis, the sun god and great divine mediator, was said to have been mystically changed into a tree. And when she was in that state, she brought forth her divine son.

Mistletoe

"That mistletoe bough in the Druidic superstition, which was derived from Babylon, was a representative of the Messiah, "the man of the branch." The mistletoe was regarded as a divine branch, a branch that came from heaven, and grew upon a tree that sprang out of the earth. Thus by engrafting the celestial branch into the earthly tree, heaven and earth, which sin had severed, were joined together. Thus the mistletoe bough became the token of divine reconciliation to man, the kiss being the well known token of pardon and reconciliation" (The Two Babylons, Hislop, p.99).

The Encyclopedia Americana says:

"The holly, the mistletoe and the yule log. . . are relics of pre-Christian times."

Gifts

Many exchange gifts because the three wise men presented gifts to the Christ child. Did you know the Bible nowhere states there were three wise men? Did you know those wise men never appeared at the manger on Christ's birth night; they actually arrived many months later? They didn't appear at the manger, they appeared at Christ's house (Matt.2:11).

Although most people believe that the custom of giving gifts at Christmas is associated with the men that brought gifts to the child Jesus, the New Standard Encyclopedia, Christmas, says:

"In reality, at least so far as the English speaking people are concerned, it [gift giving at Christmas] is derived from an old heathen custom."

"The wise men gave their gifts to Christ, but did not exchange gifts with each other. The gifts presented to Christ were to a king, because of his royalty, and not because of his birthday. He was a king, and the people of the East never approached the presence of a king without a present in their hands" (Adam Clarke Commentary, Volume 5, Matt.2:11, p.34).

The Christmas Wreath

"The use of Christmas wreaths is believed by authorities to be traceable to the pagan customs of decorating buildings and places of worship at the feast which took place at the same time as Christmas. The Christmas tree is from Egypt and its origin dates from a period long anterior to the Christmas era" (Answers to Questions, Frederick Gentlemen Haskins).

Christmas and many other observances have come directly from paganism, but the annual observances and festivals of Leviticus 23 have come from God and should be observed today by God's earthly children.

Santa Claus

The name Santa Claus is actually the corruption of the name St. Nicholas, a Roman Catholic bishop who lived in the fifth century.

"St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra. . . a saint honored by the Greeks and Latins on the 6th of December. . . a legend of his surreptitious bestowal of dowries on the three daughters of an impoverished citizen. . . is said to have originated the old custom of giving presents in secret on the eve of St. Nicholas (December 6) subsequently of Christmas and Santa Claus" (Encyclopedia Britanica, 11th Edition, Volume 19, p.648-649).

Kris Kringle

"From the German people were to come those most universal of Christmas customs: the Christmas tree, and the portly beneficent Kris Kringle, known as Santa Claus.

"Gradually the Presbyterians, Quakers and Puritans accepted such customs as the Christmas tree, the giving of small gifts and the Christmas feast. But they spoke violently against the corruption of the Christkindl, (the Christ Child) into Kris Kringle. After Kris Kringle was fully assimilated, there was much concern among all religious groups about the non-religious trend of the holiday" (Christmas Day: The Complete Book of American Holidays, Myers, p.314-316).

WHAT ABOUT THANKSGIVING DAY?

Although many people believe the national Thanksgiving holiday is unique to United States of America, it is not. A small amount of research into ancient history reveals that many nations and religions have dedicated special days to show their gratitude to gods whom they believed benefitted them individually and nationally.

Historically, a thanksgiving feast was first celebrated in what would become the United States by the Pilgrims in 1621. During this festival, they gave their gratitude to the god they believed had delivered them from a harsh winter and blessed them with a bountiful harvest. Because of the religious beliefs and practices of the Pilgrims, it is doubtful they knew the Sovereign God whom Christ came to reveal or understood how the true God required his chosen people to serve and worship him.

Most people in the United States do not realize that they are allowed to enjoy such tremendous blessings only because of the promises made to the patriarch Abraham by the Creator God. The Creator God promised to bless Abraham's decedents, which would eventually be known as Israelites, of which the United States is prophetically Manasseh, the half-tribe of the patriarch Joseph. See Gen.48:1-22.

There are dozens of scriptures in the biblical record showing that the Sovereign Father's chosen people should be eternally thankful to him and continually express their gratitude to him for the blessings he has bestowed on them. These scriptures show that gratitude should be shown to the Father through praising, thanking, and honoring him with our lives.

The question you should ask yourself is not whether or not you should be thankful to the Sovereign God and express your gratitude to him, because it is obvious you should. But, ask and answer the two following questions regarding the observance of Thanksgiving Day in order to be assured that, if you do decide to observe this national holiday, your observance does not violate God's law of worship.

1. Is it permissible to observe a national day of giving gratitude to the true God?
2. Is it prudent to observe a day of giving gratitude to the true God with unbelievers?

Your answers to both of these questions have a direct impact on your relationship with your heavenly Father and your Savior.

Added Festivals

There are several festivals which the Jewish people established in addition to the annual festivals and holy convocations which the Creator God commanded to be observed in perpetuity (Lev.23:1-44). The Feast of Purim was established to commemorate the miraculous deliverance of the Jews in the ancient Persian Empire from a plot to destroy them. The winter Feast of Dedication mentioned in John 10:22 was established in commemoration of the re-consecration of the Temple in Jerusalem. Some believe that, because Jesus was in Jerusalem during this festival, he was observing it, but John only records that he was there during the festival; he makes no mention of Jesus observing this festival.

Although no direct condemnation of the establishment and celebration of the additional festivals by the Jewish people can be found in the biblical record, the following instructions not to add to or take away from what the Creator commanded clearly show that these added festivals were not sanctioned by him and violated his instructions:

"Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you" (Deut.4:1-2 NIV).

"The Lord your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same. You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it" (Deut.12:29-32 NIV).

Because the Israelites and Jews frequently perverted the commanded observances, the Creator God often described these festivals and their added festivals as being theirs, not his, as noted by the prophecies recorded by Amos and Malachi:

"And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day" (Amos 8:10 KJV).

"Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it" (Mal.2:3 KJV).

Commanded Festivals

There are eight commanded festivals and sacred assemblies listed in Leviticus, chapter 23, which are to be observed by those who worship and serve the Sovereign God. Through these eight festivals, the Sovereign God reveals his plan, purpose, goal, and rewards for those who successfully obtain salvation and enter his family and kingdom. Each of these festivals have their own unique, separate, and distinct meaning within God's plan for the salvation of humanity:

"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, concerning the feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. . . . These are the feasts of the Lord, even holy convocations, which you shall proclaim in their seasons. . . . And Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord" (Lev.23:1-2, 4, 44 KJV).

These eight festivals include the weekly Sabbath and are the only ones sanctioned by God to be regularly observed by his chosen people.

The Fall Harvest Festival

One of the festivals which those who truly worship and serve the Sovereign God and Christ are commanded to observe is the fall harvest festival of Shelters/Ingathering, which pictures the harvest of people into the family and kingdom of God as spirit-beings. Conversely, the national observance of Thanksgiving Day is not sanctioned by God, has no scriptural foundation, and seems to be a counterfeit substitution of God's fall harvest festival.

False Religion

According to the Bible, there are only two religions on earth—the Sovereign God's and Satan's. If you practice a religion, you are either worshipping the Sovereign God through his worship system or you are worshipping Satan or evil spirits through a worship system which is in opposition to the Sovereign God's worship system—that which is not of God is of Satan. See Rev.12:9.

Satan is deceiving the whole world into following his various religious systems and festivals in order to deceive people into thinking they are worshipping the true God. The existence of deceptive worship systems is a fact and many people fall prey to these counterfeits, thinking they are worshipping the God of the Bible.

The Issue and Problem

The primary issue regarding participation in Thanksgiving festivities is not whether or not we should show our gratitude to the Sovereign God; the issue is whether or not we should participate in a national holiday with individuals who do not know the true God and are giving gratitude to a false god.

For most people, the Thanksgiving holiday is just a day off from work and has no religious meaning, but for some it is a day to celebrate with family and friends and offer a traditional prayer of thanksgiving to their god. Participation in this holiday which is a day specifically set aside for giving gratitude to a god for blessings received seems harmless on the surface. However, it must be remembered that this holiday is not sanctioned by the God of the Bible and is a part of this world's religious systems, which are in opposition to the Sovereign God.

Some might think their participation in a Thanksgiving holiday meal with false Christians, people of other religions, or non-religious individuals is acceptable to God the Father, but it is not. It is in fact a violation of his law of worship, as noted in many scriptures that warn the elect to avoid participation in false religions and to remain totally separate from them.

Those who pray to a false god violate the first and second commandments and violate God's instructions not to attempt to worship him in the same way as those of false religions worship their gods:

"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make yourself any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy to thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex.20:3-6 KJV Para.).

"The Lord your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same. You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it" (Deut.12:29-32 NIV).

Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians warning them not to have a close association with false religions devised by evil spirits. Although his warning was in the context of eating things sacrificed to idols, this warning easily applies in principle to participation in Thanksgiving Day festivities:

"What say I then? That the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that you should have fellowship with devils. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils: you cannot be partakers of the Lords table, and of the table of devils" (1.Cor.10:19-21 KJV).

The English word *fellowship* in verse 20 is translated from the Greek word *koinonos*, which does not mean fellowship; it means to have a close association. A large part of the question being discussed in chapter 10 pertains to how close an association the Father's elect can have with false religions and their practices and still maintain a righteous attitude and a good relationship with their heavenly Father.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he explains that the elect must not interact with false religions or their belief systems in order to remain in harmony with their heavenly Father and be accepted by him:

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be

my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2.Cor.6:14-18 NIV).

A person who is one of the elect cannot become entangled in any aspect of false religion and expect to maintain a harmonious relationship with their heavenly Father and Christ.

The Father's elect are warned in the Book of Revelation to come out of false religion so they will not be punished for violating God's law:

"And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues" (Rev.18: 1-4 KJV).

Because the elect are warned to avoid participation in other religions, the following are some questions a person who is serious about their salvation should ask and answer about participation in Thanksgiving Day festivities:

- Can I participate in Thanksgiving Day festivities with people who are not of the body of Christ without giving the impression that we both worship and serve the same god?
- Can I bow my head at a meal and say amen (i.e., so be it) to a prayer given by another person to their false god without giving the impression that their god is also my God?
- Does it really matter to God the Father if I worship him with false Christians or people of other religions?

Thanksgiving day is not one of God's commanded festivals; it is of this world's religious system. The elect are commanded to practice the true God's worship system set forth in the biblical record which includes eight commanded observances—not religious festivals of human origin.

There is no restriction in the biblical record which would prevent an individual setting aside a special day to show gratitude to God for his blessings if it does not violate any of God's percepts, principles, or laws. What God expressly forbids is participation in this world's religions, religious practices, and the worship of false gods.

SUMMARY

Easter, Halloween, Christmas and the national Thanksgiving holiday in the United States are the four major religious celebrations of professing Christianity today. And all three violate the instructions of God concerning false Gods and false religious practices that are repugnant to the Sovereign God and his son the Savior of mankind.

The scriptures clearly record that the only worship acceptable to God is worship that conforms to his instructions concerning how he wants to be worshiped. Moreover, God's law imposes the death penalty on all who improperly worship him.

The Commanded Observances and Holy Convocations

When the Creator God formed the Israelites into a nation, he commanded them to keep the following observances and holy convocations each year within the three main agricultural seasons:

Spring:

- The Passover—commanded observance
- The Days of Unleavened Bread—a seven day festival
- The First Day of Unleavened Bread—a festival and commanded assembly
- The Lift Offering—an offering of the first grain of the barley harvest
- The Last Day of Unleavened Bread—a festival and commanded assembly

Early Summer:

- The Feast of Weeks known as the Day of Pentecost—a festival and commanded assembly

Fall:

- The Feast of Trumpets—a festival and commanded assembly
- The Day of Atonement—a festival and commanded assembly
- The Feast of Shelters/Ingathering—a seven day festival
- The First Day of the Feast of Shelters/Ingathering—a festival and commanded assembly
- The Festival of the Eighth Day—a festival and commanded assembly

The observances and festivals noted above are not the feasts of Moses, Israel, or the Jews. These are observances and festivals, which God proclaimed to be his sacred assemblies:

Three Festival Seasons

"Three times you shall keep a feast to me in the year. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread: (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it you came out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:) And the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of your labors, which you have sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when you have gathered in your labors out of the field. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God" (Ex.23:14-17 KJV).

"The Eternal spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, Concerning the feasts of the Eternal, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts" (Lev.23:1-2 Para.).

A holy convocation is a commanded sacred assembly, which is to be kept at a time commanded by God. God is the Creator of time and only he can make time holy! Humans neither have the authority nor the power to make a thing holy or to pronounce that something that God has made holy is no longer holy.

The Early Church

Historians who research the early Christian Church find that the apostles and the early Church practiced the observance of the Sabbaths, New Moons, and the annual festival days and observances until this church disappeared from recorded history. But why did they observe these days, especially when they were persecuted for doing so? Their observance of these days makes no logical sense, unless these practices were required under their agreement with God.

Is there something of which the apostles and the early Church were not aware, which would eliminate the need for God's earthly children to keep these observances today?

What new truth have theologians of today found that would allow one to cast aside the teachings of Christ and the apostles in regard to these observances and substitute forbidden observances in their place?

There are no satisfactory answers to these two questions. An honest search of the Bible will reveal that God's commanded observances have not been canceled or suspended.

Because the observance of these days was required prior to and during the life of Christ, were observed by the early church, and will be required when the God Family rules the earth, they must not have been canceled or suspended. Therefore, it should be obvious that, in this age of the church, the children of God should also be observing these special days.

A question to answer is. Are there Christians today who practice the observances of the commanded observances and holy convocations as did the early church and if so, who are they and where are they?

By B. L. Cocherell

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— CHAPTER —
SIXTEEN

THE EATING OF CLEAN AND UNCLEAN CREATURES

In the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are found many dietary laws given to the ancient Israelites that prohibit the eating of certain land and sea based animals, birds, reptiles, fish, and insects. Many professing Christians believe and teach that these dietary laws were only ceremonial and were canceled after the advent of Christ. But is this true? Does the Sovereign God expect individuals who have agreed to follow his truth and way of truth to practice these laws? Are these dietary laws a part of God's overall plan for mankind and are there physical and spiritual benefits for those who practice these laws?

In order to begin to understand the importance of the law concerning the kinds of meat fit for human consumption, we need to look at the kinds of animals that God allowed to be offered to him as sacrificial food.

A careful study of the Book of Leviticus reveals that part of the sacrificial system required that people offer God certain sacrifices that were considered to be his food, which he consumed with fire and shared with the priests and the offerer.

In Leviticus 1:3, God speaks to Moses out of the tabernacle and instructs him to tell the children of Israel the law of the offerings (Lev. chps. 1-7). The very first offering mentioned is the burnt offering:

"If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord" (Lev.1:3 Para.).

Leviticus 1:9 says that all of this sacrifice was to be burnt: *"He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord."* None of this particular sacrifice was to be eaten by anyone else. It was to be a sweet-smelling savor to the Creator God.

God enjoyed receiving the burnt offering from his people; the sweet smell of this food was pleasing and satisfying to him.

Unfit Food For God

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is my honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, that despise my name. And you say, Wherein have we despised your name? You offer polluted bread on my altar; and you say, Wherein have we polluted you? In that you say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now

to your governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept your person? says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.1:6-8 KJV).

The Israelites were offering worthless contemptible food on God's altar (his table): *"But you have profaned it, in that you say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible" (Mal.1:12 KJV).*

These scriptures show that the altar of the Lord was the Lord's table, and the food placed on it had to be the type of food that God was willing to consume. Whatever was put on the altar (the table of the Lord) was food for God. As the sacred fire on the altar consumed the offering, it ascended to God as a sweet smell.

The following kinds of animals were offered as burnt offerings (God's food) and were consumed by God at his table:

- Bullocks (Lev.1:5)
- Sheep and goats (Lev.1:10)
- Turtledoves (Lev.1:14)
- Oxen (Num.7:87)

Only animals considered to be clean in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 were used in the burnt offering. No unclean animals were to be offered to God by the priests as his food. Moreover, God instructs those who want to obey him to eat only those foods that he himself would eat (Lev.11:1-40).

"You must not eat of any of the small animals that move on the ground, whether they crawl, or walk on all four legs, or have many legs. Do not make yourselves unclean by eating any of these. I am the Lord your God, and you must keep yourselves holy; because I am holy. I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt so that I could be your God. You must be holy, because I am holy. This, then, is the law about animals and birds, about everything that lives in the water, and everything that moves on the ground. You must be careful to distinguish between what is clean and unclean, between animals that may be eaten and those that may not" (Lev.11:41-47 GNB).

Verse 44 shows that one way to be holy in God's eyes is to eat only clean animals; he says you must *"be holy, because I am holy."*

The Covenant of the Rainbow

One other proof that God only partakes of clean animals is found in Genesis 8:

"And Noah built an altar to the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet smell; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the

imagination of a man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again kill all living things, as I have done" (Gen.8:20-21 Para.).

After Noah's sacrifice of clean beasts and fowl, God smelled the sweet smell and made the covenant of the rainbow.

These scriptures show that Noah had the knowledge of what was clean and what was not clean as far as God's food was concerned. So, he must have known what he was able to eat that would keep him holy in God's eyes.

Clean or Unclean—Does it Matter?

Today, the Father's elect are his temples on earth. Because of this, the law of clean and unclean meats still applies today.

God's Temple on Earth

"Don't you know that your body is the temple of the holy spirit that is in you, which God has given you, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which belong to God" (1.Cor.6:19-20 Para.).

God's children are the temple of the living God. His most holy place is now in his elect children. Therefore, we should keep our bodies pure, both spiritually and physically, just as he instructed the Israelites to keep his temple and his holy place undefiled while he was dwelling in the Holy of Holies. No unclean thing was to be placed on God's altars or tables.

"Don't you know that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defiles the temple of God, God shall destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1.Cor.3:16-17 Para.).

How could one defile the Temple of God? One historical example is when Antiochus Epiphanes defiled the Temple by offering swine's flesh on God's altar/table (167 B.C., 1 Macabees 1:61). If pork or any other unclean meat could defile God's temple in Israel, it will also defile his temple today, which is the physical body of a person with the indwelling of the Sovereign Father's holy spirit.

THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL LAW OF CLEAN AND UNCLEAR MEATS

The biblical record written by Moses contain a set of laws pertaining to which animals are fit for God's people to eat. But what was the purpose of this law and why is it necessary to obey it today?

"And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which you shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parts the hoof, and is cloven-footed, and chews the cud, among the beasts, that shall you eat. Nevertheless these shall you not eat of

them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: as the camel, because he chews the cud, but divides not the hoof; he is unclean to you. And the coney, because he chews the cud, but divides not the hoof; he is unclean to you. And the hare, because he chews the cud, but divides not the hoof; he is unclean to you. And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven-footed, yet he chews not the cud; he is unclean to you " (Lev.11:1-7 KJV).

Ceremonially Unclean

It has been argued by some that the Hebrew word *tameh* (*unclean*) actually denotes the state of being *ceremonially unclean*; therefore, these individuals believe the dietary laws were only for the ceremonial purposes of ancient Israel, not for Christians today.

But is this belief true? Does *tameh* mean *ceremonially unclean*? The answer can be found in the Bible. By using the Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament, all the places in the Bible where this Hebrew word *tameh* is used can be found. Where this word is used, it is not always translated *unclean*; it is sometimes translated *defiled*. There are at least two scriptures, Leviticus 18:23 and Ezekiel 22:11, which prove that *tameh* does not always mean *ceremonially unclean*.

"Neither shall you lie with any beast to defile (tameh) yourself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion" (Lev.18:23 KJV).

"And one has committed an abomination with his neighbor's wife; and another has lewdly defiled (tameh) his daughter in law; and another of you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter" (Ezk. 22:11 Para.).

Do such abominations only make the sinner *ceremonially unclean*? Obviously the word *tameh* is not limited to the definition: *ceremonially* or *ritually unclean*. It is also used to denote the state of being *defiled* or *unclean*.

In ancient Israel it was possible to become ritually unclean by touching something unclean. This uncleanness prohibited the Israelites from involvement in various religious practices that were otherwise required (Num.9:6-11). Keeping oneself undefiled was not an arbitrary or an unreasonable demand of God. One major purpose was to continually remind the Israelites of the purity of God and the need for humans to be pure.

You Shall Be Holy

God says, *"You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy"* (Lev.19:2). Does this imply holiness for ceremonial purposes only?

The Theological Word Book of the Old Testament states:

"Whatever theories are adduced to explain the laws of uncleanness, the scriptures themselves emphatically associate them with the holiness of God. The so-called Law of Purity (Lev.11-16) was placed side by side with the Law of Holiness (Lev.17-26). In the passage which lists unclean foods, the holiness of Yahweh is emphasized as the reason for avoiding unclean foods. The regulations regarding uncleanness set Israel apart from other nations. These were object lessons of God's holiness which could not co-exist with the uncleanness of Sin" (Vol. 1, p.35, article 'tameh', number 809).

In The Jewish Religion, Friedlander states, "We must take care that we do not consider these precepts exclusively as sanitary regulations, however important such regulations may be. We must not lose sight of the fact that Holiness is the only object of the Dietary Laws mentioned in the Pentateuch" (p.456).

Holiness

One reason for giving the laws of clean and unclean meats was 'holiness.' But what is holiness? God is holy and he commands his people to be holy and undefiled (1.Pet.1:19). In order for a person to become a pure and undefiled son of God a person must be washed with the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ (Rev.1:5). But, his sacrifice does not give us license to defile ourselves (Rom.3:31; 6:2,15). It is easy to understand that when you are defiled, you are unholy. And unholiness is the same as unrighteousness and all unrighteousness is sin (1.Jn.5:17). Moreover, sin that is not repented of and covered by the blood of Jesus Christ leads to eternal death in the Lake of Fire.

Physical Promises to Israel

Is holiness the only object of these laws? Israel was not a spiritual nation. Israel was a physical nation with physical laws to make it physically clean and physically holy to fulfill physical promises. This was not ceremony. There were no promises to ancient Israel in ceremony; the promises were for obedience. These promises were physical, and breaking physical laws reaps physical punishments (Deut.chps.11; 28).

It is not necessary for God to explain in exact detail the reason for every law that he has caused to come into existence. We are not told that lepers were separated from other people so that the disease wouldn't spread to others, yet when this law (Lev.13:46) was broken in the Middle Ages, leprosy became rampant and was not brought under control until the Catholic Church enforced this biblical law and separated those affected by the disease. We do not have to understand every detail of a law before we obey, because knowledge and understanding come with faith and obedience.

Science, Not Ceremony

It is now possible to scientifically show that certain animals are not fit for human consumption. Research by Dr. Carey Reams shows that consumption of unclean meat is harmful to our health. Dr. Reams explains that eating unclean meat is like putting hi-test airplane fuel in your automobile engine; it may run for a while, but the fuel will ruin your engine. (Health Guide for Survival, by Salem Kirban, p.46-50).

Physical Curses for Disobedience

Many of these unclean animals carry diseases that adversely affect the human body. Trichinosis is a commonly known parasitic disease of pigs which is passed on to humans who consume the infested animals. This is just an example of a negative physical result for disobeying God's law. Physical curses were promised to ancient Israel for disobedience to the laws that God gave to them:

"The Lord shall smite you with a consumption, and a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning . . . The Lord shall smite you with the botch [elephantiasis] of Egypt, and with the emerods [hemorrhoids], and with the scab [psoriasis], and with the itch, whereof you cannot be healed [prurigo]. The Lord shall smite you with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: . . . The Lord shall smite you in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the top of your head" (Deut.28:22, 27-28, 35 KJV).

Modern man commonly disobeys God's health laws, but is there a connection between this disobedience and diseases that are becoming more and more recognized as related to our diet? Some forms of mental disorders, such as hyperactivity in children and even some criminal tendencies can be traced to nutritional problems.

When God pronounced these curses upon man, it was because he had already built into man what the results of this disobedience would be. He does not need to intervene; human beings defile their own bodies with the meat of unclean animals and reap the penalties.

Time Element

Many of the laws considered 'ritual' can be found in the same book and chapters of the Bible as those laws that are not 'ritual'. One way to distinguish the difference between ritual laws and other laws is that the ritual laws usually mention a time period of uncleanness.

The laws that concern ritual or ceremonial defilement always specify a time limit for the purification of the defilement. This is an important distinction between physical and spiritual defilement which must be recognized in order to keep from being led astray by those who misapply scriptural understanding or those who do not wish to obey God's commandments.

A close reading of the law of clean and unclean meat in Leviticus, chapter 11, will not show a time element associated with this law. These animals are simply unclean and they should never be eaten by humans.

ARE THE DIETARY LAWS FOR JEWS ONLY?

Why should a Christian care about the law of clean and unclean meats when this law was given to the ancient Israelites?

The laws that explain which meats are fit or unfit for human consumption were given as a guide for the health of all mankind. Moreover, even Noah, the ancestor of all of mankind, was aware of the distinction between clean and unclean animals (Gen.7:1-5). But centuries later, after these laws had been violated by almost everyone, they were reestablished by the Creator God with the nation that he was founding—the nation of Israel:

"And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts (animals) which you shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth" (Lev.11: 1-2).

Who are the children of Israel? The identity of Israel is greatly misunderstood today. To most people, the words 'Israel' and 'Jew' are synonymous. However, these two terms are not synonymous.

Genesis, chapter 12, contains the ancestry of the tribes of Israel, which states that God chose Abraham who had a son Isaac and a grandson Jacob whose name was changed by God to Israel. Israel had twelve sons whose descendants became the tribes of Israel. Only one of these tribes was called Judah, which is where the word 'Jew' comes from. Israel's other eleven sons were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

Around 721 B.C., the majority of these tribes were carried away into captivity by Assyria and they never returned to the area called Palestine; thus, they became known as the 'Lost Tribes of Israel' because they lost their identifying traits.

But wherever the descendants of Israel are today, whether they are descendants of Judah or the 'Lost Tribes of Israel', their ancestors were the ones to whom the Dietary Laws of Leviticus 11 were given.

The Jews are often called "God's Chosen People," and one reason for this is that a large number of them have not forgotten God's weekly Sabbath or his annual festivals. Moreover, many of them have continued to observe God's dietary laws that were meant for all of Israel and all of mankind.

The Jews and the Law

Modern practitioners of Judisim follow the laws of Leviticus, chapter 11, and their own historical dietary traditions, which are recorded in the Talmud (writings which seem to be more important to them than the biblical record). The Talmud and other Jewish publications have many do's and don'ts about meat and other foods and their preparation that are not a part of Leviticus, chapter 11.

One day, some Jews came to Jesus Christ and found fault with his disciples, because they had eaten bread without first washing their hands in accordance with the tradition of the spiritual leaders of the Jews (Mk.7:1-5).

Jesus answered them by calling them "hypocrites" and stating, "*In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Mk.7:7).

Although the Jews observed the dietary laws, they managed to pervert them with their own teachings and traditions.

The laws noted in Leviticus, chapter 11, are from God to all of Israel (and by extension to all of mankind) and it has absolutely nothing to do with the Talmud and Jewish man-made teachings and traditions. Moreover, all mankind should be careful to observe God's law without adding to or diminishing from its wisdom. See Deut.4:1-2; 12:32.

DOES GOD CARE ABOUT FOOD?

What does obeying the law of clean and unclean meats have to do with salvation? Does the Sovereign God of all that exists really care what we eat? Will you lose your salvation if you eat unclean meats?

God is not waiting around to strike you down with trichinosis or to deny you salvation if you eat a ham sandwich. God has given you the right to make your own decisions. However, he does look at the attitude of each of his children in everything that they do. There is a difference between a person who eats unclean meat in ignorance and a person who does it in willful disobedience toward God. A person can repent and ask forgiveness for acts of ignorance and lack of character. However, if a person persists in willful disobedience against God in any way, that person is in jeopardy of losing their salvation (Heb.10:26).

The prophet Isaiah clearly shows that the end result of violating the law of clean and unclean meats is eternal death:

"I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, which walks in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts; A people that to my face continually provoke me to anger, sacrificing in gardens, and burning incense upon alters of brick; which remain among the graves, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things in the their vessels. Which say, stand by yourself, come not near me; for I am holier than you.

These are smoke in my nose, and a fire that burns all day" (Isa.65: 2-5 Para.).

It is important to note that although many of the prophecies of Isaiah were a condemnation of ancient Israel at that time, they also have contemporary implications. Moreover, many will be fulfilled before, during, and after the return of Jesus Christ to rule the earth. Isaiah clearly records the end result of violating the system of worship and the laws of physical and spiritual purity that God gave to his people:

"For with fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many. They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, says the Lord" (Isa.66:16-17 KJV).

Clearly, God says that he will destroy all who will not come into conformity with his righteous law. In the Book of Revelation, John reveals that nothing impure and nothing considered an abomination by God will enter into his holy city:

"And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev.21:27 KJV).

God does care if his people consume unclean meats. Furthermore, if any of his chosen people rebelliously violate the law of clean and unclean meats, they will not be able to enter his holy city or have eternal life.

God would not keep us from doing something that is in our best interest to do. If we can draw closer to God's perfection by not eating the things that he commanded us not to eat, our faith relationship with him and his son will be increased and strengthened. Moreover, anything that increases our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ should be a priority to anyone seeking eternal life.

CLEAN AND UNCLEAR CREATURES

MAMMALS

Clean Mammals

The predominant characteristics of clean mammals are the following: They give birth to live offspring, suckle their young, breathe through lungs, have hair on the skin, have constant body temperature, and have a four-chambered heart. Mammals that chew the cud and have a split in their hooves are fit for human consumption. These animals are herbivores and have hollow or solid horns.

A few examples of clean mammals are cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo, deer, gazelle, antelope, and oxen.

Unclean Mammals

The predominant characteristics of unclean mammals are as follows:

- There is a split in their hooves, but they do not chew the cud and they possess canine and incisor teeth.
- They chew the cud but do not have a split in their hooves, they have small hooves like nails, walk on cushion-like pads, have tusk-like canine teeth on both jaws, and incisor teeth on upper jaws, and their stomach has only three compartments.
- They are solid-hoofed, herbivorous, have a single-stomach, and have incisor teeth on both upper and lower jaws.
- They are carnivores, have six incisors and two sharp canine teeth on both jaws, 4 or 5 toes with claws on each foot, and walk either on their toes or their paws.
- They neither chew cud nor have a part in their hooves.

A few examples of unclean mammals are the ape, bat, bear, camel, dog, donkey, elephant, fox, hyena, hippo, horse, jackal, leopard, lion, llama, rabbit, pig, mule, mouse, whale, and zebra.

FISH

Although many kinds of animals live in water; the law of clean and unclean meats dictates that the only animals fit for human consumption which live exclusively in water are fish.

The predominant characteristics of clean fish are as follows: vertebrates that live in water and breath through gills, have both fins and scales, and reproduce either by laying eggs or giving birth to live offspring.

Clean Fish

The only fish fit for human consumption must have both fins and scales (Lev.11:9; Deut.14:9). In this category, only fish with bony skeletons are included because they alone possess fins and scales. The scales must overlap one another and be of bony origin and not a growth of the skin and they must be visible to the eye.

A few examples of clean fish are carp, bass, sardine, herring, perch, salmon, and trout.

Unclean Fish

- Fish that do not have scales or have teeth like projection on their skin, which are not true scales, because as they do not overlap.
- Fish with no visible scales or fins

A few examples of unclean fish are catfish, eel, shark, sturgeon, and some species of tuna.

BIRDS

The predominant characteristics of clean birds are as follows: bodies covered with feathers, upper limbs are wing-shaped, no teeth, breathe through lungs, constant body temperature, four-chambered heart, lay eggs.

Clean Birds

There are five predominant characteristics of clean birds:

- Not a bird of prey
- Elongated middle front toe plus a hind toe
- Three toes on one side of perch with hind toe on the other side
- Has a crop
- Has a gizzard with double lining that can be easily separated

A few examples of clean birds are chickens, ducks, geese, house sparrows, most song birds, partridges, pheasants, pigeons, and quail.

Unclean Birds

There are four predominant characteristics of unclean birds:

- Birds of prey that are carnivores and have hooked beaks and sharp talons that are bent like hooks
- Scavenger birds that feed on carrion and are usually bare necked, with thick solid bills and blunt talons that are slightly inclined
- Night birds of prey. Large head and eyes and 4 opposing toes
- Water and marsh fowls, except ducks and geese

A few examples of unclean birds are buzzards, crows, eagles, hawk, kites, swifts, ostriches, owls, and vultures.

AMPHIBIANS

The predominant characteristics of amphibians are as follows: vertebrates born in water, living in water, on land, or both. During early stages (larva-tadpole), they breathe with gills, and in the adult stage they breathe with lungs or gills. Body temperature changes in accordance with medium in which they live.

No amphibian is fit for human consumption.

REPTILES

The predominant characteristics of reptiles are as follows: creeping and crawling things that have short legs or none at all, live mostly on dry land, have lungs, the majority of them lay eggs with a soft shell in which the white and the yolk are mixed. They are cold blooded (temperature adjusts to the environment), and their skin is covered with scales.

No reptile is fit for human consumption.

INSECTS

Only a few of the millions of species of insects are fit for human consumption:

"These may you eat of every flying creeping thing that goes upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth; Even those may you eat, the locust after its kind. . ." (Lev.11: 21-22).

A few examples of clean insects are locusts, grasshoppers, and crickets.

SUMMARY

Clearly much thought went into the laws that the Creator God gave to national Israel and none were frivolous or unnecessary at the time that these laws were codified. Biblical prophecy clearly shows that many of these laws including the laws concerning what is clean and unclean are to be observed when Christ returns to establish his Sovereign Father's government and worship system on earth as noted in the prophetic Book of Ezekiel:

"And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezek.44:23KJV).

The dietary laws given to national Israel at Mount Sinai were not meant for them alone, these laws were meant to be a blessing to all mankind. Notice what the prophet Micah recorded concerning God's law being taught after Christ returns:

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain [government] of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills [lesser governments]; and people shall flow to it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Mic.4:1-2KJV).

It seems logical that the benefits derived from the dietary laws given to national Israel and which will also be observed after Christ returns have not been suspended during this gospel age and will still benefit individuals who diligently practice them.

By B. L. Cocherell

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____ CHAPTER ____
SEVENTEEN

WOMEN SPIRITUAL LEADERS
Where do they Get their Authority?

Today, there is much confusion about who Jesus Christ has authorized as the spiritual leaders of his heavenly Father's earthly children and which of the various leadership functions and responsibilities can be performed by men and women in the formal worship and teaching assemblies of the church.

In many biblically based churches and organizations there are women holding positions of spiritual leadership, some are ministers, pastors, preachers, teachers, and evangelist. These women and the membership of these various churches and organizations firmly believe that the Bible authorizes women to occupy positions of spiritual leadership.

This question has nothing to do with whether or not women are capable of assuming leadership positions and making sound decisions. The question is whether or not women are authorized to assume positions of spiritual leadership according to the biblical record? The answer to this question is very important, because Jesus said the following regarding those who falsely assume they are doing his will and the will of his Heavenly Father, but clearly are not:

"Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that practice lawlessness" (Matt.7:21-23 KJV Para.).

The reason these individuals who think they have secured salvation by their works are not worthy of eternal life is that all of the good works they have performed have not been done within the framework of God's law. Therefore, they are guilty of practicing lawlessness, and the penalty for practicing lawlessness is death. See Rom.6:23.

It is important to understand the basic laws, concepts, and principles governing those whom God has sanctioned to be spiritual leaders of his people in order to see whether or not God allows women to occupy positions of spiritual leadership within his earthly family and to represent him in an official capacity to the world.

Promises to Ancient Israel

The Creator God gave these promises, instructions, and warnings to national Israel through Moses prior to their entering the promised land:

"And the Lord shall make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall be above only, and you shall not be beneath; if that you pay attention to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, to observe and to do them: And you shall not go aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them" (Deut.28:13-14 KJV Para.).

Notice that the Creator was very clear in his instruction to the nation of Israel. He demanded absolute loyalty and obedience, else the promised benefits would not be given. Instead, curses would come upon them as noted in verse 15:

"But it shall come to pass, if you will not pay attention to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day; that all these curses shall come upon you, and overtake you" (Deut.28:15 KJV Para.).

After the death of Moses, the Creator God gave Joshua similar promises, instructions, and warnings:

"Be strong and of a good courage: for to this people you shall divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be you strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded you: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; but you shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success" (Josh.1:6-8 KJV) See also Deut.5:29.

The Creator demanded absolute loyalty and obedience in order to reap the benefits promised for obedience.

If the Creator God was interested in loyalty and obedience from the Israelites, how much more is the Sovereign God interested in loyalty and obedience from those he sent his Son to save? From what is said in the New Testament, he is very interested in our loyalty and obedience.

Jesus said the following concerning God's law that he gave for the benefit of mankind:

"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smaller letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt.5:18 NIV).

Is heaven and earth still here? Yes, it is! Has everything in God's word been fulfilled? No, it has not! Is the Law of God still in effect? Yes! Jesus says it is! Jesus says the following about anyone who would dare violate this law:

"Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least [Greek: less than nothing] in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.5:19 Para).

What does God's law have to do with whether or not women can occupy positions of spiritual leadership within his earthly family and represent him to the world? The answer is that the Sovereign God is a God of law and he has set in place a specific organizational structure through which he expects to be served and worshiped. What follows will clearly show this organizational structure as it pertains to who is authorized to serve him as the spiritual leaders of his followers.

Ancient Israel

When Ancient Israel was formed into a nation, the Creator God chose men from the tribe of Levi to serve him as priests and to be the spiritual leaders of his people. God said to Moses:

"And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office" (Ex.29:44 KJV).

The biblical and historical record of ancient Israel clearly shows that the Creator God chose only males of the tribe of Levi to serve him as the spiritual leaders of Israel.

Prophetesses of Ancient Israel

When the subject of leadership is discussed, those who advocate women being placed in positions of leadership will almost always cite the scriptures that speak of women prophetesses. It is true that both men and women were given this function and responsibility in ancient Israel. However, the biblical record shows a major difference between men and women in their performance of this function and responsibility.

It is important to understand that a prophet or a prophetess is always directly chosen by God for a specific task, such as delivering a message of repentance to God's people, foretelling or delivering punishment for disobedience to God, blessing or cursing people or nations on behalf of God, foretelling future events, and in some cases, teaching spiritual lessons. It is also important to understand that there is a clear difference between the function and responsibility of a prophet and a prophetess shown in the biblical record.

Although male prophets in ancient Israel were at times leaders of God's people, prophetesses were never shown as being authorized to hold positions of leadership by the Creator God. To this statement many will reply, What about Deborah the prophetess who judged Israel?

The simple fact is that a linguistic analysis of the biblical record shows that Deborah did not judge Israel in the sense of governing Israel as its civil or spiritual leader; rather, she conveyed God's condemnation of the Israelites for evil practices, foretold future events concerning them, and reminded them of God's instructions to wage war with Sisera the captain of Jabin's army

"And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried to the Lord: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel" (Jdg.4:1-3 KJV).

Notice the context in which Deborah the prophetess is mentioned, is that of national Israel's punishment for their evil behavior before God.

"And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment" (Jdg.4:4-5 KJV).

Here, the English word *judged* is a translation of the Hebrew word *shaphat*, which means *to judge*, i.e., *pronounce sentence* (for or against); by implication, *to vindicate* or *punish*; by extension, *to govern*; passively, *to litigate* (literally or figuratively).

The English word *judgment* is a translation of the Hebrew word *mishpat*; which means properly, *a verdict* (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree (human or [participant's] divine law, individual or collective), including the act, the place, the suit, the crime, and the penalty; abstractly, justice, including a participant's right or privilege (statutory or customary), or even a style.

Most translators of the Bible follow the lead of the King James translations and interpret the words *judged* and *judgment* to infer that Deborah governed Israel; however, the Hebrew words *shaphat* and *mishpat* do not convey the meaning of governance in the context of the biblical record concerning Deborah. These words convey a condemnation of Israel for their evil behavior, which is consistent with the historical record of Judges, chapters 4 and 5.

A careful review of Judges, chapters 4 and 5 do not show an authorization from God for Deborah to govern or lead Israel in any capacity, but shows the lack of male leadership in Israel at that time and their unwillingness to assume their function and responsibility as leaders of Israel.

The context of Judges, chapters 4 and 5 also documents a lack of male leadership in Israel at that time. Clearly, no male prophet was in Israel at that time; therefore, people sought counsel from Deborah who had shown herself to be a righteous person and prophetess through whom God would give insight and instructions.

The song of Deborah is a further indication that these Israelite males were not diligently performing their responsibilities as leaders of Israel and were behaving as little children who needed a mother to care for them:

"The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel" (Jdg.5:7).

The biblical record does not show Deborah in a leadership position in Israel, it shows her as a person given the responsibility as a prophetess to convey the Creator's condemnation of the Israelites for evil practices, to foretell future events concerning them, and to remind them of God's instructions to wage war with Sisera the captain of Jabin's army.

The biblical record shows that the prophetess Deborah advised the Israelites concerning God's will for them, gave them warnings from God and conveyed knowledge of prophetic events. Huldah the prophetess warned King Josiah and the people of Judah of punishment because of their rebellion against God, and Anna the prophetess spoke of the advent of Christ. But, none of these women were in positions of leadership

DURING CHRIST'S EARTHLY MINISTRY

During Christ's ministry, he chose twelve men to be his close companions and prepared them to occupy leadership positions in what would be his Father's holy nation and earthly family. To these men he revealed the identity of his Heavenly Father and his good news message of salvation. Christ also chose 70 other men (Lk.10:1-12) and sent them with great spirit-power (Lk. 10:17-20) to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

After Christ's death and resurrection, he gave the 11 remaining disciples, who were later to be known as apostles, their commission:

"You go and teach all races. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be damned" (Mk.16: 15-16 Para.).

Believing is more than just an acknowledgment that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that the message of salvation he brought from his heavenly Father is true. True belief is manifested in one's life through loyalty to God the Father and obedience to the laws and rules of conduct he has set forth for his earthly children by which to live. If there is no loyalty and obedience there is no true belief. See Titus 1:15-16; Rev.21: 7-8.

To those of shallow belief Jesus says the following:

"Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not the things that I say"
(Lk.6:46 Para.).

THE EARLY CHURCH

Christ delegated the administration of the early church to the apostles who, in turn, delegated some of their authority to other men, just as Moses had done when he appointed judges over Israel:

"Truly I say to you, Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"
(Matt.18:18-20 KJV Para.).

There are many scriptures that show the apostles using their authority to make decisions concerning the written law. The apostles also had the authority to set forth oral law which was just as binding on the Father's earthly children as the written law. These apostles were sitting in Christ's seat of authority over the Father's holy nation during their lifetime, just as those who sat in Moses' seat of authority over national Israel. See Acts 15:1-41; 1.Cor.5:4-6; 1.Tim.1:17-20.

The organizational structure of the early church as set forth by Jesus Christ was clearly a theocratic system governed by men through which the Sovereign Father's earthly children were to worship and serve him in temples of flesh.

The following scriptures outline the organizational structure of the early church:

"Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of languages. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak other languages? do all interpret?" (1.Cor.12:27-30 KJV Para.).

Apostles

All of the apostles were men and these men governed the early church. Where did these men get the authority to make decisions concerning church administration, church doctrine, and the conduct of the Sovereign Father's earthly children? They received this authority directly from Christ who received his authority to govern the church from his Heavenly Father. See Matt.28:18-20; Eph.5:23-24.

Prophets

"And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, . . ." (1.Cor.12:28 KJV).

The English word prophet in 1 Corinthians, chapter, 12 verse 20 is translated from the Greek word *prophetes* and means *one who foretells, an inspired speaker, and by extension, a poet*. Although this is the Greek meaning of the word prophet, the intent of its usage in the New Testament goes far beyond the Greek meaning. Prophecy in the early church seemed to encompass the full range of the meaning of the word to prophesy. Future events were foretold, God's message to mankind was proclaimed, instructions from God were given, and the mysteries of God were revealed. See Acts 11:27-28; 15:32-35; 21:10-11; 1.Cor.14:29-33; Eph.3:3-6.

While explaining the miracle of languages which occurred on the Festival of Pentecost, Peter said this event was a part of the prophecy of Joel, which said that your sons and daughters would prophesy (See Joel 2:28-29). And indeed prophets in the early church were both men and women (Acts 21:8-9; 1.Cor.11:5), with the only noticeable distinction being who could formally address the assembled congregation and who could not. See 1.Cor.14:29; 1.Tim 2:11-12.

Prophetesses of the Early Church

The apostle Paul teaches that women should not speak-out in the formal assembly of a congregation and the indication is that neither should they prophesy in the congregation as noted in the following text.

"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman that pray or prophecies with her head uncovered dishonors her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaved" (1.Cor.11:4-5 KJV Para.).

The English word *prophecies* in verse 5 is translated from the Greek word *propheteuo*, which is a derivative of the Greek word *prophetes* and means to *foretell events, divine, speak under inspiration, and exercise the prophetic office*:

Yes, women receive revelations and can reveal these revelations to others as many scriptures indicate. The daughters of the evangelist Philip were among those of the early church whom God chose to receive and convey information to others of the elect:

"And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came to Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy" (Acts 21:7-9 KJV). See also Acts 2:17.

The question is not whether women can prophecy, because righteous women can and do prophecy. The question is, Is it proper for a woman to prophecy in the congregational assemblies of the elect? The apostle Paul says no it is not. Women are not to speak-out in the assemblies of the elect during the formal worship of God or during the teaching service as noted in Paul's letter to the Elect at Corinth:

"Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge" (1.Cor.14:29 KJV).

The English word *prophets* in verse 29 and throughout this text is translated from the Greek word *prophetes*, which means *a foreteller* (a prophet); by analogy, *an inspired speaker*:

"If any thing be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace. For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1.Cor.14:30-33 KJV).

Clearly, not every one should be speaking at the same time if they have been given a revelation or have special understanding. Paul stresses order among the elect in a formal setting when they are come together to worship the Father, to learn, and to share in learning.

Paul's Decree

Continuing to instruct the elect at Corinth in the proper conduct that should be exhibited during their formal assemblies, the apostle Paul issues the following decree:

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted to them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also says the law" (1.Cor.14:34 KJV).

The English word *silence* in verse 33 is translated from the Greek verb *sigao*, which means *a voluntary silence* and connotes a request for silence in the midst of clamor and disorder. Additionally, Paul says that it is a shame for a woman to speak in church. The English word *speak* is translated from the Greek word *laleo*, which means *to talk*.

Paul approved of women being together with men during formal assemblies of the church, because in Christ they are one. However, these were new and radical ideas to both Gentiles and Jews. This newfound freedom led to a disregard for orderliness and courtesy during their formal teaching and worship assemblies, especially on the part of women who were not accustomed to listening to public speakers or participating in public worship.

Paul backs up his decree by invoking the authority of God's law. But, of what law is Paul referring? It is the law concerning the authority between a man and a woman which was first given to mankind after Eve disobeyed God's instructions by taking and eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:

"To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen.3: 16 Para.).

This law does not speak to the intellect or worth of an individual, but to responsibility and function within the theocratic system through which God governs his people. Men are to be in authority over women, so says God's law.

Paul was taught as a Pharisee and clearly understood God's law, thus his decree that women should keep silent in the assemblies of the elect. Although women are permitted to sing praises to God in the congregation, they are not allowed to preach, teach, or prophecy in congregational assemblies:

"And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. What? came the word of God out from you? or came it to you only?" (1.Cor.14:35-36 KJV).

The English word *shame* in verse 35, is translated from the Greek word *aischron*, which means *a shameful thing*, i.e., Indecorum. In verse 36, Paul states the fact that God's truth and way of truth was delivered to mankind through men, not women.

Paul's instruction to the elect at Corinth in chapter 14, concerns the issue of authority and order in the congregation. Men who receive a revelation should speak in an orderly fashion and women should not speak-out in the congregation, but must keep silent.

This silence of women within the congregational worship assemblies when a minister or other men are speaking, not only shows respect for God and his law but also for the authority of the spiritual leader and the other men in the congregation. Moreover, it is evident that, if women are to be silent in a formal congregational assembly, they are also prohibited from prophesying or teaching within a formal assembly.

Although the spiritual leadership of ancient Israel and the early church were all males, the office a prophet or the gift of prophecy is different, in that it is a separate function and responsibility apart from the priesthood and the ministry of the Body of Christ. A prophet is always directly chosen by God for a specific task, such as delivering a message of repentance to God's people, foretelling or delivering punishment for disobedience to God, blessing or cursing people or nations on behalf of God, foretelling future events, and, in some cases, teaching spiritual lessons.

Although righteous women are sometimes chosen and authorized to convey messages and prophecies from God, women cannot, according to the authority structure of the church, formally proclaim these messages or prophecies within formal congregational assemblies. Therefore, in order for a prophetess to fulfill her responsibility, she must do so within the authorized structure of the church; otherwise, she acts without divine authority, and usurps the divinely appointed order of authority.

In summarizing his decree concerning the issue of authority and order within the formal assemblies of the elect, Paul again invokes his authority and God's law in order to firmly establish his decree:

"If anybody thinks themselves a prophet or spiritually gifted, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. If anyone ignores this, let them be ignored" (1.Cor.14: 37-38 Para.).

TEACHERS

"And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, . . ." (1.Cor.12:28 KJV).

Here, the English word *teacher* is translated from the Greek word *didaskalos*, which means an *instructor*.

As with the function of a prophet, both men and women are noted as fulfilling the teaching function. However, the teaching performed by the men of the early church is different from that of women. The teaching performed by men was instruction in God's truth to the elect and the proclaiming of the good news message to the world. Whereas, the older women were to teach the younger women by a righteous example, as well as by oral instruction:

"But you speak the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becomes holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Tit.2:1-5. KJV Para.).

The function of teaching within the church carries with it the responsibility to make sure that what is taught is truth, because what one teaches, if not correct or not thoroughly explained, has the potential to adversely impact a person's life and spiritual growth.

The New Testament shows teachers can be men or women depending on what is taught and the circumstances surrounding the teaching process. For example, older women with more experience in the Father's truth and the practical application of a righteous lifestyle are to teach younger women as noted in Paul's letter to Titus (Tit.2:3-4). However, Paul's instruction to Titus does not authorize women a teaching office or position of authority within the church, nor does this instruction relieve men of their leadership responsibility within the church.

The biblical record clearly shows that Christ delegated the responsibility of spiritual leadership and the teaching of his heavenly Father's truth and way of truth in an official and formal capacity to men. And after Christ returns, men will still be responsible for spiritual leadership and the maintenance of the worship system at the temple in Jerusalem.

Paul's Instruction To Timothy

In his letter to the evangelist Timothy, the apostle Paul gives the following clear instruction concerning women and the church:

"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have [usurp] authority over a man; she must be silent" (1.Tim.2:11-12 NIV).

The clear inference of the first part of verse 12 is that women of the church were not the teachers of God's truth, but were to learn these things from men who are authorized to teach.

Verse 12 warns women to not usurp the authority of a man. The English phrase *usurp authority* is translated from the Greek word *authenteo*, which literally means *to act of oneself* and figuratively means *to dominate*. At one time, *authenteo* described one who kills with his own hands. Later, it was used to indicate how one may act on his or her own authority and dominate others in an autocratic manner.

The English word *silent* in verse 12 is translated from the Greek word *hesuchia*, which means *stillness* i.e., *quietness*, or *silence*.

Many men seize upon Paul's instruction to Timothy in verse 12 to prove that women in the Body of Christ are prohibited from functioning in any kind of teaching responsibility. However, this is not what this scripture says; otherwise, Paul would have been contradicting himself, because he told Titus to have the older women teach the younger women (Tit.2:1-5).

Some who attempt to justify the practice of women in positions of leadership within the church feel that Paul was just stating an opinion to Timothy; however, this was not Paul's opinion in this matter, it was Paul's instruction to Timothy regarding a problem, which needed to be rectified.

After Christ Returns

The prophet Ezekiel was inspired to record that, after Christ returns and establishes God's government on earth, men of the tribe of Levi will be the spiritual leaders of God's worship system on earth:

"But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister to me, and they shall stand before me to offer to me the fat and the blood, says the Lord God: They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister to me, and they shall keep my charge" (Ezk.44: 15-16 KJV). See also Jer.33:17-22.

It is easily shown from the biblical record that before the advent of Christ and after his return that God chose males of the tribe of Levi to serve him in the capacity of priests and teachers of his law.

After Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, the descendants of Levi will be brought into the land of their inheritance. National Israel's theocratic governmental and organizational structure will be restored as it was at the beginning of the nation under the leadership of the Levitical priesthood:

"Therefore says the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of my adversaries, and avenge me of my enemies: And I will turn my hand upon you, and purely purge away your dross, and take away all your tin: And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your councillors as at the beginning: afterward you shall be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed" (Isa.1:24-28 KJV).

SUMMARY

One only has to review the qualifications which were necessary to become and remain an elder in the early church to clearly understand that the leadership of the Father's elect children is the function and responsibility of men. All the apostles, evangelists, and elders of the early church were men; there are no examples of a woman being authorized to hold a position of leadership in ancient Israel or the early church.

The biblical record shows the following about positions of leadership in ancient Israel, the early church, and the millennial rule of Christ:

- The Creator God only chose and authorized men to fill positions of leadership in ancient Israel.
- Christ only chose and authorized men to proclaim the Kingdom of God and his Father's good news message while he was alive.

- The apostles only chose and authorized men to fill positions of leadership in the early church.
- After Christ returns to conquer the earth and establish his Father's government and worship system in Jerusalem, only men will occupy positions of leadership.

After the establishment of the early church, it is clear that there were women who served in many capacities just as in ancient Israel and there were also prophetesses, such as Philip's four daughters; However, none were in positions of spiritual leadership in the early church.

Is there one scripture in the entire Bible that authorizes women to occupy positions of spiritual leadership within the congregations of God's elect? The answer is no! A search of the scriptures will not find such an authorization. Nowhere in the New Testament is there the slightest inference that women are to be allowed to occupy an office of spiritual leadership within the assemblies of the Sovereign God's earthly family.

Questions

Are women who assume positions of spiritual leadership usurping the authority, function, and responsibility of men in violation of God's law and will concerning who is authorized to occupy positions of spiritual leadership during this gospel age of salvation?

Are women in spiritual leadership positions as ministers, pastors, preachers, teachers, and evangelist righteous women in compliance with God's law?

Could the specter of women promoting themselves as spiritual leaders be a part of the prophesied curse that the Creator God pronounced through Isaiah?:

"Woe to the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him. As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths" (Isa.3:11-12 KJV).

Whose doctrine is it that teaches women to assume a position of spiritual leadership within a professing Christian church? Could it be that this belief and teaching is a doctrine of demons or is it just a tradition of men? You be the judge.

By B. L. Cocherell

b10w19

NOTES AND COMMENTS

— CHAPTER —
EIGHTEEN

TITHING: FACT, FICTION, OR FRAUD

The thing that comes to the minds of most professing Christians when they hear the word 'tithing' is money. In many of today's biblically based churches money is talked about as much, if not more, than the message of Christ.

- Was the law of tithing practiced by the early church?
- Is the law of tithing binding on true Christians today?

This chapter will answer these questions through biblically based research. Additionally, this chapter will give insight into how God views the practice of giving and sharing.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMISSION AND RESPONSIBILITY

Christians are commissioned by Jesus Christ to proclaim his Father's good news message to humanity:

"Go you therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the holy spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen" (Matt.28: 19-20 KJV Para.).

Attempting to fulfill this commission is a tremendous undertaking. It requires much time, talent, energy, effort, and financial support. Time, talent, energy, and effort must come from God's children, but how should this work of the church be financially supported?

Paul asks the elect at Rome about the responsibility of supporting those who preached the gospel message:

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom.10:14-15 KJV).

Paul explained to the Corinthians that supporting the ministry and the work of the church is a Christian responsibility:

"Who goes to war any time at his own charges? who plants a vineyard, and eats not of the fruit thereof? or who feeds a flock, and eats not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or says not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, You shall not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn. Does God take care for oxen? Or says he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that plows should plow in hope; and that he that threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so has the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1.Cor.9:7-14 KJV).

But how is this support to be given? Should the support come through the tithing system that was a part of God's first covenant with national Israel? Should Christians tithe a certain amount of their increase as the ancient Israelites did? Or should it come through the freewill offerings of those who are personally committed to doing their part in supporting the work of the church?

IS TITHING REQUIRED TODAY?

Many religious organizations teach tithing as the means of supporting their particular work. And many millions of people over the years who have regularly dedicated a percentage of their income to God have felt that they have been physically and spiritually blessed as a result of their giving.

Many who live by the principle of giving a tenth of their income to a church will attest to the benefits of tithing based on their own personal experiences. But are the elect children of God required to give a tenth of their income to support the work of the church in order to remain in right-standing with God? Many believe that, because God owns everything, he requires Christians to return ten percent of their total income to him. And, if one fails to do this, a Christian is stealing from God and will be cursed.

This belief might sound logical on the surface; however, it has a major flaw. There is no historical or biblical proof to support this belief. From Genesis to Revelation there are no instructions that command the elect children of God or anyone else to tithe on their monetary income.

If there is proof that the tithing law that God gave to national Israel is binding on the elect of God today, the proof should be easily found in the Bible. In order to fully understand the responsibility of the Christian concerning tithing, it is important to remember that humans do not have the authority to require people to worship God in opposition to his express will as revealed through his word—the Bible. If a person or an organization teaches that tithing on one's income is a universal law of God that is in effect today, they should be honest enough to show how historical or biblical evidence backs up this assertion. However, this is impossible to do; therefore, most religious organizations that teach tithing just state this doctrine as if it were fact and leave it unproven.

The following questions must be answered about the subject of tithing before a conclusion can be reached as to whether tithing is binding on the elect of God today:

- What is a tithe?
- Who had to pay the tithe?
- To whom was the tithe paid?
- How often was the tithe paid?
- From what was the tithe to be taken?
- How was the tithe calculated?

THE JEW AND TITHING

First let us clear up a misconception that many have concerning the Jewish religion. The Jews do not practice the paying of tithes as part of their religious system. The Jews do not tithe today, because there is no one to whom to pay the tithe.

According to the law given by God through Moses, tithing cannot be accomplished today by any of the tribes (nations) of Israel, including the tribe of Judah (Jews). They cannot tithe, because there is no Levitical priesthood officiating in the nation of Israel, nor is there a temple in Jerusalem in which to officiate. Therefore, it is impossible for any Israelite to tithe in the manner authorized and prescribed under the law of tithing. However, if a temple were to be built in Jerusalem and the Levitical priesthood were instituted again, many Jews would tithe in accordance to the law.

ABRAHAM AND MELCHIZEDEC

Many use the following account in Genesis 14:18-20 in an attempt to prove that a universal tithing law existed during the life of Abraham, and that this account shows tithing as a universally understood principle that was observed from the beginning of Creation. But, does this account reveal the same law that God gave through Moses?

"And Melchizedec king of Salem brought bread and wine: and he was the priest of the Most High God. And he blessed Abraham, and said, Blessed be Abraham of the Most High God, who possesses heaven and earth: And blessed is the Most High God, that has delivered your enemies into your hand. And Abraham gave Melchizedec tithes of all" (Gen.14:18-20 KJV Para.).

Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedec, the king of Salem. When Abraham gave this tenth, was he obeying some universal tithing law that was later formalized and made a part of God's agreement with the Israelites at Mount Sinai?

The surrounding circumstances of this event are those of war:

"And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar" (Gen.14:1-2 KJV).

During the battle with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham's nephew Lot and Lot's family, servants, and possessions were captured and carried off by the aggressors.

"And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abraham's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed" (Gen.14:10-12 KJV).

Upon hearing of Lot's capture, Abraham armed his servants pursued Lot's captors and liberated everyone and everything that the aggressors had taken. This included things that belonged to the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. As Abraham returned from battle, Melchizedec came to bless him:

"And Melchizedec king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abraham of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen.14:18-19 KJV).

In verse 20, Abraham gives a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedec. The writer to the Hebrews also refers to this event:

"For this Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace." (Heb.7:1-2 KJV Para.).

According to the proponents of tithing today, tithes must be paid on one's increase. But, Abraham gave Melchizedec a tenth of 'all':

"And the king of Sodom said to Abraham, Give me the people, and you take the goods. And Abraham said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up my hand to the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, and said that I will not take even from a thread or a shoe-latch, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abraham rich: However, that is only taken which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion" (Gen.14:21-24 Para.).

WHERE IS THE INCREASE?

Where is Abraham's increase? Abraham did not have any increase, because he only liberated the people who were taken captive and recovered their goods for them. Granted, everything could have been considered spoils of war by Abraham. However, gaining spoils of war was not the reason he set out after the aggressors. Abraham's intent was to liberate his nephew Lot and his people.

Notice that Abraham kept nothing for himself. He even said in verse 23 that the goods belonged to the king of Sodom. There was no increase for Abraham; therefore, even if the spoils of war were reckoned as tithable items, Abraham would have been exempt, because he did not have any spoils on which to tithe.

This example does not show that Abraham was obeying a universal tithing law that required him to give a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedec. It seems that the tenth of the recovered goods given to Melchizedec was an offering of thanks rather than a required payment on an increase.

One must take care not to read something that is not historical fact into this account. This account, which is used in the New Testament to show the superiority of the Melchizedec priesthood, does not prove that Abraham was obeying a universal law of tithing. However, it does show Abraham's gratitude to God for his blessings.

JACOB'S VOW

The second proof that is put forth for a universal tithing law is the account in which Jacob vows to give a tenth of all that God blesses him with:

" And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that you shall give me I will surely give the tenth to you" (Gen.28:20-22 KJV Para.).

The word *if* is important in this account, because Jacob is asking God to enter into an agreement with him. Jacob promises that, if God will bless him, he will give a tithe of these material blessings. Not only did Jacob ask God for food, clothing, protection, and peace as a condition of this agreement but also he agreed to worship only God and call the place where the agreement was made 'God's House.'

If tithing were a universal law before Abraham was born and it existed during Jacob's lifetime, it would have been very presumptuous of Jacob to think he could bargain with God on this issue. To understand what is taking place in this account, we must find out what the circumstances were that made Jacob decide to make a vow.

Some people believe that God does not bargain with people; instead, he only dictates to them. However, the biblical fact is that God has negotiated many agreements with individual people besides the overall agreement that he made with the nation of Israel. Read the examples of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel (1.Sam.1:1-28), and Jephthah, the Gileadite (Jdg.11:30-40). There are indeed many other bargains with God that were initiated by both men and women that are noted in the Bible. Moreover, in Ecclesiastes 5:2-5, King Solomon warns people to be careful about making and keeping such vows and covenants with God.

Notice the tremendous promises that God gave to Jacob. Jacob's vow (a personal contract with God) included a request for additional blessings based on his promise to honor God with an offering of a tenth of what God would give to him in the future.

Jacob's vow clearly states that if God would do these things, Jacob would further honor him with worship and obedience. Clearly, this event does not establish or prove a universal, perennial, or irrevocable law of tithing. What it does show is that Jacob made a covenant with God and was willing to worship and acknowledge God as his Creator, sustainer, provider, and protector.

If Jacob were obligated to pay a tenth to God because of some universal tithing law, why would he have to make a special covenant with God to give him a tenth? Jacob's example of a conditional contract with the Creator to tithe does not prove a universal tithing law existed before the Mount Sinai agreement with national Israel and cannot in any way be used as an example to impose and bind tithing on Christians who are under a New Covenant.

AT SINAI

At Mount Sinai, there was a people who had forgotten the most basic principles of God's law while they were captive slaves in the land of Egypt, but they would soon have this law revealed and bound on them as a nation:

Exodus 19:20-25 KJV

"And the Lord came down on mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. And the Lord said to Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth on them"

"And Moses said to the Lord, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai: for you charged us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. And the Lord said to him, Away, get you down, and you shall come up, you, and Aaron with you: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break forth upon them. So Moses went down to the people, and spoke to them."

When the Israelites left Egypt, they took a great amount of material wealth from the Egyptians. However, no instructions can be found requiring that they pay tithes on this increase of material wealth. Later, when the Israelites took the spoils of war from the Midianites, they were not required to tithe on these spoils. Instead, they were to divide them among the people, the priests, and the Levites. See Num.31:26-30.

When there was a need to build the tabernacle, Moses asked the people to give freewill offerings for its construction. Why would he ask for these freewill offerings if there was a universal tithing system? There may have been as many as six million Israelites camped at Mount Sinai for almost a year, which would have been plenty of time to collect enough tithes and offerings to build a very large structure, This should be further proof that no universal tithing law existed before the Mount Sinai agreement with national Israel.

THE TITHING LAW INSTITUTED

One of the first clues concerning when the law of tithing was to take effect and the conditions that had to exist for it to apply to national Israel is found in Leviticus 25:1-2:

"And the Lord spoke to Moses in Mount Sinai, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, When you come into the land which give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath to the lord" (KJV).

Only when the Israelites entered into the land that God would give them were they to keep the land rest and the Jubilee. This is an extremely important point because it clearly shows that some of the law of God about national Israel requires that the Israelites live in the land of their inheritance.

Although the law of tithing was given to the Israelites while they were sojourning in the wilderness, no tithes were collected from them during this time, because there was no increase to tithe on. The Israelites were nomads in the land. They wandered from place to place with their flocks and herds.

Moreover, they could not tithe on an increase, because God provided food and clothing for the Israelites while they lived in the wilderness. Because of the scarcity of the necessary items for survival, the Creator provided them daily during the entire forty years of Israel's punishment until they came to the borders of the land of Canaan. See Ex.16:8, 12, 35; Deut.29:5; Jos.5:12; Psa.105:40.

THE TITHING LAW

Among those who practice tithing as a doctrinal issue, there are a variety of viewpoints and methods used to determine what, when, and how one should tithe. Some pay a tenth on their gross income, some pay on their net income, and a few pay on the net increase of their material goods.

The Old Covenant tithing law that some try to apply to the elect of God today did not require that a person tithe on their total income, but only on the increase of the land.

If the question of what is to be tithed on were not hard enough by itself, the question of when to pay is even more complicated. Should a person tithe each pay period, at the end of the year, or every third year? Some believe there are three tithes that must be paid: the first to be used to support the ministry, the second to be used during God's annual observances and festivals, and the third to be given for the support of widows and orphans. Although these are difficult questions, it is very easy to understand the main issues and the purpose for the tithing system.

This widely misunderstood law was given to a specific nation, under a specific set of circumstances, and for a specific purpose. By disproving these misunderstandings and beliefs that have no historical or biblical basis, it will become clear that the tithing law given to ancient Israel is not applicable to the elect of God today. However, there are some important spiritual lessons to be learned from the law of tithing.

The law of tithing is first mentioned in Leviticus 27:30-33 and only speaks of animal and agricultural items being tithed. Some people might say God was just stating principles to follow when he gave these examples of the law of tithing. However, it seems highly unlikely that these were just examples of the overall principle of tithing, because the instructions that God gave are very detailed and specific:

"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy to the Lord. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passes under the rod, the tenth shall be holy to the Lord. He shall not search whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it: and if he change it at all, then both it and the change there of shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed" (Lev.27: 30-33 KJV).

"All the tithes of the land" clearly refers to the land of Canaan and other lands that God had promised to give them as a national inheritance. Leviticus, chapters 25, 26, and 27 speak specifically of the lands that the Israelites were to occupy. This is exactly how the ancient Israelites understood the law of tithing as indicated by historical evidence. The Israelites understood that the law of tithing only applied to the land of inheritance. And only those who had received this inheritance could tithe.

When the tribes of Israel were eventually removed from their land and dispersed to other geographical areas, they did not consider the produce of those lands to be tithable according to the law. The produce of these lands were considered to be impure and not suitable for use in supporting the temple service. See Judaism, Vol. II, p.71, by George Foot Moore and The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Vol. I, p.9, by Alfred Edershiem.

HOW THE TITHE WAS TO BE USED

The purpose for the tithe is explained in the Book of Numbers:

"And behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service when they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Num.18:21 KJV).

The tenth part of all the increase of animals and produce had to be used to pay the Levites for the services they performed in the tabernacle and in the temple at Jerusalem. However, this tithe of the land was not the Levite's only means of support, nor did their religious duties consume all of their time. They lived much as any other Israelite did when they were not performing their religious duties. Just as the priests had courses of service, the Levites also took turns in carrying out their Levitical responsibilities. When the Levites were not engaged in their religious duties, they could use their time as they desired.

Numbers 35:1-8 shows that the Levites would inherit certain cities and much of the land around them on which to raise their cattle and whatever else they wanted. This property was to be theirs forever (Lev.25:33-34). Because they had these cities and all this land, they could support themselves when they were not actively engaged in their ministry to the people of God.

The scriptures also list the stranger, the fatherless, and the widows as being eligible for extra support from the tithe that was used to support the poor (Deut.14:28-29).

TITHABLE ITEMS

Tithable items fell into two general categories: The increase of grain, vegetable produce, and fruit from trees, and the increase of domestic animals:

"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy to the Lord. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passes under the rod, the tenth shall be holy to the Lord" (Lev.27:30-32 KJV).

M'Clintock and Strong's Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature' states:

"As the Mosaic law does not define what things are subject to this tithe, but simply says that it is to consist of both vegetables and animals [Lev.27:30], the Jewish cannon enacted that as to the produce of the land 'whatsoever is esculent [edible], though still kept in the field, and derives its growth from the soil is tithable.'" See the Mishnah, Maaseroth i,1 for clarification of this point.

It is important to understand the ultra-legalistic thought process of most of these Israelites in regard to the law of God. Many who kept the law, kept the letter of the law with great zeal (Lk.11:41:42). If tithes had to be paid on things other than agricultural goods and livestock, there is no doubt that these people would have conformed to the letter of the law.

When one reads the law of tithing, one will notice that nothing is mentioned about the tithe of money, fish, mining or commerce. To claim that these things are tithable items is to read something into the law that is not stated there.

THE FESTIVAL TITHE

Deuteronomy, chapters 12 and 14, verify the agricultural nature of the law of tithing in ancient Israel and refer to a special tithe for the annual observances and festivals and poor Israelites. Whether or not these two additional tithes were separate from the regular tithe or were merely set aside every third year for this purpose is unclear from the context. Even Jewish authorities on the law differ on this point. This question is not necessarily pertinent to the discussion at hand and is only noted because some who hold to the doctrine of tithing use these two chapters of Deuteronomy to support their belief that Christians should pay three tithes.

The festival tithe (commonly called 'the second tithe') was not to be used within the Israelite's home territory: *"You may not eat within your gates your tithe of your corn [grain] or of your wine, or of your oil . . ."* (Deut.12:17; 14:22-23). The annual observances and festivals were very important to God and to the people of Israel because they pictured the seven steps in God's plan for the redemption of mankind.

The males were to give a special gift to God when they came before God on these special occasions:

"Three times in a year shall all your males appear before the Lord your God in the place which he shall choose: in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and in the Feast of Weeks, and in the Feast of shelters/ingathering; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty: [but] each with a gift in his hand, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you" (Deut.16:16-17 Para.).

A gift or an offering was required, but the amount is not specified. The importance of this kind of offering and how it applies to true Christians will be explained later. Notice that this offering was not restricted to those who were required to pay tithes, but it was required of all males.

THE TITHE FOR THE POOR

"And at the end of three years you shall bring forth all the tithe [commonly called 'the third tithe'] of your increase the same year, and shall lay it up within your gates [i.e., home or property]" (Deut.14:28 KJV).

This tithe was to be laid up within the person's property and the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow were to partake of it:

"And the Levite, (because he has no part nor inheritance with you), and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within your gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do" (Deut.14:29 KJV).

Second Chronicles 31:6-11 refers to the law of tithing during the lifetime of King Hezekiah. At this time, the tithe consisted of the produce of the land and animals, some of which were stored in special chambers at the temple.

Without exception, the tithe was a tithe of produce or animals. There is no reference in the Bible to a tithe of monetary income, the selling or trading of wares, or any other source of income.

The Temple Tax

After the return from Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah required the Israelites to give an offerings of one third of a shekel per year in addition to the regular tithe of their increase in order to support the service of the house of God (Nehe.10:32, 35-39).

If the Jews had been tithing on all of their income, including both produce, animals, and money, no temple tax would have been necessary. The primary reason for the Jew's lack of support for the temple and the priesthood was due to being heavily taxed by their captors. Although Nehemiah assessed the third part of a shekel for the support of the temple, it was not a part of the tithing law as set forth by God.

WHAT IS REAL INCREASE?

Those who insist on teaching the doctrine of tithing seem to be quite silent on the question of what real increase is. A word study into the meaning of the Hebrew words translated into the English as 'increase' in the Bible shows that an increase is anything that is over, above, and beyond one's expenses. These expenses include what it costs to live (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, insurance, health costs, taxes, the cost of earning a living, the cost of doing business).

Two Hypothetical Examples of the Tithing Principle

1. A certain farmer grows 100,000 bushels of wheat in a one year period. If this farmer used the principle of tithing as indicated in the the Bible, and tithed only on his increase, he would deduct all living expenses and all costs of doing business from this amount. For example, if all of his expenses amounted to 99,000 bushels of wheat, the increase would be 1,000 bushels of wheat. If he tithed on his increase, the tithe would be 100 bushels of wheat. Of course, if there were no increase above his expense, he could not tithe because he would have no increase on which to tithe.
2. If this farmer also raised livestock and his herd or flock had an increase of only nine animals, the farmer would not be obligated to tithe on the increase of nine according to Leviticus 27:32-33, because the tenth animal was the one that was holy to the Lord.

SUMMARY

In summary, there is no scriptural evidence that the law of tithing required one, two, or three tenths of one's total income. The tithe was to be paid only on the increase of agriculture produce and livestock in the land of national Israel.

The law of tithing under the first agreement between God and national Israel was given specifically to fit the needs of that nation at that time in history.

Under the first agreement, God's worship system required that the Levites and priests serve God and the people in the place where God placed his name (this was Jerusalem after the temple was built) and throughout Israel where the people lived. Under this agreement, God also instituted national seasonal observances and festivals wherein all the males were required to attend at the place where God placed his name.

The law of tithing was designed for the following reasons:

- To support the priesthood and other Levites in God's service
- To be used to enjoy the annual observances and festivals
- To help the widows, orphans, and strangers in times of need

Because the first covenant with national Israel has been canceled by God and a new one has been established through the sacrifice of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, there are now a whole new set of circumstances for the worshiper of God (Heb.8:6-10). Those who are called under the new covenant to participate in the first resurrection are not under the laws and rules of the first covenant in the same way ancient Israel was.

It is true that many of the terms, conditions, and laws of the first covenant were placed in the new covenant. However, the law of tithing is not one of them. It is impossible for Christians today to conform to the law of tithing as set forth under the agreement with national Israel, because the circumstances have changed. Today, national Israel does not exist under the rule of God, and there is no Levitical priesthood officiating at a place where God has placed his name. Until these circumstances change, absolutely no one can obey the law of tithing as originally given to ancient Israel.

MALACHI CHAPTER THREE

Many preachers have pounded the pulpit and repeated Malachi 3:7-10 in support of their belief of a universal tithing law. Although the prophet's indictment and stinging rebuke is indeed a condemnation for not giving tithes and offerings, it does not apply to the Father's elect children today.

In order to understand Malachi's message, one must understand to whom he is giving this reprimand. It is clear that he is not speaking to the Gentile nations nor is he speaking to the entire House of Israel, because the ten tribe nation of Israel had been taken into captivity several hundred years before the ministry of Malachi. Although the first verses of Malachi 3 are prophetic, there can be no doubt that the only group of people he could be talking to are the House of Judah and perhaps a few from the House of Israel who were scattered around the area of Judea:

"And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, says the Lord of hosts. For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers you are gone away from my ordinances, and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, Wherein shall we return?" (Mal.3:5-7 KJV).

The main problem addressed here is that the people had almost entirely quit supporting the Levites with tithes and offerings and had become lax in their obedience to God's law. However, the Creator had promised to bless Israel with tremendous abundance (Deut.28) if they would keep their part of the covenant that they made with him at Mount Sinai.

WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me. But you say, Wherein have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse: for you have robbed me, even this whole nation" (Mal.3:8-9 KJV).

God is addressing the entire nation (House of Judah), when he says that they had robbed him. The covenant their forefathers had ratified at Sinai specifically stated they would obey whatever he asked them to do (Ex.19:5-8). One of the things he asked them to do was to give a tenth of their increase to him for the support of the Levites.

Because they were not tithing and giving offerings, which were also required, they were stealing the tithe that belonged to him by right of contract. God also tells them they had been cursed because they had robbed him and kept his tithe for their own use.

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and test me, says the Lord of hosts, and see if I will open the windows of heaven to you, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.3:10-11KJV Para.).

Although the people were breaking the covenant, God was more than willing to forgive them and bless them. All they had to do was keep their part of the covenant: *"Honor the Lord with your substance, and with the firstfruits of all your increase: So shall your barns be filled with plenty, and your presses shall burst out with new wine" (Pro.3:9-10 KJV).*

The prophet Nehemiah, contemporary of Malachi, reprimanded the House of Judah for the same reasons that Malachi did:

"And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil to the treasuries" (Nehe.13: 10-12 KJV).

During the ministries of Malachi and Nehemiah, there were very hard times in the land of Judah. Many were in debt, and food supplies were very short; however, this situation was allowed to come on them because of their disobedience to God's law. See Deut.28.

The Storehouse

What and where were the storehouses Malachi referred to? Some people believe that there were storehouses scattered all over Israel; however, the storehouse that Malachi spoke of was at the temple in Jerusalem. These storehouses originated during the reign of King Hezekiah about the eighth century B.C., in which Hezekiah required the people of Jerusalem to bring a tenth of the produce to the temple:

"Moreover he [Hezekiah] commanded the people that dwell in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the Lord. And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, that dwell in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated to the Lord their God, and laid them by heaps" (2.Chron.31:4-6 KJV).

The People's Generosity

The people of Jerusalem and the people in the surrounding areas brought a tenth of their increase. 2.Chronicles 31:7-10 tells us that the people brought so much that it had to be piled up outside of the temple. Upon hearing of the people's generosity, Hezekiah had storage rooms built in the temple in order to store the tithes the people brought.

Although the principle of blessings for obedience is clearly shown in the third chapter of Malachi, there is no indication whatsoever that the law of tithing is a part of the new covenant. To say these scriptures are an indictment against all peoples and nations because they do not tithe is a misrepresentation of what God intended to be conveyed by Malachi.

Although the first few verses of Malachi 3 seem to be prophetic, Malachi was plainly addressing this chapter to the nation of Judah, which was under a curse because they were not tithing and supporting the Levites as they had agreed to do. This chapter hardly applies directly, or literally to Christians.

Just because parts of the Book of Malachi refer to the 'end of the age' does not mean that the entire book is prophetic. If one believes that Malachi 3:8-10 applies in a dual sense to the end of the age, as well as Malachi's day, then one must completely and totally disregard the contextual setting of the chapter.

If we take an honest look at Malachi, chapter 3, in context, what Malachi was inspired to say cannot in any way be used to establish the premise that there is a universal tithing law, nor does Malachi give any authority to enforce the law of tithing on the elect of God today. Taken at face value, Malachi 3:8-10 is completely understandable in its historical context. To read more into these scriptures than was intended in order to gain financial support for the church and the ministry is totally unwarranted and unnecessary.

NEW TESTAMENT TITHING

The important questions for Christians today in regard to tithing are the following: Is tithing a requirement under the new covenant? If so, how must it be collected and administered? If tithing is not required, how does one fulfill one's obligation to support the church and its ministry?

RENDER TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S

Most proponents of tithing today use the following New Testament text to prove that the law of tithing is binding on Christians today:

"And they sent out to him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God in truth, neither care you for any man: for you regard not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What think you? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt you me, you hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought to him a penny. And he said to them, Whose is this image and superscription? They said to him, Caesar's. Then said he to them, Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left him, and went their way" (Matt.22:16-22 KJV).

Does this text show that the law of tithing is binding on Christians today? No, it does not! Tithing is not mentioned or alluded to in this text. When Matthew 22:15 is read, the motive for the Pharisee's question becomes clear. *"The Pharisees took counsel how they might entangle him in his words."*

Jesus' words in verses 16-22 were spoken in the context of answering an attempt of the Pharisees to trap him into saying something that could be considered sedition or rebellion against the Roman government. If he did, they would have had a reason to bring an accusation against him before the Romans. These men were very foolish, because Christ understood their motives and said, *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."*

The Jews were a conquered people. They were not sovereigns over their property or their lives. All that they possessed belonged to Caesar. They lived or died by the will of Caesar. When Jesus said *"Render to Caesar what is Caesar's,"* he was not making a superficial statement, because Caesar owned everything by right of conquest.

The only thing Caesar could not control or own was the will and spirit (mind) of this conquered people, which was theirs to do with as they pleased. Each Jew had the prerogative to either obey Caesar or to obey God. Disobedience to Caesar brought physical punishment. But, disobedience to God had even more far-reaching consequences.

The question here was not one of tithes or even money. The question was about who one should obey—"Caesar, or God?" Jesus' gives the right answer: *"When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left him, and went their way"* (v22).

THE TITHING OF THE SCRIBES & PHARISEES

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt.23:23 KJV).

The Scribes and Pharisees were very careful to pay tithes on small amounts of herbs and spices that they probably had grown in a small pot or garden.

"And the Lord said to him, Now do you Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. You fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; and, behold, all things are clean to you. But woe to you, Pharisees! for you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these [former] ought you to have done, and not to leave the other [latter] undone. Woe to you, Pharisees! for you love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets" (Lk.11: 39-43 KJV).

The Scribes and Pharisees were very legalistic and they meticulously tithed the smallest increase of their herb garden, which was done to fulfill the law of tithing that concerned agricultural goods produced from the land. Jesus said they were right in giving to God what was rightfully his. However, Jesus brings to light a serious attitudinal problem these people had in regard to their fellow man and the rest of God's law. Moreover, Jesus reprimands them for their legalistic, hypocritical, and loveless attitude.

The Levitical Priesthood were still in authority and officiating in religious matters during Christ's lifetime, so the tithe was still to be paid to them under the law of tithing. Only after Jesus' death and resurrection was the agreement with national Israel revised and replaced with a far better one.

THE LABORER'S HIRE

Another scripture that is often quoted in an attempt to prove that the law of tithing is still binding is Luke 10:7:

"And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house" (KJV).

In this account, Jesus sent out the seventy disciples to preach about the Kingdom of God and he told them not to take any money with them, but to accept what is provided for them along the way (Lk.10:1-12). Many people use this text to say that Christians should tithe and that the ministry must be the recipient of these tithes because they are the laborers of the church. Indeed, one who labors in the proclamation of the gospel is worthy of his hire.

In order to understand the meaning of Luke 10:7, one must understand the circumstances that surrounded those whom Jesus sent forth to proclaim the gospel message. They left their jobs in order to become laborers of the gospel; therefore, their means of support came from those whom they served through the proclamation of the gospel or through the supernatural works that they bestowed on those with whom they came in contact. See also Matt.10:5-10.

It is not wrong for those who serve the church and do the work of the church full or part-time to be compensated for this work.

Some people think that they are worthy of their hire and they may or may not be right. The measure of whether one is worthy or not depends entirely upon the service rendered. Many quasi-Christian evangelists, preachers, and teachers believe that they are worthy to be kept in the style of kings and they live in opulence with private aircraft, mansions, and a host of servants. Where do these people of such supposed great ability and service get their examples for such treatment? Their examples for such treatment is not found in the Bible; instead, their example is the society around them.

For the servants of the elect to live in opulence, while those whom they are to serve live in constant need is nothing short of criminal and a gross violation of the law of love.

Those who call themselves 'ministers' of the living God and draw substance from the church beyond what is just and prudent are stealing from God and his people. Misappropriation or mis-management of what is given to God is gross misconduct and will be dealt with very severely in the day of judgment by God the Father.

Where Should Financial Support Come From?

If the law of tithing is not binding on the elect of God today, from where does the financial support for the work of the ministry and the proclamation of the gospel come?

God does not need human instruments to proclaim his message. The fact is that God is powerful enough to proclaim his message without our help. However, he has purposed to use people to perform much of this work for him.

But, how will the ministry be supported if people do not tithe? Paul supported himself a good deal of the time, and God provided for Elijah through miracles (1.Kgs.17:13-16, 19:4-8). We humans tend to forget that God is all powerful. For him to provide food, shelter, protection, and financial help for his elect is a small thing in comparison to what he is doing to sustain his physical creation. God can and will provide for those who ask of him in faith. However, just because he can and does provide, does not mean that a Christian can neglect their responsibility to assist in the sustaining of those who are engaged in the work of the gospel when it is prudent or necessary.

WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS

"Do not lay up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and rust does corrupt, and where thieves break in and steal: But lay up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves cannot break in nor steal: For where your treasure is, that is where your heart is" (Matt.6:19-21 Para.).

Just what is your treasure? What is the most treasured thing a person can possess? Is it money, friends, houses, fine clothes, jewelry? Or is it the one thing that money cannot buy—life? Are not all things secondary to one's life? Without life there is nothing. The thing God wants his elect children to store up in heaven is righteous character that will endure forever. Wherever one places one's effort and one's life is where one's treasure is.

PHYSICAL THINGS WILL PERISH

Above all other people on earth, Christians should realize that the physical things of this life are meaningless when compared to the eternal rewards offered by God the Father. Most people treasure their physical life above all else, but Jesus says the higher priority should go to the things of the spirit:

"And he said to them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. And he spoke a parable to them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be, which you have provided? So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Lk.12:15-21 KJV). See also Lk.12:31-34.

Jesus does not mean that the elect should not be wealthy; however, he does mean that wealth should not be one's main priority.

Laying up treasure in heaven involves putting God first in our lives and seeking the eternal things of righteousness and the Kingdom of God more than the physical temporary things of this life.

In this parable Jesus refers to the law of tithing when he speaks about one's priorities in life. If one's first priority is putting self and material gain ahead of God and others, one is laying up treasures on earth, not in heaven. Where one's treasure is, indicates where one's heart is.

The apostle John wrote, *"Beloved I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers"* (3.Jn.2).

THE PRINCIPLE OF WORK FOR PAY

Many people believe that the elect will not support the church or its work if they are not required to tithe. This is a valid concern, but giving is still a personal commitment. If a person is unwilling or unable to provide material support for the church and its work, it is a matter that needs to be dealt with between God and that person, because God knows the heart. For one person to condemn another because of the degree of material support a person gives or does not give is wrong, because only God knows the attitude and heart of an individual.

Those who come under the new covenant during the gospel age must strive to bring every thought and aspect of their life into conformity with this covenant. A person who has accepted its terms and conditions cannot withhold any facet of their life. True Christianity is not to be taken lightly. The commitment to the Father and Jesus Christ must be total and is the most serious commitment a person can ever make with their life.

Many preach that tithing should be done out of a sincere desire to please God. Although they are misguided and uninformed on the subject, they are at least demonstrating a genuine desire to put God first in this area of their life. Unfortunately many have been preaching the doctrine of tithing to further their own interests. Instead of being honest and forthright in teaching the truth about this subject, they pervert the scriptures and place unnecessary burdens on people.

Even if the law of tithing were applicable today, over 99% of those who profess to obey it are in violation of this law in one point or another, especially in the point of tithing on one's monetary income.

Although there is not one scripture in the entire biblical record that instructs the elect of God to observe the law of tithing as stated under the first agreement with national Israel, there are many scriptures that instruct the elect to freely share their skills, talents, time, and material goods to support the church and those who labor in the gospel.

THE ATTITUDE OF GENEROSITY

The attitude of generosity is repeatedly stressed as being a desirable character trait, but selfishness is strongly condemned:

"There is that scatters, and yet increases; and there is that withholds more than is right, but it tends to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that waters shall be watered also himself" (Pro.11:24-25 KJV).

"But this I say, he that sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he that sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver" (2.Cor.9:6-7 Para.).

The Bible clearly shows that generosity is one of the major character traits of God the Father and our Savior:

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil.2:3-5 KJV).

THE MELCHIZEDEC PRIESTHOOD

There is no doubt that God directed the Israelites to tithe in order to support the Levites and the Levitical priesthood, and most professing Christian ministers recognize that they are not Levites or a continuation of the Levitical priesthood. However, with this admission comes the problem of how to legitimize the receiving of tithes.

Many teach that, after Jesus became the High Priest in heaven, (after the order of Melchizedec), he assumed the function of the Aaronic priesthood and made those who were to minister to his Father's elect children a part of this priestly order. Others believe that after Jesus' resurrection, the authority and responsibility for shepherding God's people passed from the Levitical priesthood to the apostles and then to the eldership. Because of these beliefs, most professing Christian ministers assume that they have the right to accept tithes from those under their authority.

Although these beliefs may seem to have some merit, there was no transfer of authority and responsibility from the Levitical priesthood to the elders of the congregations of God. Moreover, the elders of the early church were not a part of the priestly order of Melchizedec. The spiritual leaders of the congregations of God have a distinctly different purpose and responsibility in the plan of God for the salvation of humanity. Furthermore, there are a number of false assumptions that have been made by biblical scholars, quasi-Christians, and spiritual leaders of the elect that need to be dealt with in order to clearly understand the authority of those who will serve the elect as spiritual leaders during the end of the age.

It is clear that Jesus Christ is now of the priestly order of Melchizedec (Heb.6:20; 7:1-28), so many assume that the ministers of Christ are also ordained to this priestly order; however, this is a false assumption. The scriptures clearly show that it is only Christ who is of this order. Nowhere in the New Testament is there even the slightest hint that those who minister to the elect of God during the gospel age of salvation are ordained into the Melchizedec priesthood.

Hebrews 5:1-10 KJV

"For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins" (vs.1-3).

Here, we find that those of the Levitical priesthood were imperfect and they had to have a sacrifice made for their own sins, which is the first clue to understanding why the spiritual leaders of the congregations of God are not of the Melchizedec order of priests. They cannot be of this order because they do not have the authority to offer gifts and sacrifices for others. This is also one of the reasons why the authority of the Levitical priesthood was not transferred to the spiritual leaders of the congregations of God.

"And no man takes this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said to him, You are my Son, today have I begotten you. As he said also in another place, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec" (vs.4-6) See also Psa.110:4.

Just as the Creator God (Jesus Christ) called Aaron to the priesthood, God the Father personally chose and ordained Jesus Christ to the priestly order of Melchizedec. Search the Bible from the beginning to the end and you will find only one person of human origin who was ordained to the priestly order of Melchizedec; that person is Christ.

"Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to him that is able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedec" (vs.7-10).

"Where Jesus entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedec" (Heb.6:20 Para.).

Although the elect of God are a royal priesthood (1.Pet.2:9), they are not at this time part of the priestly order of Melchizedec. It is only Jesus Christ that is of the order of Melchizedec. It should be evident that the spiritual leaders within the church during the gospel age of salvation have a completely different ministry from Jesus Christ who ministers to the Father's elect children as a high priest. Moreover, they have a different ministry from the Levitical priesthood who will minister to physical Israel.

Melchizedec, a Superior Priesthood

The writer to the Hebrews explains why the Melchizedec priesthood is far superior to the Levitical priesthood, which was demonstrated when the Levites symbolically paid tithes to Melchizedec through Abraham.

"For truly they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he [Melchizedec] whose descent is not counted from them [the Levites] received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him [Abraham] that had the promises. And without any contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. And here men that die [the Levites] receive tithes; but there he [Melchizedec] receives them of whom it is witnessed that he lives [an eternal being]. And as I may so say, Levi also, who received tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he [Levi] was still in the loins of his father [Abraham] when Melchizedec met him" (Heb.7:5-10).

Verses 5-10 clearly show the distinction between the Levitical priesthood and the priestly order of Melchizedec. The Levitical priesthood is a physical priesthood, which is inferior to the order of Melchizedec, which is a spiritual priesthood.

"But this man [Jesus Christ], because he continues for ever, has an unchangeable priesthood" (Heb.7:24 KJV).

Verse 24 is extremely important because some who minister within the congregations of God believe that this scripture proves that they are of the Melchizedec order of priests by virtue of being in a leadership position.

A more literal translation of the phrase *an unchangeable priesthood* is *a priesthood which passes not from one to another*. If the Melchizedec priesthood cannot be transferred from one to another and is an order of priests that must be entered into, men who believe that they are of the priestly order of Melchizedec are mistaken, because the scriptures clearly show that Jesus Christ is the only human who has entered into this order of priests.

The message of Hebrews 7 is that now we have a perfect high priest who sprang out of Judah, not Levi, who is able to bridge the gap between man and God the Father, which enables man to come into God's presence.

A Perfect High Priest

Hebrews 7:11-16 KJV

"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (vs.11-12).

Verse 12 is often used to substantiate the claim that today's spiritual leaders have the authority to collect tithes from God's people, because the priesthood is now changed. But, is this what this text actually says? Verse 12 concerns the law that regulated who may officiate as high priest of the nation of Israel. Only a man who is of the tribe of Levi and of the bloodline of Aaron can become a high priest of national Israel. This law has never been changed. The prophet Ezekiel says that after Christ's return, decedents of Aaron will still officiate as high priests. The law that has been changed, is how one may access God the Father. Prior to Jesus Christ, no human could access God the Father. But now, this law is changed. Now, through Jesus Christ who is descended from the tribe of Judah, the Father's children may come into his presence.

Under the first agreement with national Israel, the High Priest acted as a bridge between God and his people. Because the High Priest himself was guilty of sin and under the death penalty, he was also in need of a perfect sacrifice and a perfect high priest to act as an intermediary between himself and God:

"For he of whom these things are spoken pertains to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchizedec there arises another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life" (vs.13-16).

Because of the imperfection of both the sacrifices and the High Priest of Israel, no human could pass beyond the Creator God into the presence of God the Father. But, why wasn't this possible? The reason is that the Father dwells in heaven, and any human who is allowed to come into his presence must be totally sinless, holy, and righteous. No human could qualify or had the authority to go before him prior to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, because before the advent of Christ, all people were sinners and under the death penalty for the violation of the Father's law. Therefore, in order to solve this problem a new spiritual high priest had to be ordained after the Melchizedec order of priests, which is a sinless spiritual priesthood. See Gen.14:18; Psa.110:4.

Hebrews 7:11-16 shows a change in the conditions of the first agreement with national Israel; this change allows the elect of God during the gospel age of salvation to go directly before God the Father without going to a physical priest and having him speak to God on their behalf, which was done under the first agreement with ancient Israel:

"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God'. . . .He sets aside the first to establish the second. . . . Day by day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:5-12 NIV).

Jesus Christ is now the High Priest who sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. And because of his sacrifice and the new agreement, there is now a new life-giving way to gain access to the very presence of God the Father.

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God" (Heb.10:19-21 KJV).

"But now has he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better agreement, which was established upon better promises" (Heb.8:6 KJV).

Our High Priest

Jesus Christ now holds an extremely important position that is vital to our salvation. He is our high priest. It is because he lives that he is able to be our high priest and intercede on our behalf before the Father:

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb.4:14-15 KJV). See also Heb.2:14-18; 9:7-28.

Jesus Christ is now a spiritual high priest after the order of Melchizedec, which is a higher order of priests than the Aaronic priesthood, because it is a spiritual order of priests. Jesus Christ did not replace the physical Aaronic order of high priests; he is above the Aaronic priesthood. Aaron's descendants through Zadok will still be high priests during Christ's reign as King of kings and Lord of lords when he rules the earth from Jerusalem after his return. See Ezekiel, chapters 40-48.

From what is said in the above scriptures about the order of Melchizedec, it should be obvious that no one who serves the elect under Jesus Christ is a part of the order of Melchizedec. Moreover, none of those who serve Jesus Christ as his ministers are spiritual priests or spiritual high priests in heaven. Only Jesus Christ is in heaven serving the elect as their high priest before God the Father.

Those who serve the elect of God serve them in a much different capacity than the Aaronic priesthood served ancient Israel and in a much different way than Jesus Christ now serves the elect.

The Changing of the Covenant

What many fail to understand about the New Covenant, which Jesus established with his death and resurrection, is that it pertains to two distinctly different peoples. It is a covenant with the physical people of national Israel that will be implemented after Christ's return as King of kings, and it is a covenant with those whom the Father calls to be his elect children during the gospel age of salvation. It is the portion of the covenant that concerns the Father's elect children that is the better covenant spoken of by the writer to the Hebrews.

The covenant with national Israel still contains provisions for a physical high priest and priesthood, whereas the covenant with the Father's elect contains a provision for a spiritual high priest (Jesus Christ). No physical high priest can intercede on their behalf to the Father. However, those of the Father's earthly nation of kings and priests have the ability to intercede on behalf of each other under certain circumstances. See Jms.5:16; 1.Jn.5:14-17; Eph.6:17-19.

The writer to the Hebrews explains the cancellation of the first covenant with national Israel and the establishment of a new agreement with national Israel and the Father's elect children of his new creation.

Hebrews 8:6-9, 13

"But now has he [Jesus Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he said, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord" (vs.6-9 Para.).

Because national Israel did not keep the agreement that their ancestors made with the Creator God at Mount Sinai, God has canceled it and made another that is far superior.

"In that he said, A new covenant, he has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away" (v13 Para.).

The first agreement that the Creator God (Jesus Christ) made with national Israel was ready to vanish and it did vanish with the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.. The first covenant that God made with national Israel is no longer valid, it has been replaced with a new agreement that will be formalized after Christ's return and the gathering of national Israel.

The biblical fact is that the spiritual leaders who serve the Father's elect children during the gospel age of salvation are a separate and distinct ministry from the Melchizedec ministry of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Levitical Priesthood to national Israel, because they are separated and ordained for a distinctly different purpose.

DID THE APOSTLES COLLECT TITHES?

If tithing were a Christian principle, there would likely be some reference to the apostles collecting or distributing tithes. An example of people involved in supporting the ministry and the church is that of Ananias and Sapphira and their land sale:

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the holy spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not your own? and after it was sold, was it not in your own power? why have you conceived this thing in your heart? you have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:1-4 KJV).

Most people who practice tithing today would say that Ananias and Sapphira had lied about the sale price of their property so that they would not have to pay so much tithe; however, this is not the case at all, notice what Peter says to them:

"While it remained, was it not your own? and after it was sold, was it not in your own power? why have you conceived this thing in your heart? you have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:4 KJV).

Peter did not mention anything about tithes or offerings. He said the money was theirs. Neither God nor the church were entitled to any part of this money until it was pledged to the church. Only after the pledge was made did the money belong to God. Ananias and Sapphira's sin was not that of failing to tithe or give a proper offering. Their sin was lying.

THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Anyone who has read the writings of Paul should have observed that he did not water down the truth of God. He preached all the truth and did not hold back correction when it was necessary. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul shows them that they had a problem with their spiritual attitude, behavior, and understanding and he tells them how to correct these problems

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to carnal, even as to babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able. For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men? For while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are you not carnal?" (1.Cor.3:1-4 KJV).

"To this very hour we have gone hungry and thirsty, without even enough clothes to keep us warm. We have been kicked around without homes of our own. We have worked wearily with our hands to earn our living . . ." (1.Cor.4:11-12 LBP).

Paul and the others who served with him were not collecting tithes and offerings from the Corinthians; they were supporting themselves as they taught these people God's truth. In this letter, Paul enumerates many of the Corinthian's problems and tells them what to do to correct these problems. It only seems logical that if Paul and the others with him were authorized to receive tithes, he would have also mentioned this in the long list of problems that those at Corinth needed to correct.

1 Corinthians 9:1-15 is often quoted to prove that the law of tithing is binding on the elect today, but this is not Paul's intent:

"I am an apostle, God's messenger, responsible to no mere man. I am one who has actually seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes. And your changed lives are the result of my hard work for him. If in the opinion of others, I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you, for you have been won to Christ through me. This is my answer to those who question my rights. Or don't I have any rights at all? Can't I claim the same privilege the other apostles have of being a guest in your homes? If I had a wife, and if she were a believer, couldn't I bring her along on these trips just as the other disciples do, and as the Lord's brothers do, and as Peter does? And must Barnabas and I alone keep working for our living, while you supply these others?" (vs.1-6 LBP).

Apparently someone at Corinth had questioned Paul's apostleship and he was setting the record straight. Although Paul was a tentmaker and more than likely supported himself by working in this trade as indicated in Acts 18:3 and 20:34, it seems that the church at Corinth was supporting the efforts of others while they labored in the gospel, but they were not supporting Paul who had raised up this church:

"What soldier in the army has to pay his own expenses? And have you ever heard of a farmer who harvests his crop and doesn't have the right to eat some of it? What shepherd takes care of a flock of sheep and goats and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk? And I'm not merely quoting the opinions of men as to what is right. I'm telling you what God's law says. For in the law God gave to Moses he said that you must not put a muzzle on an ox to keep it from eating when it is treading out the wheat. Do you suppose God was thinking only about oxen when he said this? Wasn't he also thinking about us? Of course he was. He said this to show us that Christian workers should be paid by those they help. Those who do the plowing and threshing should expect some share of the harvest. We have planted good spiritual seed in your souls. Is it too much to ask, in return, for mere food and clothing?" (vs.7-11 LBP).

Paul tells them here that all those who labor in the gospel should be paid for their effort. Doesn't it seem a bit strange that Paul did not quote the tithing law to get his point across? Paul had been a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:4-5); he knew the law extremely well and he knew that the law of tithing did not apply during the gospel age of salvation, which is why he never mentions it in his reprimands to the churches or to individuals.

"You give them to others that preach to you, and you should. But shouldn't we have an even greater right to them? Yet we have never used this right, but supply our own needs without your help. We have never demanded payment of any kind for fear that, if we did, you might be less interested in our message to you from Christ" (v.12 LBP).

Paul clearly shows that it is the responsibility of the elect to support those who labor full-time in the church and the gospel. Paul had a right to expect to be supported by the congregation at Corinth but he did not ask for this support while he was there.

"Do you not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so has the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (vs.13-14 KJV).

There is no doubt that Paul is talking about the Levites who received tithes and offerings in payment for their service at the temple and to the people. However, the point he is stressing is that those who preach the gospel should be supported by those to whom the gospel is preached.

"Don't you realize that God told those working in his temple to take for their own needs some of the food brought there as gifts to him? And those who work at the altar of God get a share of food that is brought by those offering it to the Lord. In the same way the Lord has given orders that those who preach the Gospel should be supported by those who accept it. Yet I have never asked you for one penny. And I am not writing this to hint that I would like to start

now. In fact, I would rather die of hunger than lose the satisfaction I get from preaching to you without charge" (vs.13-15 LBP).

One thing to remember is that one spiritual law of God is just as important as another. The apostle James says, "*Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offends in one point, he is guilty of violating the whole law" (Jms.2:10 Para.).*

For the apostle Paul to unilaterally make a decision to temporarily suspend the tithing law for the congregation at Corinth would have been to defy God and reject his calling to preach the truth. The apostle Paul makes no mention of tithes at all, he does not even infer that tithes should be paid. The whole context is wages for service rendered.

There are some people who believe that the spiritual leaders of the church should support themselves as Paul did for much of his ministry. However, just because a man becomes a spiritual leader within the congregations of God, it does not mean that he somehow has more time, substance, and energy than any other member of the church. Doing the work of the ministry takes extra time, money, and energy. A married or single spiritual leader must take much time from his family or his personal pursuits in order to properly fulfill his responsibility.

THE COLLECTION AT CORINTH

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 16, there is an account that many people who worship on the first day of the week use to justify their tithing and offering practices:

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do you. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever you shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality to Jerusalem" (1.Cor.16:1-3 KJV).

It is interesting to note that during 41-54 A.D. there was a drought, which was predicted by the prophet Agabus that encompassed a large part of that area around Jerusalem. Moreover, there is always a need for food during and after a drought, because it takes time for the land to become productive again. In all likelihood these were the circumstances that necessitated the collections made by the apostle Paul:

"And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great drought throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar" (Acts 11:27-28 KJV).

It seems that the apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in late spring of 55 A.D., and he began a collection that was meant for drought relief. Paul also mentions this collection in his letter to the congregation of God at Rome (about 58 A.D.):

"But now I go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints who are at Jerusalem. It has pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain" (Rom.15:25-28 KJV).

This account speaks about an offering of produce for those at Jerusalem, but it never mentions tithing.

In his second letter to Corinth, Paul states again that he took nothing from them in the way of physical support:

"Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so will I keep myself" (2.Cor.11:7-9 KJV).

If those in the other congregations that Paul mentions were required to tithe, why would Paul have felt he was robbing them in order to serve the congregation at Corinth. Because Paul had been a well educated legalistic Pharisee, and of the tribe of Benjamin (not Levi) he knew that he had no right to the tithes under God's first agreement with national Israel. Clearly, he and the other apostles and elders were supported through voluntary offerings by God's people. There is no scripture in the entire New Testament that indicates otherwise.

PAUL'S KINDNESS

Some people believe that the apostle Paul was a hard hearted person, but the contrary is true. He was very kind, caring, and merciful, even to his own hurt. Paul had a right to be supported by those he was serving but he did not take what was rightfully his, because he did not want to offend the members of the Corinthian congregation:

"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:33-35 KJV).

The apostle Paul and others who served the elect of God practiced what they preached. They worked long and hard to support themselves in order to preach the gospel and serve God's people:

"Don't you remember, dear brothers, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled and sweated to earn enough to live on so that our expenses would not be a burden to anyone there, as we preached God's Good News among you" (1.Thes.2:9 LBP).

"For you well know that you ought to follow our example: you never saw us loafing; we never accepted food from anyone without buying it; we worked hard day and night for the money we needed to live on, in order that we would not be a burden to any of you. It wasn't that we didn't have the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to show you, firsthand, how you should work for your living" (2.Thes. 3:7-9 LBP).

What is totally lacking in the writings of Paul is any insistence for the elect of God to observe the law of tithing. However, Paul does have much to say about a giving attitude and that the elect of God should give to support those who serve them as elders and laborers in the gospel. Paul never quotes or refers to the law of tithing when discussing the matter of support for the church and the ministry. But why not? The reason is that Paul knew the law of tithing did not apply to the elect of God during the gospel age of salvation.

HISTORIANS AND NEW TESTAMENT TITHING

Historical evidence also proves that tithing has not been required of the children of God during the gospel age of salvation:

"It is admitted universally that the payment of tithes or the tenth of possessions for sacred purposes did not find a place within the Christian church during the age covered by the apostles and their immediate successors" (Hastings Dictionary of the Apostolic Church).

"The Christian church depended at first on voluntary gifts from its members" (Encyclopedia Britannica).

"It [tithing] was not practiced in the early church"; "The Christian church depended at first on voluntary gifts from its members" (Encyclopedia Americana).

"The early church had no tithing system—it was not that no need of supporting the Church existed or was recognized, but rather that other means would suffice" (The Catholic Encyclopedia).

In the Sclaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, it is explained that when the tithing concept was first adopted by the Catholic Church, it was voluntary in nature. But, at the Synod of Macon in the year 585 A.D., payment of tithes was made compulsory under threat of excommunication. Secular authorities were then used to enforce this demand.

"In the early Christian church the custom of consecrating to religious purpose a tenth of income was voluntary, and it was not made obligatory until the Council of Tours in 567 A.D.. The second Council of Macon, in 585, enjoined the payment of tithes under pain of excommunication" (article 'Tithes'). M'Clintock and Strong's Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature.

It is interesting to note that nowhere in the historical records of the early church or the New Testament writings can one find a record of the church financing its efforts or the ministry through the tithing system.

The early church did not practice the law of tithing given to Israel in the wilderness, but how and why was this law imposed on professing Christianity as a means of financial support? Early church history shows that the Catholic Church changed the way that it thought the church should be financed, and most of professing Christianity today accepts the Catholic church's teaching in this matter.

The historical record, and the New Testament scriptures prove that obligatory tithing was not taught or practiced by the early Christian church.

It becomes apparent when one searches history and the scriptures that there is no historical or scriptural authority whatsoever for carrying over and modifying (almost beyond recognition, as some have done) the law of tithing that was given to ancient Israel.

THE REJECTION OF TRUTH

The origin of professing Christianity's tithing system can easily be found by anyone who wishes to investigate the subject. But as always, many who come to know and understand the truth of God will refuse to accept or obey it.

To reject truth is willful sin. To those who are truly Christians and the elect of God, the writer to the Hebrews says of this type of attitude:

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb.10:26-27 KJV).

Jesus Christ says that we can know a person's spiritual condition by their fruit:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore you shall know them by their fruits" (Matt.7:15-20 KJV).

AN INDICTMENT FOR THIS AGE

Ezekiel, chapter 22, is part of a dissertation about the national and personal sins of Israel. Within this chapter, the prophet Ezekiel serves an indictment from God upon the people of Israel. Ezekiel gave this indictment and warning message about 127 years after the ten-tribe House of Israel had been taken into captivity by a foreign power. Whether or not the House of Israel received this prophetic message at that time; it is clear that this message has a contemporary meaning for the scattered House of Israel today:

"There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests [pastors and ministers] have violated my law, and have profaned my holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they made a difference between the holy and the profane . . ." (Ezk.22: 25-26 KJV).

Most professing Christian church leaders know that they are teaching tithing in opposition to biblical truth. But, rather than repent and teach the truth of God, they refuse to do so and tenaciously hold onto their teaching of tithing for their own gain.

No person or organization has ever had the authority to bind anything on the elect of God unless it can be proven from the Bible that it has already been bound in heaven. Unless today's tithing system within the congregations of God can be biblically proven as a valid way to financially support the church, it has no place in the true church of God.

NEW COVENANT LIBERTY

The first covenant between God and national Israel had a physical priesthood as the mediator between God and man and animal sacrifices, which had to be offered to cover the sins of the people. This system was to be supported by mandatory tithes on the agricultural and animal production of the land plus freewill offerings from all Israelites.

Under the New Covenant that is made with individuals who are called to become children of God during the gospel age of salvation, Jesus Christ is the High Priest, Advocate, and Mediator between the Father and his elect children. This new covenant is described in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 8:

"He [Jesus Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them [the Israelites], he said, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day

when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord" (Heb.8:6-9 Para.).

The new covenant is a better covenant and supersedes the first agreement that was made with national Israel. It is clear that the law of tithing that God gave to Israel does not apply to the elect of God today, because none of the conditions for its practice exist today. Moreover, the elect of God today have entered into a new and different relationship with the God family.

The fact is that the agreement that the Father's elect children have with him does not contain many of the laws, terms, and conditions that were in the agreement with ancient Israel, such as circumcision, sacrifices, a multiple tithing system, and many other requirements that were specifically given to the ancient Israelites for that day of salvation.

But just because a Christian does not have to abide by the Levitical tithing law does not mean that one is absolved of all responsibility to support the church and its work. One who uses the liberty of not being required to give a specific percentage of their increase as an excuse not to support the church or its work is violating many important spiritual principles about their responsibilities toward God, his people, and the church.

STEWARDSHIP

Jesus gave his Father's earthly children a commission embodying an outward concern for others. How the work of the church is to be supported is taught throughout the biblical record. The early disciples clearly understood how the work of the church was to be supported and the method they used is the one we should use today. There was no confusion or misunderstanding regarding this matter in the early church.

Paul was inspired to reveal that much of what was written as God's word before the gospel age of salvation is to be used to guide our lives today. If the tithing system given to ancient Israel were to be used literally as a guide for the support of the church, only people who make their living from growing agricultural products and animals would be required to give and bear the responsibility for the support of the church.

Although the giving of a set percentage of one's income to help support of the church, its work, and the poor is a good practice, there is a far better and more rewarding method for this support, which is set forth in the Bible. Besides the law of tithing, God provided another way for those who were not covered by the tithing system to have a part in supporting the Levites, the priesthood, the poor, and the temple system of worship. This method is the giving of freewill offerings, which is still a method that is binding upon the elect of God today.

WRITTEN FOR THE ELECT TODAY

Christ and the apostles taught from the Books of the Law, the Writings, the Prophets, and the Psalms. The prophet Isaiah said that the Savior would come and magnify these teachings (Isa.42:21). Jesus said that he taught his disciples the true meaning of the laws, principles, and precepts that had been inspired to be written down centuries before.

Speaking of the people and the events that were recorded in the inspired writings, Paul wrote the following:

"Now all these things happened to them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1.Cor.10:11 KJV).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works" (2.Tim.3:16-17 KJV).

OFFERINGS

The prophet Malachi makes a very important point that applies to the elect of God today and their responsibility to give offerings to God. Malachi 3:8-9 records that the nation of Israel had robbed God of tithes and offerings. However, these offerings were not a part of the law of tithing. They were freewill offerings that the people had to give to show their appreciation and gratitude to God for the blessings he had bestowed on them.

Although historical and biblical evidence proves beyond doubt that the elect of God are not obligated to observe the law of tithing, the holy scriptures also prove that the elect are robbing God and themselves if they do not freely and generously give offerings to support the body of Christ (the church) and its work.

After the Creator God had given the instructions to build the tabernacle, he requested that the Israelites bring an offering with which to construct the building (Ex.25:2-3). However, God did not specify the exact amount that each person should give; he left the amount to each individual's discretion.

The Creator also commanded the Israelites to bring gifts to him on a regular basis: *"Three times in a year shall all your males appear before Jehovah your God in the place which he shall choose: . . . they shall not appear before the Lord God empty; [but] each with a gift in his hand, according to the blessings of the Lord God your God which he has given you" (Deut.16:16-17 Para.).* Again, the gift or offering was required, but the amount of the gift is not specified.

The Terumah

"Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that gives it willingly with his heart you shall take my offering. And this is the offering which you shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass" (Ex.25:2-3 KJV).

Here, the English word *offering* has been translated from the Hebrew word *terumah*, which means *a contribution*. Simply put, God requested a contribution to build the tabernacle. Chapters 35 and 36, show that the Israelites contributed more than enough for the work of the tabernacle.

The Terumah Minah

"And there you shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the first of your herds and of your flocks" (Deut.12:6). See also Deut.23:23.

Here, the English word *freewill* is translated from the Hebrew word *minah*, which means a *gift*. Notice that these gifts were in addition to tithes and sacrificial offerings.

Many Examples of Freewill Offerings

In the Bible, there are many examples of people freely giving to God and others. When the tabernacle and altar were to be dedicated, the princes of Israel brought wagons, oxen, silver, gold and much more to be used in the service of the tabernacle. See Num.7:1-25.

The prophet Nehemiah and many others gave of their time and energy to bring wood to the temple for the burnt offerings. There is no doubt that this was a considerable undertaking, because there were a tremendous number of burnt offerings made each year at the temple:

"And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering [qorban, which is an offering to be brought through unselfish labor], to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law" (Nehe. 10:34 KJV).

"Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; and for the wood offering, at times appointed, And for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good" (Nehe.13:30- 31 KJV).

The Corban Offering

Mark 7:9-13 records Jesus' reprimand to the Pharisees for having the wrong attitude toward giving:

"And he said to them, Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother; and, Whoever curses father or mother, let him die the death: But you say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever you might be profited by me; he shall be free. And you suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of no effect through your tradition, which you have delivered: and many such like things do you" (KJV Para.).

The Greek word *corban*, which is used to explain the Pharisees' wrong attitude toward giving, is from the Hebrew word *qorban*, which means *an offering or oblation of self-sacrifice coming from one's life substance*.

The Pharisees were so perverted in their view of what they thought was righteousness that they twisted and manipulated the laws of God to fit their own selfish desires. The Living Bible gives a good translation of Christ's reprimand in Mark, chapter 7, and puts what he said in a proper perspective:

"You are simply rejecting God's laws and trampling them under your feet for the sake of tradition. For instance, Moses gave you this law from God: 'Honor your father and mother'. And he said that anyone who speaks against his father or mother must die. But you say it is perfectly all right for a man to disregard his needy parents, telling them, 'Sorry, I can't help you! For I have given to God what I could have given to you.' And so you break the law of God in order to protect your man-made tradition. . . ." (Mk.7:9-13 LBP).

Speaking of a time far into the future after the Kingdom of God is established on earth and all mankind is living in peace, the prophet Ezekiel says:

"For at Jerusalem in my holy mountain, says the Lord, all Israel shall worship me. There I will accept you, and require you to bring me your offerings and the finest of your gifts" (Ezk.20:40 LBP).

The Old Testament is full of examples of the Creator God requesting and receiving gifts, contributions, and freewill offerings. However, did the Creator God who became Jesus Christ need anything that his human creation could give him? Humans do not have the ability to supply God's needs. But they can give something that God the Father and Jesus Christ want. God the Father and Jesus Christ want their human creation to have an attitude of giving and sharing.

THE ATTITUDE UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

Under the new agreement, a person's attitude is more important than their overt actions, because this is where the thought process of spiritual sin begins. The physical act of sin is just the manifestation of what begins and is nurtured in one's mind. It is not the amount that one gives in support of the church and its work or how often one gives to the church or its work that is important to the Father and Jesus. It is one's attitude toward giving and sharing that is important, because one's attitude shows where one's heart is.

The responsibility to give is far greater under the new agreement than under the old, because the guidelines are different. Under the new agreement, one must give because they want to and not because they are required to. Spiritual Christianity—true Christianity—involves internalizing God's way of life and living it from the heart. True Christian giving is to be based on freely, cheerfully, and liberally giving and sharing from the heart.

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom.10:13-15 KJV).

It takes a vast amount of effort, time, talent, and money to preach and teach the truth of God to this sick and dying world. Although God could supply all of the material needs of the church and its work if he wanted to, he expects us to adopt the attitude of giving and supporting his work as part of our spiritual growth process. See Matt.28:19-20.

EXAMPLES OF GIVING

One reason that the writings of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were preserved was so that the Father's elect children could use them as a guide for spiritual growth. Therefore, we should seriously consider the examples of giving and sharing that are recorded for our benefit.

However, to use Abraham's and Jacob's example of giving and God's tithing system for ancient Israel as the authority to legislate tithing as a requirement upon the elect of God today is a misapplication of these examples. There is a vast difference between someone who decides from his heart to willingly and cheerfully dedicate a portion of his substance toward supporting the church and its work and someone who is commanded to do so or made to feel guilty if they do not.

A GIVING CHURCH

An excellent example of giving and sharing from the heart is that of the church at Philippi. These early Christians seem to have been more spiritually mature and expressed more of the right kind of love and spiritual fruit than some of the other churches that Paul served.

The tone of Paul's letter to the Philippians, though full of instruction and reprimands, is warm and reflects a positive confidence that the church is generally healthy spiritually. The tone is quite different from that of the letters to Corinth. Is it significant that, more than any other Church, the Philippians were faithful in supporting Paul even when he was in other areas and should have been supported by others.

"Notwithstanding you have well done, that you did communicate with my affliction. Now you Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again to my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: But I desire Fruit that may abound to your account. I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things that were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil.4:14-19 KJV).

The Philippians set an excellent example, and the positive assurance Paul gave them that God would supply their needs applies to anyone who is spiritually mature and fulfilling their responsibilities before God.

AUTHORITY TO RECEIVE SUPPORT

There is no doubt that it is the elects' responsibility to support the church and its work of proclaiming the gospel. The apostle Paul speaks about this obligation many times in his letters to the churches. Moreover, he tells the Corinthians it was his right to receive this support (1.Cor. chp.9; 2.Cor.chp.11), and he speaks of the generosity of the Philippians, the Galatians, and other churches. The churches of Paul's time supported the efforts of the ministry with freewill offerings as we who are called by God today should also do.

Paul's clear instructions in 1.Timothy 5:17-18 show that those who serve Christ as spiritual leaders of the elect and labor in the proclamation of the gospel have the right to receive support from those they serve. Every spiritually mature Christian who is seeking to live in accordance with God's way will endeavor to fulfill their responsibility to help support the church and its work:

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture says, You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward" (1.Tim.5:17-18 KJV).

THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt.6:31-33 KJV).

The elect are instructed not to be overly anxious or concerned about the physical, everyday needs of life. One thing a true Christian should realize above all else is that, if their priorities are not correct, they are walking on dangerous ground. Seeking the Kingdom of God cannot take second place to anything else in a Christian's life.

Jesus says, *"Seek you first the Kingdom of God"* (Matt.6:33). The elect of God have been called to be God the Father's sons and high officials in his spiritual government (Rev.5:10; 20:4-6). For a Christian to place anyone or anything above their calling and worship of God is indeed sad, because it shows a great lack of understanding of what is being offered by their heavenly Father.

Do we take care of all our material needs and desires first, and then think about the material needs of the church and its work?

The Father and Jesus Christ certainly do not intend that we prove our righteousness by starving or not properly fulfilling our personal responsibilities to our families. One caution we find over and over in the Bible is to avoid becoming too concerned with physical goods and appearances. One of the Ten Commandments deals with the very human problem of covetousness. None of us is immune to it and we should not overlook how spiritually devastating covetousness can be. Paul called it idolatry (Col.3:5), because it results in putting God in a secondary position. In the context of Christian generosity, Paul writes

"Let him that is taught in the word communicate [i.e., in the sense of sharing material goods. See Phil.4:14-15] to him that teaches in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal.6:6-8 KJV).

Paul uses the same analogy in discussing the subject of giving with the Corinthians:

"But this I say, He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you: that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2.Cor.9:6-8 KJV).

Jesus said the following about the principle of generosity:

"Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Lk.6:38 KJV).

The principle of reaping what we sow applies in every area of life, but it particularly applies in the realm of Christian giving and sharing. This is a living spiritual principle that is as much in effect today as in the days of Solomon. Solomon expresses this empirical principle:

"Cast your bread upon the waters: for you shall find it after many days" (Ecc.11:1 KJV).

THE WIDOW'S MITE

"And he [Jesus] looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts [Greek: doron. English: a present, sacrifice, gift or offering.] into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say to you, that this poor widow has cast more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in to the offerings of God: but she of her penury has cast in all the living that she had" (Lk.21:1-4 KJV).

Does God expect us to give all we have to the church and its work and live in poverty? No, he does not! Nowhere does God teach that people should give until they are impoverished. The Bible teaches just the opposite. Instead, we are expected to use good judgment and give as we are able and sometimes sacrifice if there is a necessity to do so.

Regardless of what some people think, adherence to the law of tithing in this age of salvation is not the key to financial success. However, placing the worship of God and obedience to his truth first in our lives is the key to eternal success. A person can give a tenth of everything he has to the church and its work and still go into poverty simply because *"Time and chance happens to us all"* (Ecc.9:11). If a person makes poor financial decisions, his finances are doomed to failure no matter how much, or how long he may have tithed or given and shared with others.

God does not expect us to give everything we possess. In Luke 21:1-4, Jesus shows that the Father looks at the attitude of an individual, not on the amount of the offering. The rich men gave much, but by comparison the widow gave far more. God wants us to give and share the amount that reflects, in our particular circumstances, the commitment to put him and his way of life first.

BE CAREFUL HOW YOU GIVE

"Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the

streets, that they may have glory of men. Truly say to you, They have their reward. But when you do alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand does: That your alms may be in secret: and your Father which sees in secret himself shall reward you openly" (Matt.6:1-4 KJV).

THE GENEROUS CHRISTIAN

The parable of the sheep and the goats has much to do with the support of the church and its work. Many people understand the first part of this parable, but very few understand who is being referred to in the last part.

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matt.25:31-33 KJV).

Here, there is a separation of sheep and goats, which represents two groups of people. One group is to be given a reward as shown in verses 34-40, and the other group is to be punished as shown in verses 41-46. But why is there a separation?

Those at His Right Hand

"Then shall the king say to those at his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me. Then shall the righteous ask him, Lord, when did we see you hungry, and fed you? or thirsty, and gave you drink? When did we take you in as a stranger? or naked, and we clothed you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and came to you? And the king shall answer and say to them, truly I say to you, inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me" (Matt.25: 34-40 Para.).

Who Are the Brethren In Verse 40?

Many people think that the brethren spoken of in verse 40 are one's fellow man, and that the principle is one of being neighborly and kind to one's fellow man. This may be true in a broad sense. However, the entire context of the chapter is Christ rewarding his followers (i.e., the Father's elect children).

Here, the English word *brethren* is translated from the Greek word *adelphos*, which generally denotes one's *near kinsman* or a *person of close association*. Moreover, the disciples and followers of Christ are a part of his family. Although there are other meanings to this word, such as *mankind* or *countrymen*, in this parable the word is clearly in the context of a close relationship.

Are all people who are living in sin and going about their evil ways the brothers of Christ? No, they are not. The scriptures are very clear as to the identity of Christ's brothers.

"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said to him, Behold, your mother and your brethren stand without, desiring to speak with you. But he answered and said to him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt.12:46-50 KJV).

Those at His Left Hand

"Then shall he say also to them at his left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was hungry, and you did not give me any food: I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink: I was a stranger, and you did not help me: naked, and you did not clothe me: sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me. Then shall they also ask him, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you? Then he shall say to them, Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt.25:41-46 Para.).

The lesson of this parable is very clear, when it is viewed in the context of the Father's elect children who are also the brothers of Jesus Christ. If one who professes to follow Christ is unwilling to give compassion and support to his spiritual brothers, he cannot be given eternal life. God the Father and Jesus Christ want to share everything that they have with those who are called to salvation. Giving and sharing are attributes of godly character, and in order to qualify for the Kingdom of God, a person must have this character trait. Those who willfully neglect the support of the church and its work are treading on dangerous ground and should examine their attitude toward their brothers in Christ.

SUPPORT FOR A COLLECTIVE WORK

Some people might believe that a Christian must belong to a collective work or organized group and support it or he will be condemned by God for not supporting his church and its work. However, the scriptures do not support such a concept.

Most of this world is deceived as to what a true follower of Christ is and how a Christian should behave. A Christian does not have to be part of a collective or organized work in order to fulfill his obligation to perform the Christian endeavor. To fellowship and to work with a dedicated group of loving Christians is indeed a wonderful experience and a tremendous opportunity for spiritual growth. However, there are some who cannot fellowship or help in a collective or organized work, because of circumstance, such as geographical location, distance, or other constraints.

This study is not written to make anyone feel guilty or to gain support for this or any other particular collective work. The intent is to help the Christian to understand and be able to place the concept of tithing and the giving of offerings in the proper perspective within one's own life. Some may not be able to find a group of true Christians to fellowship with or a group with which they agree in regard to the method of performing the Christian commission. Therefore, they may wish to remain autonomous in their Christian endeavor. Remember, God is interested in one's attitude.

A Christian can do their own personal work for God and be as dedicated a servant and disciple of our Savior as one who is part of a collective work. One's walk with God is an individual matter, not a collective situation. However, if one claims to be part of a collective work, the scriptures clearly show that one should support it with effort, finances, prayers, or whatever one is able to give or share.

Whether or not a person is part of a collective work, it is the individual Christian's responsibility to sort out how to apply the principle of giving and sharing as indicated in the biblical record. Giving, sharing, and an outgoing concern for others are not optional attitudes for a Christian, they are the foundation upon which godly character is built.

A MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

A point that escapes many when studying the subject of tithing is that the tithe was the minimum that God expected to be given to him for the support of the temple service and other services to Israel. Besides the tithe, God expected the Israelites to give generous offerings in the form of festival offerings and freewill offerings.

The tithe was the lowest acceptable level of giving, not the maximum acceptable level. If an Israelite gave just ten percent of his increase, he was only giving the minimum required. The Bible has many things to say about those that only do the minimum:

"But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say to him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say to him, Make ready where-with I may sup, and gird yourself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward you shall eat and drink? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I

think not. So likewise you, when you have done all these things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Lk.17:7-10).

Christ says that those who only do that which is required of them are unprofitable servants.

THE LUKEWARM CHRISTIAN

"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would that you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold or hot, I will [am about to] spue you out of my mouth. Because you say you are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and know you not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked: I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev.3:14-19 KJV).

There are many lessons a Christian can learn from this warning to the Laodiceans, and one of the most important is that God does not tolerate minimum performance. Those who have been called to be a son of God must endeavor to be zealous in their commitment to God. Jesus Christ says if one is doing the minimum that is required, he is unprofitable, and if one is lukewarm in his commitment to God, he is in grave danger of being cast out of the body of Christ.

God does not require or expect his elect children to give or share what they do not have. Furthermore, he will not condemn those who cannot give or share because of circumstance beyond their control or because of poverty. Giving materially to support the church and its work or others should not be done to the point of impoverishment, because our Father in heaven wants us all to prosper (Jn.10:10; 3.Jn.2).

GOOD WORKS

"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent to him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said,

Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the elect and widows, presented her alive" (Acts 9:36-41 KJV).

This account emphasizes Tabitha's giving attitude. She was a person of good works, and one who gave the gift of her time, energy, and physical substance. We do not know the reason why God gave her back her physical life. However, we do know that he placed a great deal of importance on her giving attitude, because he inspired her attribute of giving to be mentioned twice.

Another record of a giving attitude is that of the centurion Cornelius:

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying to him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Your prayers and your alms are come up for a memorial before God . . . And said, Cornelius, your prayer is heard, and your alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God" (Acts 10:1-4; 31).

Concerning giving, Paul writes:

"Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver" (2.Cor.9:7 KJV).

Here, the English word *cheerful* is translated from the Greek word *hilaros* which means *merry, willing, voluntarily*.

A major reason for developing a giving attitude is to practice being like Christ. Paul says to be Christ-minded:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil.2:5 KJV).

What was Christ's mind like? Jesus Christ who was the Creator God gave all that he had for humanity; he gave up his immortality to become a human and gave his life for all of humanity. We who have been chosen to follow him are admonished to have the same mind he has.

How can a person who professes to be a follower of Jesus Christ and his heavenly Father have a selfish attitude? A generous, giving, and sharing attitude is a godly character trait, which anyone who professes to be one of the Father's elect children should be perfecting as one grows in the grace and knowledge of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

In the biblical record, there are many examples of how to give to and share with the church, the work of the church, the ministry, fellow Christians, and others. But, how do we give the ultimate gift to God the Father and Jesus Christ? What is the gift that they earnestly desire with all their being?

First, one must know what gift is desired. A clue can be found by examining the things that God wants to give those whom he has called to salvation. He says he wants to give eternal life. He says through the apostle Paul:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1.Cor.2:9 KJV). See also Isa.64:4.

In the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt.25:34), Jesus says, *"Come you blessed of my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* It is clear from these and many other scriptures that God the Father and Jesus Christ want to share eternity with those called to salvation.

But how can this be accomplished unless those the Father calls respond positively to his teachings. The greatest gift we can give God the Father and Jesus Christ is obedience to the principles that have been given to us so that we can enter into the Kingdom of God as members of his divine family. Therefore, one who fails to learn the lesson of giving and sharing deprives himself of a vital dimension of what true Christianity is all about.

ANONYMITY IN GIVING

In a few countries around the world, the governments allow their citizens to deduct charitable gifts from their taxable income, whether they are given to churches or other organizations. These gifts must be recorded and proof must be kept to substantiate actual donations.

There are two problems associated with this kind of record keeping. The first is that it eliminates the anonymity of the giver, which allows others to view their personal interaction with God. The second problem is that people tend to impute motives and draw conclusions from this information.

The second problem is destructive to the one doing the judging. Jesus' example of the rich men and the widow's mite clarifies this problem. Only God knows the hearts and attitudes of people and he alone has the knowledge and the right to judge the attitude of giving. Outward appearances are often very deceiving.

God is not necessarily interested in the amount of effort expended or the size of the offering. However, he is very interested in the attitude of the giver, because the attitude shows the degree of one's spiritual conversion. No human has the right to judge another's Christianity purely on the basis of his gifts and offerings to a collective group or to individuals.

This judgment is beyond the responsibility and understanding of any individual and simply should not be done because it is usurping God's prerogative to be the judge of our efforts. It would seem far better to give anonymously and keep this most precious relationship private between the one giving and God than to go public with it.

However, there could be benefits to having the donations on record in countries where one is allowed to increase his income by claiming this tax benefit. The key to giving privately or openly is of course the degree of trust and confidence one has in those handling the gifts and offerings and one's own attitude toward God in the giving process.

THE TITHE AND THE OFFERINGS

For the ancient Israelite, tithing was not a complex issue. Only people who farmed the land or raised animals were required to tithe. If a person was required to tithe, the requirement was that a tenth of the increase must be given to God. However all Israelites were required to give mandatory and freewill offerings for the support of the priesthood and the needy. If the Israelites had been faithful in giving these offerings, all of their needs would have been supplied.

There were fundamental differences between the tithe and the offerings. The tithe was determined by God and could not be adjusted either up or down and it remained at the fixed rate of one tenth of what was produced from the land.

However, to determine the amount of an offering was just the opposite. The offering could be a large or a small amount of anything the person wanted to give. The amount of this offering depended entirely on the discretion of the one doing the giving. In other words, the amount depended upon the individual's attitude toward God.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

The concept of offering pertained to the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law. It is far easier for a person to fulfill the letter of a law than the spirit. When fulfilling the letter, one does not have to make a decision of what to do. What to do has already been decided. It is just a matter of obeying or not.

But with the spirit of the law, one must determine how the law applies to one's life and particular circumstances. Fulfilling the spirit of the law requires that a person do some introspection and attitude analysis before making a decision. The concept and requirement to give offerings for the support of the ministry and to give help to the needy is very much a part of the New Testament teachings for Christian behavior and cannot be overlooked if one is to stay in right-standing with God the Father and Christ.

The responsibility of the elect to support the church and its work compares in many ways with the ancient Israelites' responsibility to support the Levites, the priesthood, and the poor of Israel. However, the elect of God are under a completely different set of circumstances, because they have physical, as well as spiritual requirements placed upon them. The elect must not only fulfill the letter of their covenant with God the Father but also fulfill the spirit of the law.

How much should a person give and share with others? This question can only be answered by each individual, after considerable introspection into one's attitude and particular circumstances. It is obvious from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles that one is not required to give all of their substance to the support of others. Nevertheless, one should not neglect their responsibility to the church, its work, or others as the need arises.

The apostle John summarizes what the Christian attitude toward giving and sharing should be:

"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how can the love of God dwell in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in words, but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, then have we confidence toward God" (1.Jn.3:17-21 Para.).

The question of how much each individual should give and share is totally a matter of conscience, circumstances, attitude, dedication, and priorities in life and love toward God. Only each individual Christian can answer these questions.

Will you follow the precepts and traditions of man, or will you follow the truth of God? The decision is yours—no one else can decide this for you. The matter of offerings is totally between you and your God.

By B. L. Cocherell

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— CHAPTER —
NINETEEN

THE TONGUES QUESTION

There are many differing beliefs concerning the gift of languages that was given on the Festival of Pentecost when God began the New Covenant Church. And there are many differing opinions as to exactly what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthian church about their use of this gift.

Some people believe a person must speak in an unknown language in order to receive the holy spirit and become a son of God. Others believe that people who practice speaking in an unknown language in their religious assemblies are demon possessed or manifesting an unstable mind. Additionally, there is a belief that the gift of speaking in a foreign language is only given to very few and it is only to be used under very special circumstances.

Today, as in the early church, the misuse of this spiritual gift is the cause of many spiritual problems for those who do not understand the reason God gave this gift. There is no doubt that this subject is difficult and cannot be understood with a casual gloss of the scriptures. The following are two major factors which complicate this subject:

- Most people who study the tongues question attempt to justify their current belief on the subject.
- We are dealing with a subject whose history has all but been lost, with the exception of the biblical account.

There is a reason for everything God does, and so it is with the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language. This study attempts to answer the following two questions about the gift of languages and give a logical biblically based explanation for the use of this supernatural gift:

- Is there a logical biblical explanation for why this gift was given, or must we wait for the return of Christ for an answer?
- Are the accounts found in Acts, chapter 2, and 1 Corinthians, chapters 12, 13 and 14, speaking of the same subject?

Note:

In order to give a more correct rendering of what the scriptures say about the gift of languages, the word *language(s)* will often be used in place of the word *tongue(s)*, because the word *language(s)* more accurately translates the Greek word *glossa*. Additionally, the words *gifts* and *unknown* will be omitted where they do not appear in the original text because they cloud the original intent of these scriptures.

THE GIFT OF LANGUAGES

After Jesus Christ's ascension to his heavenly Father to be accepted as the first-fruits of the harvest of humanity, and during the Festival of Pentecost, the disciples and about 120 other followers of Christ gathered to observe the Feast of Weeks/Pentecost (Acts 1:12-15).

Some Bible Scholars believe the disciples and the others gathered in one of the large rooms or porches near the temple, which were available for public use. This may be true, because the temple area could accommodate over 200,000 people, and a large number of people heard those who had received the holy spirit speaking in foreign languages.

This meeting of the disciples and the other followers of Christ at the temple made it possible for Peter to speak to the large group of people who gathered after the event noted in Acts 2:2-4, of whom nearly three thousand accepted Christ as their savior. See Acts 2:41; 3:8-11; 5:12; Jn.10:23-25.

This particular Pentecost was an extremely important day for those gathered at the temple and for the rest of humanity. The fact that the disciples and the other followers of Christ were gathered together on Pentecost tells us that these individuals still felt the Feast of Weeks was to be celebrated. Otherwise, why else would they have been gathered together on the first day of the week, a day which would have otherwise been a normal work day? Why would they leave their homes, jobs, and other responsibilities unless this day was an observance which was still required as a part worshipping God?

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1 KJV).

The English phrase *was fully come* is translated from the Greek word *sumpleroo*, which indicates a specific point in time. This Pentecost was not like any other Pentecost in history; this Pentecost was at a specific point in time set aside before the creation of the earth as the ending and the beginning of many things within God's plan for humanity.

In the Fullness of Time

Before this specific Pentecost, God the Father had sent his son to fulfill his plan for the redemption of humanity and to make it possible for humans to become a part of his heavenly family. This Pentecost was a day on which a large number of the prophetic first-fruits of the wheat harvest were adopted by the Father into his family.

"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, having come out of a woman, having come under the law, that he might redeem the ones under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba! Father!" (Gal.4:4-6 Para.).

The Fire of God

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:2-3 KJV).

No biblical or historical record of such an event can be found before the advent of Christ. Moreover, nowhere in this age of the Church do we find these same events happening within the body of Christ, nor can we find this exact situation repeated in scripture. This was a one-time event, which was performed at a specific moment in history for a specific purpose.

During this Pentecost, the fire of God descended upon those who were present. This was the fire of the spirit that was present when Moses met the Creator God at the burning bush. This was also the fire that descended upon Mount Sinai, upon the tabernacle, and upon the temple that Solomon built in order to show that the Creator God had placed his name and presence there.

It is important to understand that the fire of God consumes all things that are impure, because nothing impure can dwell in the presence of God. However, the people present with the disciples this Pentecost were not impure; they were chosen by God the Father to be among the first of humanity to partake of his divine nature. These individuals had been purified through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ; therefore, they were not destroyed by the power of God, which came to rest upon and within them.

Just as this fire descended upon the tabernacle and upon the temple that Solomon built, on this Festival of Pentecost, the spirit-fire of God descended upon the children of the New Covenant; thereby, the Father had placed his name and presence within a new Temple where he would meet with his people.

On this Pentecost, the place where it was necessary to formally worship God was changed from a physical building to a living temple of flesh. This is the hour Jesus spoke of when he told the woman of Samaria the hour would come when God's place of worship would be changed and people would be able to worship the Sovereign Father in spirit and in truth (Jn.4:19-24).

Tongues of Fire

The writer of Acts concisely relates the events on the first Pentecost after Christ's death and resurrection, which makes it difficult to determine exactly what it was that came to rest on those assembled with the apostles:

"When the Day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the holy spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:1-4 NIV Para.).

The first thing to note in verse 3 is that the English words *what seemed to be* are translated from the Greek word *hosei*, which basically means *as if, as (it had been, it were), like (as)*. The use of *hosei*, tells us that what was seen is something similar to fire, but not the same as fire.

The English word *tongues* in verses 3 and 4 is translated from the Greek word, *glossa*, which means *the tongue*; by implication, *a language* (specially, one not acquired naturally). The English word *fire* in verse 3 is translated from the Greek word *pur*, a primary word, which means *fire* (literally or figuratively, specifically, *lightning*):

If the writer intended to mean that what was seen was like the flames of a fire, he would have used the Greek word *phlox*, which means a flame or a blaze. *Phlox* would have clearly described what was seen as being fire, but this word was not used, which indicates that what was seen was something different.

The following is a more literal translation of the Greek language of Acts 2:3 from the Textus Receptus into English:

"There appeared divided languages like fiery lightening which sit on each of them."

An analysis of the Greek words used in the description of what appeared in verse 3 seems to indicate letters or words within fiery lightening coming to rest on these individuals, which resulted in their ability to speak languages other than their native language.

The Holy Spirit

As the fire from God rested on those whom the Father had chosen to become his children, the holy spirit began to reside within them, and they were transformed into the Father's spiritual children at that moment.

"They were all filled with the holy spirit and began to speak in foreign languages as the spirit gave them the gift of speech" (Acts 2:4-6 The Jerusalem Bible).

"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:5-6 KJV).

This was the first proof that those people who were touched by the fire of God had indeed received the holy spirit and had been made a part of the Family of God. See Jn.14:21; 15:1-7; Rom.8:9-11; Gal.6:18; Phm.1:25.

Notice that all of the foreign languages spoken by these people were understandable to the listeners, without an interpreter. Perhaps this miracle was not only of speaking foreign languages, but also of understanding for those who were listening.

These Galileans were speaking in the particular dialects of those present:

"And how hear we every man in our own tongue [dialect] wherein we were born?" (Acts 2:8 KJV).

"How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native languages?" (Acts 2:8 The Jerusalem Bible).

There are at least 17 different language groups referred to in Acts, chapter 2. What was so astonishing to those present was the fact that each person heard the wonderful works of God spoken in his own particular language.

"We hear them speak in our language the wonderful works of God. And they were amazed and were in doubt, saying one to another, What does this mean? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:11-13 Para.).

Many people clearly understood what was being said, whereas others apparently did not.

There is no doubt that, on this Day of Pentecost, both speakers and hearers were the beneficiaries of a special miracle from God. There was no incoherent speech, no unknown languages to decipher, no interpreters were needed—all those who were intended to understand the message, understood it clearly.

"But Peter, stood up with the eleven, and said to them, You men of Judea, and all you that dwell in Jerusalem, know this, and pay attention to my words: For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day [about 9 a.m.]" (Acts 2:14-15 Para.).

Nine o'clock in the morning is a very important time because this is about the time that the Lift Offering of barley flour was made during the days of Unleavened Bread. The Lift Offering was symbolic of Jesus Christ as the first-fruits of God the Father's spiritual harvest of humanity.

Nine o'clock in the morning was also the time when the two leaven loaves of bread from the first-fruits of the wheat harvest were presented to God for his acceptance. In Acts 2:14-15, we see the acceptance of these individuals as sons of God by the imparting of the holy spirit; they were the first-fruits of the summer harvest of humanity.

Peter's Explains These Events

In order to explain why the disciples and the others with them had the ability to speak in languages foreign to them, Peter quotes the prophet Joel and says that this was being done in order to fulfill Joel's prophecy about events which would happen in the end of the age of human rule:

"But this is what was spoken of by the prophet Joel; And it will come to pass in the last days, says God, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:16-18 Para.). See Joel 2:28, 32; Isa.44:3.

The English word *prophecy* in verse 18 is translated from the Greek verb *propheteuo*, which means *to be a prophet, to prophesy*, and is normally used in the context of speaking divine counsel or foretelling the future.

There is no doubt that on this Festival of Pentecost, both the speakers and the hearers were the beneficiaries of a special gift from God. There was no babbling, no incoherent speech, no unknown languages to decipher, and no interpreters were needed, all those present understood clearly what was being said.

Prophetic Fulfillment

The events of this particular Festival of Pentecost were extremely important in the sequence of events which were necessary for the fulfillment of the Sovereign God's plan for humanity; because, on this particular festival, the prophetic and symbolic meaning of the leaven loaves of wheat bread offered to God on this feast day were fulfilled in those who received the holy spirit and adopted into the God the Father's spiritual family.

The giving of the holy spirit on this day of Pentecost was only the beginning of the prophecy of Joel; the last half of this prophecy will be fulfilled through the power of the spirit just before the first resurrection and return of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Acts, chapter 2, describes an event that is unique to those who were called to salvation at the very beginning of the gospel age. The following things happened on that Festival of Pentecost:

- The dwelling place of God's Spirit was transferred from a physical building to human temples (1.Cor.3:17; 6:19; 2.Cor.6:16), which was evidenced by tongues of fire.
- The consummation of the New Covenant occurred (Jer.31:31-34; Heb.8:10).
- The gift of languages was used to preach the Father's good news message.

Christ's Promise

"Afterward he appeared to the eleven as they sat eating, and reprimanded them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe the ones who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, Go you into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved and he that believes not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new languages" (Mk.16:14-17 Para.).

Many people feel that Jesus said that all true Christians will speak in new languages. However, this is not what Jesus said. Jesus was only speaking to the eleven apostles, not to all the disciples. A close study of what was said indicates that when Jesus said, *"these signs shall follow them,"* he was making a general statement. There does not seem to be anything in the original Greek language that indicates that these signs would be a part of each and every Christian's spiritual makeup. The apostle Paul confirms this analysis in 1. Corinthians, chapter 12, when he spoke of different spiritual powers given separately and individually.

Many people also feel that the word *new* in verse 17 means a language that was previously unknown to humanity. However, this is not true. Here, the English word *new* is translated from the Greek word *kainos*, which denotes *that which is unaccustomed or unused* it does not mean something *new in time* or *recent in time*.

The *new tongues (kainos)* spoken of in Mark 16:17 are the *other tongues (heteros)* spoken of in Acts 2:4. These languages were 'new and different,' but not in the sense that they had never been heard before or that they were new to the hearers, because it is clear from Acts 2:8 that this is not the case. These were new languages to the speakers; they were different from the languages that they were accustomed to speaking.

What Jesus says in Mark 16:14-18 is that there would be tremendous miracles done by some who truly believed in him in order to show others that they were his followers. However, to truly believe in Christ is more than just a superficial vocal pronouncement. To truly believe is to obey and have faith in his promises. True belief in Christ is a dynamic way of life, not just the voicing of ethereal platitudes.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The giving of the holy spirit with the attending gift of languages were all extraordinary events involving special circumstances for which there had been no precedent. The following are two of these events.

Cornelius, the Centurion

Acts, chapters 10 and 11, record the account of Peter being sent to preach the gospel to the Roman officer Cornelius and his household. As Peter began to proclaim the gospel to those present, the holy spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household, and they began to speak in foreign languages (Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18).

Through this event, God shows Peter and those who came with him that he was also calling non-Israelites to salvation. It is unclear from the Greek language used in this account whether the word 'fell' is used literally or metaphorically to indicate how these people received the holy spirit.

There is no mention in this account that the sound of wind or the appearance of fire accompanied their receiving of the holy spirit, which occurred on the Festival of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3). Moreover, it seems that the speaking of foreign languages is the only similarity between these two events.

Paul at Ephesus

Acts 19:1-6 shows the apostle Paul communicating with those who had been baptized by John the Baptist. Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus Christ and performed the ordinance of laying on of hands. After the laying on of hands, those who were baptized spoke in languages other than their native language and prophesied. This is also an example of a miracle of intelligent speech and discernible languages being used to show that God had given his spirit to these individuals and had separated them for a holy purpose.

The chart on the following page shows that the only thing individuals who received the holy spirit in these accounts had in common was water baptism. Additionally, these accounts show the following:

- God the Father gives his spirit how he wants, to whom he wants, and when he wants.
- A person does not have to beg God for the holy spirit because he gives it freely to those who obey him.
- It is not necessary to repeat the name of Jesus over and over or any other repetitious words, chants, or incantations in order to receive the holy spirit.
- God the Father honored the ordinance of laying on of hands for the receiving of the holy spirit.
- Different situations required different signs to be manifested at that point in the history of the early church.
- The charismatic doctrine which states that no one can receive the holy spirit unless he speaks in a foreign or unknown language, and that speaking in these languages is the only evidence that one has the holy spirit is false.

Specific Events Which Occurred When The Holy Spirit Was Given Documented in the New Testament:

	Christ	The Disciples Acts 2	Paul Acts 9	Cornelius Acts 10&11	Paul at Ephesus Acts 19:1-6
Water Baptism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Spirit Descending as a Dove	✓				
Voice from Heaven	✓				
Sound of a Windstorm		✓			
Tongues of Fire		✓			
Speaking in Foreign Languages		✓		✓	✓
The Laying on of Hands			✓	✓	✓

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many people in the charismatic movement believe that one cannot receive the holy spirit unless one experiences speaking in unknown languages. Moreover, many of these same people believe that in order to acquire the gift of the holy spirit one must beg, plead, and agonize for it. Are these beliefs biblical fact or are they false concepts? A careful search of the scriptures shows that one neither has to speak in unknown languages or beg and plead for the gift of the holy spirit, because it is given by the grace of God to all who fulfill the requirements of repentance and water baptism.

Jesus

"If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?" (Lk.11:13 KJV).

Peter

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:38 KJV).

"And we are witnesses of these things; and so is also the holy spirit, whom God [God the Father] has given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32 KJV).

These three scriptures on page 329 show the following:

- God will give the holy spirit to those who ask.
- True repentance and water baptism are an integral part of receiving the holy spirit.
- The Father only gives his spirit to those who obey him.

LAYING ON OF HANDS AND FIRE

The accounts of Acts, 8:9-17, 9:1-18 chapters 10 through 11, and 19:6 show that the ordinance of the laying on of hands is part of the process of receiving the holy spirit. These scriptures also show that nothing else is necessary after repentance and baptism for the receiving of the holy spirit except the laying on of hands.

If all true Christians must receive the holy spirit the same way the people on the Day of Pentecost did, why do we not see the appearance of fire on those who supposedly receive this gift while speaking in unknown languages? If this were necessary, fire would be manifested. Because fire is not manifested, it is not necessary for receiving the holy spirit, and neither is speaking in unknown languages.

GOD'S PLAN

Some believe that Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the holy spirit because they (the disciples) were not ready to receive this Spirit. However, this is not the case at all; just the opposite is true. The disciples were ready. It was God the Father and Jesus Christ who were not yet ready to give it.

God has a plan for the salvation of humanity. And within this plan, there are certain benchmarks in history on which certain events are foreordained to occur. The annual observances and festivals are such historical benchmarks on which prophetic events occur. The following are four of these foreordained events that took place in 30 A.D.:

1. On the Passover in 30 A.D., the exact day when a lamb was sacrificed for the sins of Israel, Jesus Christ became the supreme sacrifice for the sins of humanity.
2. The Days of Unleavened Bread that followed Jesus' crucifixion pictured coming out of sin and freedom from sin, which can only be accomplished through Jesus' sacrifice.
3. The wave Sheaf Offering offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread pictures the first of the first-fruits (Jesus Christ) being presented to God the Father.
4. On the Festival of Pentecost, God the Father gave his holy spirit to the first humans to accept his offer of the new agreement between him and humanity. This festival is fifty days after the Wave Sheaf Offering and it pictures the first-fruits of the summer harvest (the elect of God) being offered to God the Father.

The disciples had to wait until the Day of Pentecost arrived to receive the holy spirit. This was not because they were not ready, but because the precise time in God's plan for this event to take place had not yet arrived:

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:1-3 KJV).

HISTORY OF THE PRESENT DAY CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

Although the manifestation of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) among the ancients can be traced as far back as 1100 B.C. and is spoken of by Plato (429-347 B.C.) and Virgil (70-91 B.C.), the modern glossolalia movement is said to have started in the early part of the twentieth century through the efforts of a Methodist minister named Charles F. Parkham. At first, the practice of glossolalia was found almost exclusively among the Pentecostal churches. However, this has changed and one can find people 'speaking in tongues' in almost every professing Christian denomination, including the Catholic Church.

Before and after the Festival of Pentecost in 30 A.D., there is no biblical record of the displays of emotionalism and unintelligible babbling that are practiced within charismatic religious groups today. This fact alone should alert a person to the discrepancies between the scriptures and the practice of speaking in unintelligible languages.

Because the Book of Acts does not support the practice of speaking in unintelligible languages as is practiced by charismatic religions today, what biblical conclusions can be reached about these practices? Paul's letter to the Corinthians has part of the answer, and the history of paganism has the rest of the answer.

THE CORINTHIAN EXPERIENCE

The Corinthian Church seems to have been a group of Christians with many problems. Both of Paul's letters to them contain strong correction. His first letter was almost totally devoted to a series of reprimands about the church's poor behavior.

After Paul's salutation to the Corinthians, he began to categorize their problems. No other church of God is corrected on as many points as the Corinthian church. This fact alone shows something about the poor spiritual character and maturity of these people. This is not to say that they were not true Christians. Clearly, the majority of the Corinthian church were God's elect children. However, they had a major problem in understanding how to conduct themselves and they were truly babes in the faith.

It is apparent that many of those at Corinth thought they were spiritual giants; however, Paul puts this wrong belief to rest early in his letter:

"Brethren, I was not able in the past to speak to you as spiritual ones, but as carnal ones, even as babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: because you were not then able, neither are you able now to eat strong spiritual meat" (1.Cor.3:1-2 Para.).

Paul's reprimand to the Corinthians shows that the majority of those in the church at Corinth were sectarian, carnal, immoral, unloving, poorly versed in the scriptures, and undisciplined in worship.

Paul's reprimanded the Corinthians for envy, strife, divisive opinions and arguing, jealousy, immorality and incest, lawsuits, drunkenness, conceit, lack of Christian love, carnal mindedness, desecration of their bodies (i.e., the temple of God), intellectual vanity, misuse of spiritual gifts, and disorderly and shameful conduct in and out of church meetings. Paul's overall message to the elect at Corinth was a call to repentance.

Many people who practice speaking in unintelligible languages point to the Corinthian church as the perfect example of the proper use of the gift of languages. However, Paul's letter to the Corinthian church shows just the opposite. The letter shows a church that was the hallmark of spiritual immaturity—a church on the verge of stepping back into the paganism out of which many of its people had recently come (1.Cor.6: 9-11; 12:1-3). The picture Paul paints of the Corinthian church is of people who are dying spiritually and allowing evil to rule in their lives. Far from being a perfect example of spiritual maturity, those at Corinth were a perfect example of how a Christian should not behave.

For the true Christian of today, the significance of Paul's reprimand to the Corinthians concerning the gift of languages is that we can learn from their mistakes and not fall into the same trap of only using the milk of the word of God, which causes one to remain a spiritual infant (1.Cor.3: 1-3).

Historical Corinth

There is little historical documentation about the people of Corinth. However, what is known gives us an insight into the potential problems of being a Christian in that society.

Corinth was the capital of Achaia in 57 A.D. and was at the cross-roads of a major trade route between Asia and Europe. The city was very wealthy and notorious for the licentious lifestyle of its inhabitants. The city's reputation was so bad that it became a proverb in some foreign languages and was immortalized by Latin poets. The term *to Corinthianize* became a part of the Greek vocabulary, which meant *to live in drunken immoral debauchery*.

The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, towered above the city on a hill. One thousand priestesses who were temple prostitutes spent their evenings selling their bodies in the city of Corinth. The city was home to the religions of its many diverse inhabitants who came to ply their trades in this prosperous area. The bulk of the inhabitants were Italian freemen, Greeks, Jews, and people from the cities of Levant. Within this city of wealth, immorality, and Satanic religions, God called a cross section of its citizens to become his children. When one considers their environment and cultural background, it is no small wonder that these people had difficulty growing into mature Christians.

The following things should be noted about 1. Corinthians, chapters 12 through 14:

- Paul was responding to reports that he had heard concerning activities within the Corinthian Church.
- He was not present to witness the practice of speaking in foreign languages by the Corinthians.
- Paul considered these activities to be major problems worthy of much discussion in his letter.
- If there had not been a major problem with speaking in foreign languages, these chapters probably would not exist in his letter of rebuke to the Corinthian congregation.

CONCERNING SPIRITUAL THINGS

"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (1. Cor. 12:1 KJV).

The English word *gifts* is not in the original text, Paul says that he does not want them to be ignorant about spiritual matters. The word *gift* was incorrectly inserted into this scripture by the translators of the King James Bible, which severely limits what Paul is talking about. He actually addresses a broad spectrum of spiritual behavior and attitudes. A more correct translation of verse 1 is as follows:

"Now brethren, I would not have you ignorant concerning spiritual things" (1. Cor. 12:1 Para.).

Idol Worship and Speaking by the Spirit

"You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, even as you were led. (See 1. Cor. 6:9). "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the spirit of God calls Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the holy spirit" (1. Cor. 12:2-3 KJV).

What Paul says in verses 2 and 3 seems to be out of context with what he says about spiritual things; however, Paul is reprimanding the Corinthians throughout this letter for their inappropriate behavior. Paul would not mention idol worship unless it was a problem within the Church. Moreover, understanding what kind of spirit would curse the Savior is important to discovering what he means in these two verses.

Basic knowledge of the spirit world includes the realization that there are good and evil spirits, and both kinds of spirits have the ability to influence human behavior, depending on each individual's attitude. James says to "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*" (Jms.4:7). If indeed some of those at Corinth were allowing themselves to be deceived, controlled, and inspired by demons to curse Christ in the frenzy of a charismatic experience, it is easy to understand what Paul means in verses 2-3.

It is very important to keep in mind that the religious background of many of the Corinthians was paganism, which included the worship of idols, sex orgies, intellectual philosophies, miracle working, supernatural healing and even speaking in unintelligible languages.

Spiritual Gifts and Supernatural Power

Before continuing, it is important to mention that, just because a person has the ability to use supernatural power, it does not mean that they have been given this power by Jesus Christ or God the Father. Many people today believe that they are doing the will of God because of physical works and manifestations of supernatural power. However, the scriptures clearly show that, unless people are called by the Father, transformed into a son of his new creation and keep his laws, precepts, and principles, they are not his people:

"Not everyone that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess to them I never knew you: depart from me you that work lawlessness" (Matt.7:21-23 KJV). See also Mk.3:5-6; Lk.21:8.

Many great works are done in the name of Jesus; however, this does not mean that Jesus has sent those who do these works. Each individual that the Father has called to salvation during this age of the church is warned to test the spirits to determine for themselves if the source of the teaching or supernatural works is good or evil (1.Jn.4:1):

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits to see if they are of God: Because many false prophets are in the world" (1.Jn.4:1 Para.).

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but are in reality wolves. By their fruits you shall know them, Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs from thistles? So every good tree produces good fruits; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruits. A good tree cannot produce evil fruits, nor a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not produce good fruits is to be cut down and thrown into the fire. Then surely from their fruits you shall know them" (Matt.7:15-19 Para.).

Diversity of Gifts and Administration

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all. But the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1.Cor.12:4-7 KJV). See also 1.Cor.12:7-10, 28-31.

The English word *gifts* used throughout 1.Corinthians, chapter 12, is translated from the Greek word *charisma*, which means a *gift of grace*. That is, a gift involving grace (Greek: *charis*) on the part of God as the giver of the gift.

In verses 4-6, Paul clearly says that the Father bestows many different kinds of spiritual gifts upon his children. He says that there are different spiritual gifts from the Father and each gift is given for the purpose of benefitting the entire Church.

Types of Gifts

"For to one is given by the spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit; To another faith by the same spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of languages; To another the interpretation of languages" (1.Cor.12:8-10 KJV).

Paul explains that individuals within the church are given different spiritual gifts through the Father's holy spirit. Clearly, not all individuals within the church have the same gift or power from God. But how can Paul's statement about spiritual gifts be reconciled with the events in the Book of Acts? Did not all those who received the holy spirit in the Book of Acts speak with foreign languages? No, they did not. Paul did not speak in foreign languages upon receiving the holy spirit; moreover, Jesus did not speak in a foreign or unknown language when the holy spirit descended on him at baptism.

What Paul says about the giving of different gifts of spiritual powers to different individuals in verses 8-10 is the first indication that 1.Corinthians, chapters 12 through 14, may not contain the same subject matter discussed in Acts.

WHO DECIDES WHO GETS A SPIRITUAL GIFT?

"But all these work that one and the selfsame spirit, dividing [to distribute] to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1.Cor.12:11-12 KJV).

Jesus Christ distributes various supernatural skills, talents and attributes through the holy spirit to individual Christians for the Father, because Jesus is the head of the church under the authority of the Father.

Paul further explains the purpose of these individual strengths and skills: *"For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one spirit" (1.Cor.12:13 KJV).* These scriptures stress unity in the body of the elect.

CHURCH UNITY

"For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" (1.Cor.12:14-16 KJV).

Some apparently thought that they were somehow more righteous because they could speak various languages, but others could not:

"If the whole body were an eye, where is the hearing? if the whole were hearing, where is the smelling? But now has God set the members every one of them in the body, as it has pleased him" (1.Cor.12:17-18 KJV).

Paul repeatedly stresses the point of unity and the necessity of the body (church) to work together.

EACH MEMBER HAS A SPECIAL PURPOSE

"And if they were all one member, where is the body? But now are they many members, but yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (1.Cor.12:19-21 KJV).

This is a rebuke to those who thought that their particular attribute, talent, or spiritual gift was superior to that of another member of the body of Christ.

"No, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness" (1.Cor.12:22-23 KJV).

Each member has a valuable function and should be respected for the part they play in the functioning of the body as a whole.

God the Father has specifically chosen each individual that he wants to be a part of the body of Christ in this age (Jn.6:44,65). Everyone he has chosen is a part of the church; all are necessary or they would not have been chosen. Each chosen one is just as important to him as another. And each has a function to carry out for the benefit of the whole church. It behooves each and every individual to support the whole body in order for the entire church to prosper. No member of the body of Christ is unimportant unless they make themselves so.

EACH MEMBER IS DEPENDENT ON THE OTHER

"For our comely parts have no need: but God has tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another" (1.Cor.12: 24-25 KJV).

The English word *schism* in verse 25 is translated from the Greek word *schisma*, which means *a rent* or *a division*. In this verse, *schisma* is a metaphor for a contrary condition to something God has purposed for the church.

A major part of the problem with the Corinthian church centered around their lack of Christian maturity, unity, and order. At the beginning of his letter to them, Paul says, *"Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius" (1.Cor.1:13-14 KJV)*. Paul's reprimand concerning the disunity within the church is a stinging rebuke to the entire Church. Moreover, he says that the elect of God should have the following attitude:

"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1.Cor.12:26 Para.).

AN ORDER OF RELATIVE IMPORTANCE

When we consider that Paul is giving the Corinthians strong correction for the misuse of speaking in various languages, it seems significant that Paul lists the ability to speak various languages last in order of importance.

"Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of languages. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with languages? do all interpret [Greek: diermeneuo, i.e., interpret fully, explain]?" (1.Cor.12: 27-30 KJV).

Obviously all in Corinth did not have the gift of languages. Moreover, these questions by Paul seem designed to show that all do not have the same skills, talents, and attributes, and that spiritual gifts are given for the benefit of the church as a whole.

God the Father calls individuals to become a part of his elect children (Jn.6:44,65) and gives them spiritual gifts as he deems necessary to perfect them and the church as a whole:

And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Til we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph.4:11-13 KJV).

All of the supernatural gifts in the following list are provided by the Father for the edification of the church as a whole.

1Cor. 12:8-10	1Cor. 12:28-30	Rom. 12:3-8	Eph. 4:7-11
1. Wisdom	1. Apostles	1. Prophecy	1. Apostles
2. Knowledge	2. Prophets	2. Ministry	2. Prophets
3. Faith	3. Teachers	3. Teachers	3. Evangelist
4. Healing	4. Miracles	4. Exhortation	4. Pastors
5. Miracles	5. Healing	5. Giving	5. Teachers
6. Prophecy	6. Helps	6. Ruling	
7. Discerning of Spirits	7. Governments	7. Mercy	
8. Languages	8. Languages		
9. Interpretation	9. Interpretation		

When a person is placed into the body of Christ and given spiritual gifts, these gifts are not for one's personal aggrandizement, entertainment, or mere public display. They are for the work of proclaiming the gospel and for the edification and enrichment of the Father's elect children who are being trained to serve all of mankind through his family and government.

Although spiritual gifts are discussed elsewhere, 1. Corinthians is the only place that mentions the gift of languages by name. A comparison of the various list of gifts show that these gifts were not a catalog of specific unchanging functions within the church. The supernatural gifts, which are listed by the apostle Paul, are all provided by God for the edification of the church as a whole.

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

"Earnestly desire the best gifts: however, I will show you a more excellent way" (1.Cor.12:31 Para.).

Paul said he would show the Corinthians the solution to their problems. He told them to earnestly desire the best gifts but he would show them something far better than having the skills, talents, and attributes that he had mentioned.

Love is the More Excellent Way

"Though I speak with the language of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1.Cor.13:1 Para.).

Some people believe that Paul said he was able to speak in the language of angels; however, he just said that, even if he could speak in the language of angels, it would be a worthless skill without love. Perhaps the reason he refers to the musical instruments is because the beating of cymbals and the blowing of trumpets accompanied the vain worship of the pagan gods Dionysus and Cybele at that time. The implication is that preaching in any language was useless unless love was present.

"And though I have prophecy [inspired preaching], and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [love], I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing" (1.Cor.13:2-3 KJV).

Paul goes on to say that any spiritual gifts that are held in high regard are not profitable unless there is genuine love as the prime motivation behind their use.

"Love suffers long, and is kind; love envies not; love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, Does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1.Cor.13:4-7 KJV Para.).

The Living Bible Paraphrases verses 4-7 as follows:

"Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges, and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him."

To what kind of love is Paul referring? And what does this love have to do with the subject of speaking in various languages? The English word *love* in this chapter is translated from the Greek noun *agape*, which denotes a particular kind of love that is not self-serving, but is selfless and places the welfare of others above the self. It is an expression of deep concern for others, which is accompanied by actions as manifestations of this kind of love. *Agape* is the kind of deep, outgoing love that God the Father and Jesus Christ have for humanity.

Paul is showing that, of all the spiritual gifts that one can be given, love is the one to be most sought after. All other spiritual gifts are nothing unless one has *agape* love. True children of God must imitate the character of the Father and Jesus; therefore, they must seek to have the kind of love that the Father and his Son have for the elect and for humanity. This is the point that Paul was trying to make to the Corinthians. He was trying to convey to them that they had been missing the point, by placing the emphasis on the wrong spiritual attribute when they should have been seeking Godly love above all else.

"Love never fails: but if there are prophecies, they will be abolished, if languages, they shall cease; if knowledge, it shall vanish. For we know and prophesy in part. But when the perfect thing comes, then that which is in part shall be eliminated" (1.Cor.13: 8-10 Para.).

Put Away Childish Things

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1.Cor.13:11 KJV).

What are these childish things? Are not all the things he reprimanded the Corinthians for, childish? None of the things Paul reprimanded them for are behavioral patterns of spiritually mature Christians.

Limited Insight

"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face-to-face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1.Cor.13:12 KJV).

Paul explains that a Christian cannot know everything about the spirit-realm of existence or about the Father's plan for his new creation. In fact, we understand very little about the spirit-realm and God's future plans. But, when we see the Father face-to-face, we will understand.

Love, the Greatest Spiritual Attribute

"And now abides faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these three is love" (1.Cor.13:13 Para.). Again, Paul stresses the attitude of love as he speaks about inspired preaching.

The greatest spiritual attribute a person can possibly have is the love that is completely selfless, and shows godly character. Paul chose his words very carefully when he spoke about love in order to make sure that the Corinthians knew that love was the greatest character trait. Notice Paul even prefaces his next statement with the phrase "*Pursue after love.*"

"Pursue after love, and desire the spiritual, but rather that you may prophesy" (1.Cor.14:1 Para.).

The English word *spiritual* in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word *pneumatikos*, which connotes invisibility and power. This word does not occur in the gospels; it first appears after Pentecost of 30 A.D. and it pertains to spirituality.

The general theme and meaning of the words *prophesy* and *prophesying* in chapter 14 seems to be that of inspired preaching with the intent of conveying spiritual knowledge for the edification of the Father's elect children. Moreover, some translators believe these words mean *the speaking forth the mind and counsel of God*

Speaking Only to God

"For he that speaks in a language speaks not to men, but to God: for no man understands him; howbeit in the spirit [mind?] he speaks mysteries" (1.Cor.14:2 KJV).

The first part of this verse can be understood to say that, if a person is speaking in an actual communicative language that no one around him understands because they are not schooled or trained in that particular language, he is speaking to God, because only God who understands all languages would understand what is said. This verse is not talking about gibberish or uncontrolled babbling.

The second part of this verse is more difficult to understand; however, the same reasoning applies. There are many scriptures that tell us God understands our every thought and emotion. Therefore, even if the one speaking understands what he is saying, he is speaking mysteries to those around him if they do not understand the language in which he is speaking.

Inspired Preaching

"But he that prophesies speaks to men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (1.Cor.14:3 KJV Para.).

Paul says the man who is inspired by God to preach the truth of God gives those who hear him something of value, unlike the person who speaks in a language that no one can understand. See verse 2 above.

It is important to note that when Paul refers to inspired speaking within the formal worship service, he never uses the female gender and always refers to those who are speaking as being in the capacity of a minister or teacher.

Speak to Edify the Church

"He that speaks in a language edifies himself; but he that prophesies edifies the church" (1.Cor.14:4 KJV Para.).

If a man speaks in a language that only he understands, that person is only speaking to himself and God. The phrase *edifies himself* seems to imply a selfish motivation. However, the man who is inspired to speak or teach the truth of God so that others can understand it, benefits the church.

Chapter 14 discusses those who are preaching and teaching within the congregation of God:

"I would that you all spoke with languages but rather that you prophesied: for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with languages, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying" (1.Cor.14:5 KJV Para.).

Paul says that he wished all those who were preachers and teachers could speak foreign languages. However, he wished even more that they could all be inspired speakers who were able to explain the Word of God, because the one who can explain God's truth has a far better gift than the one who is multilingual unless the multilingual preacher or teacher can also explain and expound the Word of God in the foreign language with clarity. It is clear from what Paul says that everything preached or taught within the congregation of God must be for the edification of the church, not just for the individual doing the preaching and teaching.

The most plausible reason that Paul wanted all the preachers and teachers of Corinth to be multilingual like he was is that the church of Corinth was a multilingual congregation. Remember, this church was in a city that was a racial melting pot. Because of this, language would naturally be a barrier to learning. Therefore, multilingual preachers and teachers who could expound the truth of God would be of great benefit to the entire church

SPEAK TO CONVEY UNDERSTANDING:

"Now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with languages, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?" (1.Cor.14:6 KJV).

Paul tells them that it would not benefit them if he spoke something they could not understand, but revealing knowledge and understanding to them was what benefitted them.

"Even things without life giving sound, whether flute or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare to the battle?" (1.Cor.14:7-8 KJV).

Paul stated his point in at least ten different ways to make sure that the Corinthians understood exactly what he meant, because their salvation depended on how they reacted to what he told them. The problem they were having with multilingual preachers and teachers combined with their other problems was tearing the church apart. In fact, if there was the aspect of a charismatic movement within the church, the danger was ever more threatening because of the demonic influence upon those preaching and teaching.

Make Things Easy to Understand

"So likewise you, except you utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for you shall speak into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices [sounds] in the world, and none of them is without signification [meaning]. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice [sound], I shall be to him that speaks a barbarian, and he that speaks shall be a barbarian to me" (1.Cor.14:9-11).

The English word *barbarian* is a translation of the Greek word *barbaros*, which has some very interesting implications in this verse. *Barbaros* means *one whose speech is rude or harsh*. Hence, it signifies one who speaks a strange or foreign language. It also denoted anyone who was ignorant of the Greek language and culture.

The inference is that, if one could not express himself so that another person could understand what he said, the speaker was not well educated in the language. Moreover, it implied that the speaker had the inability to communicate intelligently.

Speak to Edify

"Even so you, forasmuch as you are zealous [exercise] of spiritual gifts, seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church" (1.Cor. 14:12 KJV).

Paul tells the preachers and teachers who were exercising their spiritual gifts that they should seek to be extremely proficient in building up the congregation. Although Paul does not say it explicitly, it can be inferred that he was telling them to seek to edify the church instead of only themselves.

"Wherefore let him that speaks in a language pray that he may interpret [Greek: diemeneuo, to interpret fully or explain]" (1.Cor. 14:13 KJV).

If a person is going to speak before the congregation, he should be able to explain in detail what he means to say. Otherwise, it is of no benefit to those listening. Therefore, Paul tells the speakers to pray for the ability to explain clearly what they are preaching or teaching.

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT:

"For if I pray in a language, my spirit [Greek: pneuma] prays, but my understanding [Greek: nous, i.e., the intellect or mind] is unfruitful" (1.Cor.14:14 KJV).

The English word *spirit* in verse 14 is translated from the Greek word *pneuma*, which means *a current of air or a breath*. This text makes sense when the meanings of the Greek words are understood. Paul simply states that if one does not understand what is spoken, the speech is just so much air or wind.

"What is it then? I will pray with the spirit [pneuma] and I will pray with the understanding [intellect or mind] also: I will sing with the spirit, [pneuma] and I will sing with the understanding [intellect or mind] also" (1.Cor.14:15 KJV).

Some people believe that the word *spirit* in these verses refers to a spiritual language. However, why would God want humans to use a language they do not understand? Because communication is a two-way transmission of information, this belief is not logical.

"Else when you shall bless with the spirit [pneuma], how shall he that occupies the room of the unlearned say amen at your giving of thanks, seeing he understands not what you say?" (1.Cor.14:16 KJV).

The English word *unlearned* in verse 16 is a translation of the Greek word *idiotes*, which means *a person without professional knowledge or a person that is ignorant, uneducated, unskilled or unlearned*. It does no good to make a public prayer to God in which the congregation is to partake if no one can understand what is being said. Logically, those who cannot understand what is being said cannot participate in the public prayer.

"For you verily give thanks well, but the other is not edified" (1.Cor. 14:17 KJV). The only one edified is the one giving the prayer

IS THERE A PRAYER LANGUAGE?

Many people in charismatic religions believe they have a spiritual gift from God which allows them to pray in an unknown language. Some of these people believe that because they sometimes do not know what they should pray for, God does it for them through an unknown prayer language.

Most who believe and practice an unknown prayer language quote the above scriptures in 1 Corinthians 14 and the following text of Romans 8:26-27 as justification for their belief and practice:

"Likewise the spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the spirit itself makes intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered. And he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the spirit, because he [it] makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom.8:26-27 KJV).

The English word *uttered* is a translation of the Greek word *alaletos* which means *something that cannot be spoken*. If this something cannot be spoken, there is no justification for an unknown prayer language. Moreover, the English word *groanings* is a translation of the Greek word *stenagmos* which means *a sigh* not a special unknown language. See 2.Cor.5:2-4.

This following is a more literal interpretation from The Interlinear Bible:

"Likewise the spirit joins in to help us in our weakness, for sometimes we are at a loss to pray for things as we should, however the spirit pleads our case for us with in a way we cannot speak. And God who searches the hearts, knows what is in the thoughts of the spirit, because the spirit according to the will of God intercedes for elect children" (Rom.8:26-27 Para.).

Does God have the ability to understand human languages? This might seem like a ridiculous question; however, it seems just as ridiculous that God would have designed an unintelligible language and require us to speak to him in this language, which we do not understand. There are many scriptures that tell us that God understands us completely and this understanding of us includes our innermost feelings, thoughts, desires, and needs that are sometimes difficult for us to express.

Truly one does not always know exactly what they need or how to express these needs. Because of this, one of the functions of the holy spirit is to act as an information gathering and communication system between a child of God and the God family. This function allows the Father and Christ to be aware of the innermost feelings, thoughts, desires and needs of those called to salvation. Because the Spirit communicates one's true physical and spiritual condition to the Father and Christ, the child of God has the assurance that, even before they ask anything of the Father, he already knows what they need:

"A man's conscience [spirit] is the Lords search light exposing his hidden motives" (Pro.20:27 LBP).

The King James translation renders this scripture:

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly."

Praying in the Spirit

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God; Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereto with all perseverance and supplication for the saints" (Eph.6:17-18 KJV).

Paul did say that we must pray in the spirit. But, what does it mean to pray in the Spirit? Since the Father is spirit and lives in the spirit realm, we must communicate with him through spirit-power. In order for us to do this, the Father has provided a function of the holy spirit that communicates our thoughts to him and Christ.

WHY WAS PAUL THANKFUL?

"I thank my God, I speak with languages more than you all" (1.Cor. 14:18 KJV).

Why was Paul thankful that he was multilingual? The following are two plausible answers to this question:

- Paul not only spoke his native tongue, Aramaic, but also could read and speak many languages, including the dead language of ancient Hebrew in which the Hebrew scriptures were written. This ability gave him great credibility with the common Jews, as well as the priests, because only the most educated people could read and understand the Hebrew scriptures.
- Paul was the apostle to the non-Israelites, as well as the houses of Israel and Judah. Because his travels took him to many distant lands, he needed to know many languages in order to fulfill his commission to preach the gospel to those with whom he came in contact. More than likely the apostle Paul had the natural ability to speak many languages, as well as the spiritual gift of languages mentioned in the Book of Acts.

BE MATURE CHRISTIANS

Paul clearly understood that the misuse of the spiritual gift of languages by the elect of God at Corinth was hindering their spiritual growth; therefore, he continues to stress the proper preaching, teaching, and conduct within the congregational setting:

"Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding [Greek: 'nuos', i.e., 'intelligence' or 'mind'], that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in a [foreign] language. Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be you children, but in understanding be men" (1.Cor.14:19-20 KJV).

A more modern translation of verse 20 is as follows:

"Brothers, stop thinking childish thoughts; keep the innocence of a child, but in understanding be adults."

ANOTHER REASON FOR BEING MULTILINGUAL

"In the law it is written, with men of other languages and other lips will I speak to this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, says the Lord" (1.Cor.14:21 KJV).

Beck's translation of verse 21 more accurately conveys the true intent of what Paul said about communicating the truth of God to people:

"In a strange language and by the mouth of foreigners I will speak to these people."

In verse 21, Paul refers to Isaiah 28:9-13, which contains information about how God gives understanding to his elect children and how he hides understanding from others.

"Wherefore languages are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not. But prophesying serves not for them that believe not, but for them which believe" (1.Cor.14:22 KJV).

If verse 22 is referring to some unknown language as many believe, it makes no sense at all when it is compared with the accounts in the Book of Acts in which the gift of languages was a sign to those who already believed and was used to demonstrate that those who spoke in various languages were the recipients of the holy spirit. The things spoken of in verse 22 and in the Book of Acts are not the same thing. The evidence for this difference in subject matter is found in the original Greek language. When the Greek meanings to the words of verse 22 are inserted, the real intent becomes crystal clear:

"Wherefore languages are for a sign [mark or indication], not for them that believe, but for them that believe not. But [inspired preaching or revelation of divine counsel] serves not for them that believe not, but for them that believe" (1.Cor.14:22).

The First Part of Verse 22

"The gift of languages is not a mark or indication for people who believe, but for people who do not believe. . ." (Para.).

A review of what occurred on the Festival of Pentecost when the holy spirit was given to the first members of the early church confirms what Paul says in the first half of verse 22. Those who believed or were being called to repentance on the festival of Pentecost in 30 A.D. clearly understood the languages being spoken as the gospel was proclaimed, but those who were not being called did not understand. See Acts 2.

The Second Part of Verse 22

"But inspired preaching or revelation of divine counsel does not serve people who do not believe, but does serve people who do believe" (Para.).

The simple truth that Paul explained to the church at Corinth was that, if one had the ability to speak in foreign languages and this power was given through the holy spirit, it was to be used to preach the gospel in an evangelistic manner for the benefit of the church through teaching the truth of God. Clearly, this gift was not to be used as a display of intellectual vanity.

CONFUSION VERSUS ORDER

"If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with languages, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that you are mad?" (1.Cor. 14:23 KJV).

Paul says that for the church as a whole to speak in different languages at the same time would give the impression that those who spoke were insane. If this type of behavior was pleasing to God, why would the apostle Paul reprimand the Corinthians for their conduct? The Corinthians must have misunderstood or incorrectly practiced the gift of languages.

"But if all prophesy [if all speak divine counsels], and there come in one that believes not, or one unlearned, he is convinced [shown his sinful state] of all, he is judged of all" (1.Cor.14:24 KJV).

The Taylor translation renders the phrase *"He is judged of all"* as *"And his conscience will be pricked by everything he hears."* This translation seems to be more logical in that it would serve no purpose for the congregation to pass judgment on an unbeliever unless the unbeliever were to be convinced of the truth by the preaching.

Verses 23-24 clearly show that Paul was instructing the Corinthians how to correctly conduct themselves in a formal worship service, especially before unbelievers. Moreover, he counseled them to teach things that would profit those who were unskilled in the truth and to give a testimony of that same truth to the unbeliever.

"And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1.Cor.14:25 KJV).

A more accurate translation of what Paul says here is as follows:

"The proper kind of teaching will result in people understanding their inner being and then be convinced they need to change and worship the true God. Because of this kind of proper conduct and teaching, they will also know that the spirit of God dwells in you" (Para.).

ORDERLY WORSHIP

"How is it then, brethren? when you come together, every one of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a language, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done to edifying" (1.Cor.14:26 KJV).

Perhaps, Paul was being a bit sarcastic here when he asks this question, but perhaps not. However, the point remains that it seemed to Paul that everyone in the church wanted to be a preacher or teacher. The reprimand here is for all things to be done for the edification of the Church, which apparently was not the case in Corinth:

"If any man speak in a language let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God" (1.Cor.14:27-28 KJV).

At the time Paul wrote his letter, Corinth was a center of international commerce in which many cultures and languages were represented. In addition, Greek was the international business language and was spoken by almost everyone as a second language.

In verses 27 and 28, Paul gives very detailed instructions to multilingual speakers concerning how they should conduct themselves. He says that if any man is going to speak in multiple languages, he should not use more than two or three languages during his dissertation and he should not mix these languages as he speaks, but he should speak them consecutively. Paul further instructs the speaker to search out interpreters for these languages but if none can be found, the speaker should not speak to the church; instead, he should keep his thoughts between him and God.

THE INTERPRETER

Several times Paul addresses a need for an interpreter when someone is going to speak to the church in a language other than the one commonly spoken in that church. The reason for this is that, if a speaker is to transmit understanding, the hearer must be able to comprehend what is being said. How could the entire church benefit if the speaker were to expound some wonderful truth and no one could understand what he was saying?

The whole tone of Paul's instructions regarding multilingual preachers and teachers shows that there must be a logical, orderly progression of events whenever a speaker feels he has to use several different languages in order to express his thoughts to the church. It is evident that Paul was not advocating the practice of spontaneous outbursts of speaking in foreign or unknown languages, which is the common practice of many charismatic churches today.

SPEAKING CONSECUTIVELY

Paul stresses order, not confusion. Order is the opposite of the normal scene in the charismatic tongues-speaking churches of today. The worship services of most of these charismatic churches are anything but orderly; disorder, pandemonium, and confusion with an abundance of uncontrolled emotionalism is the norm, not the exception within their worship services. In the following verses, Paul says that true Christians should conduct themselves in an orderly fashion as they preach and teach in worship services.

"Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace. For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted" (1.Cor.14:29-31 KJV).

Verse 32 is very important to understand because it leads directly to a major point that Paul wants to impress upon the Corinthians:

"And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1.Cor. 14:32 KJV).

An analysis of verse 32 should leave no doubt that uncontrolled behavior is strictly forbidden while those who are prophets (inspired speaker's) are speaking to the church.

The use of the Greek word *pneuma* (English: *spirit*), which can mean *air, breath, wind* or *mind*, does not change what Paul says. In fact, this word strengthens Paul's point that those who teach (inspired speakers) should be in control of themselves. The vast majority of charismatic tongues-speaking people today readily admit that they cannot control what they say when speaking in tongues. Clearly, they have no control over their actions and are violating the principle Paul explained.

To make this point even more clear Paul said:

"For God is not of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1.Cor.14:33 NKJV).

The Living Bible Paraphrased clearly translates the meaning of verses 29-33 and leaves no doubt about what Paul wrote:

"Two or three may prophecy, one at a time, if they have the gift, while all the others listen. But if, while someone is prophesying, someone else receives a message or idea from the Lord, the one who is speaking should stop. In this way all who have the gift of prophecy can speak, one after another, and everyone will learn and be encouraged and helped. Remember that a person that has a message from God, has the power to stop himself or wait his turn. God is not one who likes things to be disorderly and upset. He likes harmony, and he finds it in all the other Churches" (1.Cor.14:29-33 Para).

WOMEN TO KEEP SILENT IN CHURCH:

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted to them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also says the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (1.Cor.14:34-35, KJV).

Women should be silent during the church meeting. They are not to take part in the discussion, for they are subordinate to men as the scriptures also declare. If they have any questions to ask, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to express their opinions in church meetings" (1.Cor.14:34-35, LBP).

Many cannot abide what Paul says to the women at Corinth because they have a wrong concept of God's government (Gal.3:28). Paul's statement has nothing to do with male chauvinism, as some believe. However, it does have to do with the order of things as they pertain to church leadership, government, and the particular functions of individuals within the church.

Paul commands the women to keep silent during the formal worship service. This is not a request; it is a command that is backed up by God's word. If chapters 12 through 14 are speaking of the same manifestation of the holy spirit that is noted in the Book of Acts, there is a major problem with what Paul says about women prophesying during worship services.

It should be noted, that the Creator God who became Jesus Christ chose only men to be a part of the Levitical priesthood and the apostleship. Moreover, the apostles ordained only men to the eldership. The only instances in which this principle of male leadership was violated, occurred when the males of Israel shirked their leadership responsibility. This definitely was not the case at Corinth, because men were in the positions of leadership.

Because the Bible presents a very narrow picture of what was going on within the Corinthian church, we do not know exactly what the problem with the women was. However, it appears that the 'speaking' that Paul refers to is a vocal disruption; however, what is clear is that some women in the church were not being orderly as specified in the teaching of the law (i.e., biblical law). Therefore, Paul had to point out that women must not speak out in a disruptive manner during worship services

PAUL SPEAKS THE WILL OF GOD

"What? came the word of God out from you? or came it to you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant" (1.Cor.14:36-38, KJV).

"You disagree? And do you think that the knowledge of God's will begins and ends with you Corinthians? Well, you are mistaken! You who claim to have the gift of prophecy or any other special ability from the holy spirit should be the first to realize what I am saying is a commandment from the Lord himself. But if everyone still disagrees . . . well, we will leave him in his ignorance" (1.Cor.14:36-38 LBP).

Be Orderly

"Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with languages. Let all things be done decently and in order" (vs.39-40 KJV).

"So my fellow believers, long to be prophets so that you can preach God's message plainly; and never say it is wrong to 'speak in tongues' [languages]; however be sure that every thing is done properly in a good and orderly way" (1.Cor.14:39-40 LBP).

There is very little order among those of the charismatic churches. In fact, their conduct is characterized by extreme confusion and chaos:

- Both men and women speak out spontaneously during services, which is a practice that is condemned by Paul (1.Cor.14:27-29, 34,40).
- There is no formal request for an interpreter before they speak in languages that are not understood by the rest of the congregation—a practice condemned by Paul (1.Cor.14:28).
- They repeat meaningless sounds which is vain repetition—and forbidden by Jesus Christ (Matt.6:7).
- There are people falling on their backs, leaping, jumping, screaming, shouting, lapsing into unconsciousness, and exhibiting uncontrolled emotionalism.

All these things are the opposite of order and the clear instruction of the apostle Paul and many others concerning the acceptable behavior for God's elect children

THE WORD 'UNKNOWN'

Most Bible scholars will agree that the word *unknown* is not in the original text of first Corinthians, chapters 12 through 14. Some Bible scholars believe that, although the word *unknown* is not in the original text, the Greek language infers that the language(s) being discussed is unknown. A very short study into the Greek language easily disproves such a theory.

It is interesting to note that although the word *unknown* is recognized by Bible scholars as being out of place in these scriptures, almost all who analyze this subject try to incorporate it into their explanations of what these difficult scriptures mean. It would seem that, because the word is clearly a misrepresentation of the facts, it should be treated as such and should not be considered when explaining the intent of the verses, except to say the word has no value to the topic at hand.

THE CORINTHIAN WORSHIP SERVICE

The noted scholar J. B. Lightfoot believed that the language spoken of in chapters 12 through 14 was the ancient Hebrew tongue and he gives some historical facts that are difficult to challenge. However, whether or not his conclusions are correct is open to debate. However, his understanding of history is substantiated by historical documentation. He brings out the following points in reference to the worship service of the Jewish synagogues of Paul's day and how this could have influenced the Corinthian Church:

- Public prayers in the synagogue were made in the ancient Hebrew tongue, with the exception of one or two being made in Chaldee. Few people spoke and understood ancient Hebrew at that time.
- Those who taught or preached spoke only Hebrew, which was repeated to the worshipers by an interpreter.
- It was a disgrace for a woman to speak in the synagogue or to usurp any part of the ministerial office.
- Services were conducted in an orderly and worshipful manner.

Because many of the Christians at Corinth were Jewish converts along with a few former priests of the synagogue, The biblical scholar Lightfoot felt that the Corinthians more than likely patterned their worship services after the synagogue services. If Lightfoot is correct in his assumption, chapters 12 through 14 can more easily be understood and the language mystery more easily solved.

FALSE CHRISTS, DOCTRINES, AND SPIRITS

An in-depth study into the charismatic Christian religions shows that their activities are a far cry from the behavioral patterns of the early Christians. The unintelligible muttering and emotional displays of those indulging in speaking in unknown languages are not the acts of an orderly spirit

Many adherents of the new charismatic religion claim that speaking in unintelligible languages is the prophetic evidence of a great spiritual awakening just prior to the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ. However, such a claim cannot be supported by scripture. In fact, the scriptures show just the opposite is true.

"Behold the days come, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of the hearing of the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Am.8:11-12 KJV).

The apostle Paul warned that just before the end of the age, there would be very little of God's truth found in the world (2.Thes.2:1-11; 2.Tim.3:13). However, there will be widespread acceptance of many false doctrines that are in opposition to the word of God.

It is interesting to note that charismatic religions are becoming a unifying factor between many of the world's professing Christian and non-Christian religions, as well as the occult and humanistic movements. However, charismatic practice of speaking in unintelligible languages does not fit within the guidelines Jesus gave to the church. Perhaps this resurgence of these charismatic practices will be the unifying force that will bring about the 'super church' spoken of in the Book of Revelation.

SATAN DECEIVES THE WHOLE WORLD

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world . . ." (Rev.12:9 KJV). See also Rev.2:9; 3:9.

It is easy for people to accept the various deceptions Satan has to offer, because the vast majority of this world's population, including most of professing Christianity, are already deceived and worship Satan's false religious system: *"And no marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2.Cor.11:14).*

However, it is difficult to deceive the elect of God if they will follow the scriptural instructions not to be led astray by every wind of doctrine and to test the spirits to see if they are of God or not (Eph.4:14).

BEWARE OF DECEPTION

Jesus warns: *"For there shall arise many false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect" (Matt.24:24 KJV).*

The last half of this verse would be more correctly rendered: *"So as to mislead if possible, even the elect."* Indeed, it is possible to mislead the elect of God. In order to avoid being led into a false teaching, a true Christian should study the scriptures diligently and prayerfully and be very cautious about accepting new doctrines by making sure that each new doctrine is backed up by biblical fact.

Paul also warned the Corinthians to be careful not to be led astray by those who preach another Jesus and another gospel: *"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ"* (2.Cor. 11:3).

Most charismatic groups stress belief in the gospel message, but they disobey and deny almost every major aspect of this message.

Peter warns the elect to be aware of spiritual wickedness that seeks to destroy them. And Paul warns about those who will depart from the faith because they are not careful about what they accept as truth:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walks about, seeking whom he may devour" (1.Pet.5:8 KJV).

"Now the spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1.Tim.4:1 KJV).

The apostles knew that many of the elect of God would leave the faith and accept satanic doctrines which would creep into the church because of a lack of attention and diligence to the truth of God. Therefore, they gave many warnings to the Church to be alert to dangerous doctrines. See 2.Cor.11:13-14; 1.Tim.4:1-3; 2.Tim.4:3-4; Heb.13:9; Eph.4:14; 2.Jn.10.

CLEVER COUNTERFEITS

In order for Satan to counterfeit a biblical teaching, he must design his false teachings to closely resemble what is genuine, so it is extremely difficult to distinguish between the two. There is a tremendous danger in accepting doctrines that sound correct without first examining them with cold hard logic.

All of Satan's teachings sound good and are cloaked in the aura of spirituality. But they can easily deceive those who allow their emotions or intellectual vanity to influence their spiritual discernment. However, Satan's doctrines always have two major flaws:

1. They never harmonize with the entire Bible.
2. They always involve the breaking of one or more of God's laws, principles, or precepts.

With his ministers and doctrines, Satan, is very clever and can easily deceive those who are not constantly on guard against false ministers and doctrines:

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing for his ministers to be transformed into the ministers of righteousness. . ." (2.Cor.11:13-15 KJV). See also 2.Tim.3:6.

DECEPTIVE EMOTIONALISM AND EXPERIENCES

Almost all of those who believe in the charismatic practice of speaking in unintelligible languages will say they know it is of God because they have experienced it. However, very few can even begin to back up this experience with scriptural fact. The true Christian who is caught up in the euphoria of this type of charismatic practice should reflect on what the apostle James says:

"Nobody must imagine that he is religious while he still goes on deceiving himself and not keeping control over his tongue; any one who does this has the wrong idea of religion" (Jms.1:26, The Jerusalem Bible).

Charismatic adherents claim that when they speak in tongues they experience 'a euphoric feeling', 'an orgasmic emotion', 'tremendous power surging through the body'. Some people who practice speaking in tongues lapse into unconsciousness and have no ability to control their mind or body and they retain no memory of the event.

It is interesting to note that some of these same feelings and experiences of charismatic practitioners are the same as some people experience who are under the influence of alcohol or mind-altering drugs.

Uncontrolled emotion is just that! It is uncontrolled, which is the opposite of controlled. Humans are emotional beings. Some exhibit more emotion than others, but some control their emotions rather than letting their emotions control them.

Paul says, "*Be angry and sin not*" (Eph.4:26). It is possible to control one's emotions just as Jesus did when he chased the moneychangers out of the temple. Uncontrolled emotion leads to all kinds of problems, such as sexual sins and violent acts against people and property.

"But speak you things which become sound doctrine: . . . Sound speech that cannot be condemned . . ." (Tit.2:1,8 KJV).

"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2.Tim.1:7 KJV).

The English words *sound mind* in verse 7 are translated from the Greek word *sophronismos*, which is derived from a Greek word meaning *discipline*, *sophronismos* basically means self-control.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Because of the growing charismatic movement within the American Lutheran Church, a medical doctor and psychologist, a professor of the New Testament, and a clinical psychologist were asked to research the charismatic practice of speaking in unintelligible languages. What these three men initially discovered about this subject was so interesting to them that they launched a study into the subject that took ten years to complete.

In 1972 one of the three researchers, John P. Kildahl, published the group's findings in a book entitled The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues. Their conclusions and findings closely fit some of the observations Paul noted in his letter to the Corinthians about this subject. The following are some of their findings and conclusions:

1. When charismatic speaking in tongues first begins within a group, the tongues issue becomes a dividing force that is never resolved peacefully and always leads to division and tension among those who practice speaking in tongues and those who do not.
2. The experience seems to be selfish and does not benefit the entire group as a whole.
3. People who were able to manifest this phenomenon had the following personality traits:
 - They were very susceptible to hypnotism.
 - They were exceptionally dependent and submissive to authority figures.
 - They were willing to be totally subjected to another person's will.
 - They were very trusting of other people.
4. Those who did not or could not speak in tongues had just the opposite personality traits.
5. Individuals who spoke in tongues always seemed to imitate the group leader or the one who had introduced them to the movement.
6. The languages spoken were not true human languages as defined by linguistics, except when the person doing the speaking had a prior knowledge of a particular human language and then spoke it.
7. The activity was either induced by the hypnotic suggestions of the group leader or by the subconscious desire of the individual.
8. This phenomenon was a purely learned behavior, with the exception of a few cases which could be described as demonically influenced.

This study seems to indicate that there was nothing very spiritual about this phenomenon, but it seems to be a humanly generated source of enjoyment and comfort for its participants. However, it was just the opposite for the non-participant.

TEST THE SPIRITS

The apostle John gives some extremely sound advice about teachings, such as the charismatic practice of speaking in unintelligible languages:

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try [test or prove] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1.Jn.4:1 KJV).

"But do not trust any and every spirit, my friends; but test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, for among those that have gone out into the world, there are many prophets falsely inspired." (1.Jn.4:1 NEBT).

There are many examples in scripture of people being inspired by God's spirit. But there are also examples of people being inspired by evil spirits. *"A company of prophets met him [Saul]; and the spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied. . ."* (1.Sam.10:10). *"And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul and he prophesied. . ."* (1.Sam.18:10). Just because a person speaks eloquently and dynamically or even speaks truth does not necessarily mean that the spirit of God is inspiring them.

PROVE ALL THINGS

The elect of God are warned time and time again to always be alert to the dangers of false teaching and to prove what is right and good before accepting it as truth: *"Prove [put to the test] all things; hold fast that which is good"* (1.Thes.5:21 KJV).

Some people might take offense at the thought of testing the spirits for fear that they might show a lack of respect toward God. However, God instructs us through his word to test whether or not spirits are from him. If we test the spirits with the right attitude, we do not offend God, we please him. Moreover, we are doing what he tells us to do for our own good. To live a Christian life is not a child's game; it should be taken very seriously, because one's eternal life is at stake.

It would not be wise to say that God does not or will not give the supernatural ability to be multilingual in order to proclaim his good news message or to teach his truths to those he has called or will call to salvation. However, it is wise to test and prove if the spirit represented is of God or not. See Matt.24:24; 2.Cor.11:13-15; Eph.4:14; 1.Thes.5:21; 1.Tim.4:1; 1.Jn.4:1.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

If a person actually has the gift of multiple languages from God and is inspired by the spirit of God to use this ability, this person will also teach and practice the foundational truths of God.

In the vast majority of cases, the simple test of obedience to the law of God will reveal whether a spirit-influence is of God or not. The apostle John was inspired to say that if a person does not obey God, he is a liar and there is no truth in him (1.Jn.2:4).

However sincere a person might be in practicing their belief, sincerity is never a test of whether a person is guided by the spirit of God or not. Obedience to God is a test (1.Jn.2:4).

God does not give his spirit to those who oppose or disobey him (Acts 5:32). He also takes his spirit away from those who disobey his laws, precepts, and principles. Because the vast majority of those who practice speaking in tongues do not obey the most basic of God's laws, precepts, and principles (1.Jn.2:4; 3:22-24; 5:3), it is relatively certain that it is not the spirit of God that guides them. Moreover, one should be extremely wary of those who say they have a gift from God, but do not obey him. Paul reveals in 2.Thessalonians 2:5-11 that God will allow those who do not obey him to be greatly deceived by false doctrines.

THOSE WHO SEEM TO OBEY GOD

A second category of people that one might encounter practice speaking in tongues and outwardly practice many of the basic laws of God. Some of these people seem to have all of the spiritual fruits associated with those who are in obedience to the laws of God. Therefore, perhaps they fit into the same category as the people Paul was addressing in the Church of Corinth? If this is the case, there is a need for repentance, because they are in danger of losing their eternal lives.

Paul Issued the following reprimand to the elect at Thessalonica:

Paul admonished, *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly and not after the tradition which he received from us"* (2.Thes.3:6 KJV). There is absolutely no historical tradition or indication in the Bible that gives credence to, authorizes, or in any way condones the gibberish and outlandish behavior of the charismatic speaking in tongues as proper behavior within the congregations of the true God.

Not everyone who has a charismatic experience is influenced by a good or an evil spirit. Some people are extremely emotional or become carried away by the excitement or intensity of the moment.

GUARD AGAINST BEING DECEIVED

It is extremely important for a true Christian to be able to determine the difference between the influence of good and evil to guard against being deceived by a false doctrine. The following are some examples of the use of multiple languages that are inspired of God and some that are not.

The Receipt of the Holy Spirit

The ability to communicate in a language other than one's native tongue may be given as evidence of initial receipt of the holy spirit. In these cases, there is no need for an interpreter, because those present will understand the language(s) (Acts 2:1-12; 10:44-48; 11:15-18; 19:1-6).

Evangelism

The ability to communicate in a language other than one's native tongue may be given for the purpose of proclaiming the true gospel. In these cases there is no need for an interpreter, because the people hearing will understand the language(s) being spoken (Acts 2:1-12; 10:44-48; 11:15-18; 19:1-6).

Formal Worship And Teaching Services

- If the truths of God are to be preached in a language foreign to those present, an interpreter must be present before the speaking, so that all who are there can benefit from what is said (1.Cor.14:27-28).
- No more than two or three different multilingual speakers may speak during a formal assembly of the elect, and the languages must be spoken consecutively (1.Cor.14:29-33).

A Wrong Spirit

The following are clearly behaviors that are not appropriate for the elect of God.

- Uncontrolled babbling or use of unintelligible languages during formal worship services (1.Cor.14:23)
- The absence of an interpreter to interpret what is said when multiple languages are used by the speaker (1.Cor.14:28)
- Women preaching and teaching within a formal worship service (1.Cor.14:34-35)
- Disorderly conduct: yelling, screaming, vocalizing of repetitious meaningless sounds, unbridled emotion (1.Cor.14:23)

OTHER QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

There are many other questions that a true Christian should ask about the charismatic act of speaking in tongues that can help to give a clear picture of the spirit behind this practice and its dangers to one's eternal salvation:

- Does God the Father want to control and manipulate human minds or does he want each individual to control and develop a strong mind and character and be in control of their own mental processes?
- Who do we find possessing, controlling, and manipulating the minds of individuals in the Bible narrative? Does God do this or is it something that is done by evil spirits?

MIND CONTROL

It is repugnant for most true Christians to even consider the thought that God would send his spirit to control, manipulate, and possess their minds and deprive them of their free agency.

God tells us the very opposite. He says that he gives us his holy spirit so that we can exercise it and use it for good. He does not say that he gives us his spirit to control our actions. Clearly, from what the Bible says, the only beings that want to control and take over the minds of humans are evil spirits.

Throughout the scriptures, we find that God the Father wants those he calls to salvation to increase righteous character and self-control, with which they can use to make correct decisions and judgments.

THE DESIRE FOR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

"If a man desires to be an overseer in the Church, he desires a good work" (1.Tim.3:1).

Any person who desires a spiritual gift should do some introspection and ask themselves why they desire the gift. If one desires the gift for personal aggrandizement or purely selfish reasons, they are seeking the gift for the wrong reasons.

The apostle Paul says the reasons for spiritual gifts is to render service to the Church and for evangelism (1.Cor.12:7; 14:24; Eph.4:12-14). The correct ambition leads a person to accomplish good things for all.

Anyone who seeks the experience of speaking in an unknown language may truly find such an experience. However, this experience can also be spiritually fatal if it is not from God.

The apostle Paul warns Christians about the deceptions of those who follow Satan:

"Whose coming is after the workings of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all the deceptions of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2.Thes.2:9-12 KJV).

Although speaking in tongues is predominately a quasi-Christian phenomenon, it is also found in other religions (Buddhism, Mormonism, Hinduism, Islam, and many other non-Christian religions). From a biblical point of view, there are no positive aspects of the charismatic practice of speaking in unintelligible languages. It has many negative aspects and does not fit any of the overall goals that are set forth for the elect of God. Any practice within the congregations of God that even remotely resembles the charismatic practice of speaking in tongues should be highly suspect as an invalid manifestation of the spirit of God, especially when one reflects on what has been shown in this study.

The Apostle Peter Warns:

"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the Devil as a roaring lion, walks [is walking] about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1.Pet.5:8-9).

The following are the reasons that God gave the gift of languages on the Feast of Pentecost:

- The gift of languages was a witness of God's power to the speakers, as well as the hearers.
- This gift of languages was bestowed on entire groups of believers, not just on a single selected individual within these groups.
- In each case the holy spirit came unexpectedly and in the beginning of the person's Christian experience.
- The gift of languages was given to show that the people who received it were God the Father's earthly children.
- The gift of teaching the word of God (prophesy) was given along with the gift of languages.
- No interpreter was necessary for the hearers to understand what was being said by those who received the gift of languages.
- There is no indication that any of these individuals were seeking the experience of speaking in a language different from their own, which is done within charismatic religious groups today.
- There is absolutely no mention of any private or solitary manifestation of this gift other than Paul's reprimand to the Corinthians.

The following compares the accounts in Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, which show the Father's children speaking in foreign languages.

Acts 2

- All spoke in languages as a group (Acts 2:4)
- Languages were understood by all who heard (Acts 2:6)
- The speakers spoke to humans (Acts 2:6)
- No interpreter was needed (Acts 2:6-11)
- These languages were a witness to believers and unbelievers (Acts 2:4-31)
- Most were filled with awe and marveled; a few thought they were drunk (Acts 2:12,13)
- There was perfect unity among the believers (Acts 2:1)

1 Corinthians

- Not all believers spoke in languages (1Cor. 12:30)
- Languages were understood by few, if any (1Cor. 14:2)
- The speakers spoke to God (1Cor. 14:2,9)
- An interpreter was needed (1Cor. 14:23,28)
- Speaking in various languages was a witness to unbelievers (1Cor. 14:22)
- Paul said strangers would say they were insane (1Cor. 14:23)
- There was utter confusion (1Cor. 14:33,40)

Because of the differences between the accounts shown on page 362, it should be obvious that these accounts are not speaking of the same subject.

A careful analysis of the accounts in Acts, chapter 2, and 1. Corinthians chapters 12 and 14, reveal the following important information:

- The only common event that happened in the events shown in the accounts in the books of Acts and Corinthians is water baptism.
- Different signs were manifested for different people under different circumstances.
- A person who is called to salvation does not have to beg God for the holy spirit because he gives it freely to those who obey him.
- It is not necessary to repeat the name of Jesus or any other words, chants, or incantations over and over in order to receive the holy spirit.
- God honored the ordinance of laying on hands for the receiving of the holy spirit.
- A person does not have to speak in a foreign language to receive the holy spirit.
- The charismatic doctrine which says that no one can receive the holy spirit unless he speaks in a foreign or unknown language and speaking in these languages is the only evidence that one has the holy spirit is false.

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By B. L. Cocherell

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— CHAPTER —
TWENTY

THE SACRED NAMES BELIEF

There are some people who hold the belief that salvation is dependent on the ability to recognize and vocalize the names of God the Father and Jesus Christ as they appear in the original text of the Bible.

Does your salvation depend upon how you pronounce the name of the Creator of the physical universe? Is there divine inspiration in the phonetic representation of the names of God the Father and Jesus Christ? Does an individual who can recognize and pronounce these names correctly have access to supernatural powers?

This belief is commonly referred to as the 'Sacred Names' doctrine. And the adherents of this doctrine are often called Yahweists, because Yahweh is one of the Hebrew names for God.

The following are the major tenets of the Sacred Names belief:

- The Greek translation of the New Testament is incorrect because the New Testament was written in Hebrew.
- Hebrew was the universal language spoken before the Great Flood and will be the language of the Kingdom of God.
- There is only one personal name for the Supreme Sovereign of all that exists.
- An individual must be able to know, recognize, and pronounce the correct personal name of the Supreme Sovereign in order to have salvation.
- The Almighty One that Christ called 'Father' was the Creator God whom the Israelites worshiped.
- There is power and salvation in the correct pronunciation of the name of God.
- One cannot worship the Supreme Sovereign unless one knows his personal name.
- It is impossible for a person to truly know the Father or the Savior unless that person can recognize the written representation of their names and pronounce them correctly.

Is This Doctrine Important?

The Sacred Names teaching is so important to many of its believers, that most of their worship toward God and their literature surrounds this one issue. It is also evident from the literature that they produce concerning their beliefs that all other doctrines of their belief system take second place to this one issue.

The belief in the Hebrew Sacred Names doctrine may seem unimportant to some people and even ludicrous to others. However, it is of such a major concern to some groups that they have spent a great deal of time, money, and effort writing books, pamphlets, and study papers about this subject.

A DANGEROUS BELIEF

There is merit in researching the names of God; however, this research has given rise to the dangerous belief that the recognition and pronunciation of the name of God is a prerequisite for salvation.

Note:

There is absolutely no way to give a quick and easy answer to confirm or deny the validity of the Sacred Names doctrine, because those who teach this belief use many scriptures in their attempt to prove their point. Because of this, it will be necessary to examine each foundational point in detail so that there will be enough information on which to base an intelligent conclusion in regard to this false doctrine.

Specifically, this study answers the following questions in order to show the impact that belief in this doctrine can have on one's salvation:

1. Are people required to worship and serve the Sovereign Father and his Son or their names?

The answer to this question is of utmost importance to our salvation. Moreover, the question of whether or not to follow the Sacred Names doctrine is even more basic than the ability to correctly recognize and pronounce the name of the Ones who English speakers recognize as 'God the Father' and 'Jesus Christ.' The basic issues of the Sacred Names doctrine revolve around three foundational questions:

- What is idolatry?
- Who and what is God?
- Who gives salvation?

Once these three basic questions are answered it is easy to see the fallacy of the Sacred Names doctrine.

2. Is the meaning of a name important, or is it the pronunciation that is important?
3. What was God's name before the Genesis Flood?
4. Is the Hebrew name of God a 'mantra' or 'talisman' to the Sacred Names believer?
5. Is there some power in the Hebrew name of God when it is pronounced correctly?
6. Do the Sacred Names believers worship the Supreme Sovereign or do they worship his name?

The answers to these questions are important in order to understand the seriousness of the Sacred Names doctrine and its potential impact on those who are truly seeking to worship the true Supreme Sovereign of all that exists.

There is nothing inherently wrong with people using the Hebrew or Greek name of the Sovereign Father or his Son as a part of their language. The problem is not whether the name is *Yah, Yahwey, Elohim, Theos, Logos* or any other derivation of what is thought to be the correct pronunciation of their sacred names; the problem is the importance some people place on the phonetic sound of the name in relation to salvation and the teaching that the inability to recognize or pronounce their names' adversely impacts on one's relationship with the Sovereign Father and his Son.

The Sacred Names doctrine states clearly that, unless a person knows the exact name of God and its pronunciation, there is no salvation for that person. If this teaching is correct, there are many questions about how a person can and cannot gain salvation. This teaching leaves the following people without hope of salvation:

- People who are mute and cannot speak.
- People who have a speech impediment and cannot pronounce the name correctly (if indeed the correct pronunciation can be found).
- People who are deaf. They are unable to hear the exact pronunciation; therefore, they cannot reproduce it correctly.
- People who are blind and cannot recognize the exact name in order to pronounce it.

If the usage of the phonetic sound of the name of the Savior is the only way a person can obtain salvation, Abraham, Moses, King David and a host of others will be left out of Kingdom of God, because none of these people ever heard the name of the Savior.

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE THEORY

Was Hebrew the universal language before the Flood? Many of the Sacred Names groups believe it was. However, there is no proof to substantiate this belief.

Let Us Confuse Their Language

"And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. And the Lord said, Behold, the people are one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing that they have imagined to do will be impossible for them. Let us go down and confuse their language, so that they may not understand each other. So the Lord scattered them upon the face of all the earth: and they stopped building the city" (Gen.11: 5-8 Para.).

Here, we learn four major things about these people who were building this city and a tower:

1. They all spoke the same language
2. This language was confused by the Creator
3. The people were scattered throughout the earth
4. This confusion of the language gave rise to other languages

Nowhere in this account is there any reference to these people's language being a universal language or a language spoken before the Great Flood. It is entirely possible that there were many different pre-Flood languages, and that Noah and his family brought any number of them to the post-Flood world. The thing that precipitated God's intervention was the explosion of knowledge and technology among the people who lived in this one area of the world, and the need to stop their technological progress in order for God's plan for the salvation of humanity to proceed as scheduled (Gen.11:1-6).

PRE-FLOOD LANGUAGE

There is abundant proof that the Great Flood of Noah's time did happen. However, there is no evidence that the language that Noah and his family spoke before this flood was Hebrew, because the flood destroyed the evidence. However, artifacts have been discovered that seem to indicate that a written language different from Hebrew existed before the Great Flood.

In the spring of 1891 a farmer named J.H. Hooper discovered a buried wall many thousands of feet long, this wall extends from the Hiawassee river north of Chattanooga southward, where it dips under the Tennessee river. Upon this wall a number of blocks were discovered which were covered with hieroglyphs of a strange language interspersed with small pictures of the sun, crescent moon, and animals, many of which were unidentifiable. All together, 872 individual characters were noted with many being repeated, which indicates that these hieroglyphs were indeed a written language (Translations of the New York Academy of Sciences (11:26-29) written by A.L.Rawson).

Tennessee Wall Hieroglyphs:

At Lawn Ridge north of Peori, Illinois, in August 1870 three workmen who were drilling a well brought up from a depth of 114 feet a coin-medallion in the drilling mud. This coin-medallion was about the size of a U.S. quarter and made of a copper alloy, machine rolled and acid etched with the picture of a woman on one side and the picture of a crouching animal on the other. Around the outer edges of both sides were found glyphs of very definite character, that show all the signs and form of alphabetic writing (Sparks From a Geologist Hammer by Professor Alexander Winchell).

While these two discoveries do not prove that Hebrew was not one of the languages of the pre-flood world; their discovery does document extremely ancient languages of unknown origin that bear no resemblance to ancient or modern Hebrew, or any other known script.

THE FATHER OF THE HEBREWS

Eber, the father of the Hebrews, was not born until about 73 years after the Flood and at least 60 years after the Tower of Babel incident. If he was the father of the Hebrew language, what was God's name before Eber? Did the Hebrew language exist before Eber? What does history show to be the language in existence at the time of Babel? Some historians say that the Hebrew language only dates back to about 2,200 B.C. Of course some feel it is much older. The problem with any of the dates discussed is that there are just as many opinions as there are dates, and there is no totality of agreement among the various historians.

However, it is known that Sumerian history antedates that of the Hebrews by about a thousand years. Therefore, it seems likely that, if there was a single language in use at the time of the Tower of Babel, it would have been Sumerian, which is definitely not Hebrew. Some point to the ancient Moabite Stone to prove Hebrew was the universal language, but the writing on the stone only proves two things: It shows that the name of the Hebrew God was different from the heathen god Baal, and that Hebrew was one among many languages in use during that time.

According to the Encyclopedia Judaica, article 'Alphabet', the Hebrews adopted the alphabetic script along with cultural values from the Canaanites during the eleventh and twelfth centuries B.C.. They followed and used the Phoenician script until the ninth century B.C. when they began to develop their own national script. So, the Hebrew alphabet, as we know it today, had its origin in the proto-Canaanite alphabet and is not 'sacred' in any sense of the word.

A NEW PURE LANGUAGE

Why would God find it necessary to bring a new pure language to the earth if Hebrew is that pure language. The necessity of a pure language should raise questions as to the validity of Hebrew being the language of the future. It should also bring into question the Hebrew pronunciation of God's name as being the purest. The following scripture leaves no doubt as to when the Lord will restore or institute a pure language:

"Therefore wait on me, says the Lord, until the day that I will rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour on them my indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will turn to the people a pure language, that they may call on the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (Zeph.3:8-9 KJV).

THE NEW TESTAMENT

One of the reasons for discussing the Old and New Testaments separately in this chapter is to expose the fallacy of one of the major tenets of the Sacred Names doctrine that states that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew, not Greek. If this were true, where are the original Hebrew documents kept? And can they be viewed and authenticated like the Greek documents? If this claim were true, where is this canonization of the New Testament in the Hebrew language? God says that he would preserve his word, so if it was preserved, where is it? There is no physical proof of this supposition?

If indeed there is an original text, it has been hidden extremely well from those whose life work is to discover and publish such findings. Most importantly, why do the Sacred Names groups use and quote from the Greek New Testament to try to prove many of their doctrinal positions, if they do not believe it is a valid text?

NO ACCURATE TRANSLATIONS

In the article [Exploding The Inspired Greek New Testament Myth](#) by Assemblies of Yahweh, we find the following statement:

"We believe that although the original text was inspired, there is no such thing as an inspired translation. Therefore, until such time as the original documents are unearthed, we must base all doctrine on the Old Testament. We should utilize the New Testament, however, and always allow the Old Testament to interpret the New . . . The oldest manuscripts extant with the exception of some Syriac fragments are Greek . . . The first point we would like to establish is that there are no original manuscripts of any book or portion of the New Testament extant today."

It is interesting that all of the Sacred Names groups seem to agree that the original New Testament was inspired. However, they say there are no inspired or accurate translations of these original texts in existence today. If the New Testament is not the inspired Word of God, there is no reason to use it for spiritual guidance or quote from it. Moreover, if there are no accurate translations, we do not have a guide to salvation. And if there is no guide, we are all without hope of eternal life, because in this age we do not have a means of atoning for our sins, which those of ancient Israel had (i.e., the sacrificial system and the priesthood).

Many of the Sacred Names groups attack the King James translation by saying its translators were only mortal men. Yet, they recommend and quote from the Sacred Name translation, the Moffat, Rotherham, Smith, Goodspeed, Jerusalem Bible and many other translations, which were all translations by mortal men.

Most scholars who support the idea that there is evidence of Aramaic influence behind the New Testament Scriptures limit this influence to only a few books. Some Sacred Names advocates carry this to the extreme by teaching that the entire New Testament was written in Aramaic. However, there is absolutely no proof that the New Testament was written in any language other than Greek.

It is not the intention of this study to defame anyone's character. However, one can only wonder about the credibility of a person's or a group's research when they openly state that they do not believe the Greek New Testament translation is valid and proceed to use a scripture from the Greek translation as support for one of their major doctrines.

If Sacred Names adherents feel that the Greek New Testament is not the inspired word of God, they should not use it to try to prove their beliefs, because it is not logical or scholarly. Furthermore, if these researchers want to be consistent in their logic and scholarship, they should not use the Greek New Testament to prove any of their beliefs.

To accept the belief that there is no inspired New Testament, requires the view that the early Christians were so indifferent and careless that they allowed the original writings of the apostles and others to be completely replaced without a word of protest. Such an assumption is preposterous.

THE LAMSA TRANSLATION

Many individuals in the Sacred Names groups believe that the authorized Bible of the Church of the East (i.e., the Peshitta) is the original canonized New Testament. Many quote from a translation of the Peshitta by George M. Lamsa and believe that Lamsa's translation was taken from an original Aramaic text; therefore, it should be used in place of the King James Version.

There is no doubt that the Peshitta exists and is the Bible of the Church of the East, but was it translated from the original New Testament text?

In regard to the source of Lamsa's translation of the New Testament, one of the leaders of the Church of the East says, "The Church of the East received the scriptures from the hands of the blessed Apostles themselves in the Aramaic originals, the language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and that the Peshitta is the text of the Church of the East which has come down from the Biblical times without any change or revision" (Catholicos Patriarch of the East, Preface, Lamsa Bible, by Mar Eshai Shimun).

Christ reprimanded the disciples saying:

"These twelve Jesus sent out, and charged them, and said, Keep away from pagan practices and do not enter a Samaritan city; But above all go to the sheep which are lost from the House of Israel" (Matt.10:5-6, Lamsa).

"And he answered, saying to them, I [Christ] am not sent, except to the sheep which went astray from the house of Israel" (Matt.5:24, Lamsa).

"James a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered among the Gentiles; Greeting." (Jms. 1:1 Lamsa).

Lamsa translates the name of the Savior as *Jesus Christ* and not *Yahweh* or *Yahshuah*. Moreover, the above scriptures in the Lamsa translation say that the original apostles were to go only to the descendants of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. If the apostles did deliver the canon to those of the Church of the East, they disregarded the clear instructions of Christ, because these people are not Israelites.

Additionally, the Peshitta is written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. And this is documented by Lamsa and other scholars. If Aramaic, which is not Hebrew, was the language in which the original New Testament was written, why would the Aramaic version use many Greek and Chaldean words in its text?

GREEK THE INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

During the time of Christ and the apostles, Greek was the language of the Roman world. The vast majority of the Diaspora (scattered Israelites) could not speak Hebrew or Aramaic. It is interesting that Jesus came from that section of Palestine that was regarded as corrupt in the eyes of the Jews in Jerusalem, because Greek was the common language there (Matt.4:15; 12:18; Jn.1:46). It is also interesting that neither Hebrew or Aramaic were suited for the proclamation of the gospel message, because they could not easily express the abstract concepts that are found in the New Testament.

Christ commanded the apostles and disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk.24:47). Greek was the international language of the day; therefore, it was the most appropriate language in which to preach the gospel message.

Acts 6 shows that the Jerusalem Church was comprised of Greek and Aramaic speaking Jews. In fact, the seven men appointed to oversee the needs of the widows all had Greek names, which indicates that they probably spoke the Greek language.

Aramaic versions of the New Testament extant today are translations from the Greek, and it is well known that the origin of the Peshitta is unknown beyond the fact that it is a close translation from the Greek. Lamsa claims that the Peshitta Gospels preserve the words of Jesus better than the Greek Gospels; however, other scholars disagree and say that the Aramaic version does not preserve God's sacred name.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS OF QUMRAN

In 1947 a young Arab shepherd boy named Mohammed discovered a small cave that contained what are called the Dead Sea Scrolls. And from 1947 to 1955, many more caves were found to contain scrolls. What makes these scrolls so exciting is that some of them were written as early as 150 B.C., which gives further proof that the Old Testament we have today is textually correct.

The astounding discovery of the first six caves establishes that the Essene people of Qumran were a part of the Jewish culture. However, a more startling find was made in mid-march of 1955 in cave number seven, which indicates that some of these Essenes were Christians. What people are not generally told is that the seventh cave contained portions of the books of Acts, Romans, Timothy, II Peter, and James, which were all written in the Greek language. Apparently, some of the Essene Jewish scholars who lived at Qumran around 70 A.D. had been converted to Christianity.

The discovery of these New Testament fragments among these Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls proves that the Greek language was the language of the New Testament. These fragments of the New Testament constitute authentic evidence that the words of Jesus were widely known and recorded throughout the first century in Palestine. It is also evident that, as early as 70 A.D., the writings of the early church leaders were being compiled and collected in the Greek language of the day.

BIBLE NUMERICS

Bible numerics are a tremendous proof that the Old and New Testaments are both the inspired Word of God. Hebrew and Greek are two languages in which each letter of the alphabet has a numerical value. A number of books have been written to explain the numerical sequence of the subject matter of the Bible. This numerical system is so precise that it is exact to the primes of numbers. Both the Old (Hebrew) and New (Greek) Testaments fit together in this numerical structure no matter what the subject may be. However, the Chaldean/Aramaic cannot be made to work within this design. This is a dramatic and demonstrative proof that the New Testament was originally canonized in the Greek language.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE TIME

History shows us that Hebrew gave way to Aramaic by the time of our Savior. Although Hebrew had ceased to be used, the Aramaic that was used was called 'Hebrew'. Historians also agree that Greek was the language that united people in the Roman Empire.

The Jewish historian Josephus shows in his writings that the Greek language was understood well by Jews living in and out of Palestine. In fact, the Mishnah shows there were synagogues in which the Jewish law permitted Greek to be spoken: "May be read in foreign tongue to them that speak a foreign tongue" (Megillah 2:1). And it further permitted:

"That the books [the law, the writings, Psalms, etc.] may be written in any language." However, at the time of Christ these books were "only permitted to be written in Greek" (Megillah 1:8 The Mishnah, by Herbert Dandy).

Although the majority of historians and Biblical scholars agree that Aramaic (not Hebrew) was the primary language of the Jewish inhabitants of Judea, and that Greek was the universal second language of the day, Josephus says:

"I have taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks and to understand the elements of the Greek language, although I have long accustomed myself to speak our own tongue [Aramaic], that I cannot pronounce Greek with such exactness." (Josephus spoke Greek with an Aramaic accent).

"For our nation does not encourage those who learn the languages of other nations, and so adorn their discourses with the smoothness of their periods; because they look upon this sort of accomplishment [learning Greek] as common, not only to all sorts of freemen, but to as many of the servants as pleased to learn them. But they give him the testimony of being a wise man, who is fully acquainted with our laws [which was rare among the Jews!] and is able to interpret their meaning" (Antiquities of the Jews, Book XX, chapter XI, Section 2).

Josephus says it was a rare Jewish scholar (i.e., wise man) who understood Hebrew well enough to be versed in the law. This is not only because Hebrew was extremely difficult to learn but also because Aramaic was the language of the Jews, not Hebrew. It was very common for the ordinary person to learn and speak Greek during the time of Christ.

The books of Hebrews and Matthew are the only two books that historians have ever claimed were written in Hebrew or Aramaic/Chaldean, and translated into Greek for canonization. Even the Aramaic version of the New Testament that we have today is freely admitted to be translated from Greek, despite what Dr. Lamsa of the Lamsa Bible claims.

The idea that Hebrew is a sacred language is not valid. The Sacred Names argument rests primarily on the assumption that the Hebrew language is some sort of sacred language to the exclusion of all other languages. There is no valid proof that there has ever been a pure language on the earth. God recognizes the various languages of the world, which was demonstrated on the day of Pentecost in 30 A.D., when the holy spirit was given to the apostles and disciples (Acts 2:1-11).

Both the Old and New Testaments have words from many different languages spread liberally throughout (e.g., Chaldean, Latin, and Aramaic). It is not necessary to list the many words from the different languages that were used in the Bible, because the documentation is easily accessible from Bible helps and research publications.

The important point is that God allowed words from other languages to be used to convey his truth. If Hebrew were to be the only language used for this purpose, there would not be a Greek translation of the New Testament for the elect of God to use; God would have given a Hebrew translation.

The end-result of accepting the Sacred Name doctrine is a complete disbelief in the inspiration of the New Testament.

If God went to the trouble of inspiring the New Testament in Aramaic, as Sacred Names advocates say, why would he allow it to become a corrupt and unreliable Greek text? Surely, such a concept is an open denial of the power and love of God! If God is as concerned about the world as Sacred Names advocates say, we can be sure he did not let his truth become corrupted.

A PROPHETIC WARNING

We are warned not to add or delete anything from the prophecies of the Book of Revelation. To do so will result in the loss of salvation. This is a very serious penalty for tampering with the truth of God. Anyone who would assume the responsibility of reconstructing a new Hebrew version of the New Testament, which would include a restored Book of Revelation, should consider this warning:

Revelation 22:18-19

"For I testify to every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add to these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev.22:18-19). See also Deut.4:2; 12:32; Pro.30:5-6; Gal.1:6-9.

WHO WAS THE CREATOR GOD?

It is extremely easy to miss the conceptual meaning of many scriptures unless one understands the difference between God the Father and the Creator God. Once this knowledge is gained, much of the plan and purpose of the God family becomes crystal clear. Also when one is able to prove who the Creator God was in relation to the God family, the Sacred Names belief system can be understood for what it truly is.

The foundational mistake the Sacred Names groups make is believing that the Sovereign God and the Creator God are the same God. This foundational mistake is the cornerstone on which they build their Sacred Names belief. They repeatedly state in their literature that one should worship the Creator God as God the Father. This foundational assumption is false. In fact, the false belief that the Creator God is the Father of the Messiah conceptually cuts one off from God the Father who is revealed in the New Testament.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen.1:1). It is very hard to find a Bible scholar or a linguist who does not agree that the word God in verse one is the Hebrew word Elohim which is a plural noun that means Mighty Ones.

However, here is where almost all agreement stops. This one word, which conveys the meaning of unity and allows for a plurality of spirit-beings, is the key to understanding what the Family of God is and who its members are. Without this understanding, it is impossible to comprehend the real meaning of the names of these *Mighty Ones*, the magnitude of the sacrifice of our Savior, or much of anything else to do with their awesome plan for mankind.

A MIGHTY ONE NAMED EL

In the Bible, the Hebrew word *El* which means *a Mighty One*, is often translated as *God*. In Exodus 17:1, *El* is combined with another Hebrew word *Shaddai (El-Shaddai)* which means *the Almighty God* or *God the Almighty One*.

THE 'I AM THAT I AM'

When they first met, Moses asks God:

"And Moses said to God [Hebrew: Elohim], Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God [Elohim] of your fathers has sent me to you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say to them?" (Ex.3:13 KJV).

God tells Moses that he is Elohim. All of the documentation available says that Moses compiled the Book of Genesis and most of Exodus. In compiling the Book of Genesis, Moses uses the Hebrew word *El* and its descriptive combinations to address and describe *A Mighty One*. Doesn't it seem strange that for the first 2,500 years of mankind's history Moses again and again records the name of the Creator God as being *El* and not *Yahweh*?

"And God [Elohim] said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM: Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, I AM [Hebrew: Haya] has sent me to you" . . . (Ex.3:14). The English word I AM is a translation of the Hebrew word Haya, which means to be, to become, to exist, or to happen. The Creator God told Moses to tell the people that the Haya (the One Who Is, the Self-Existent One) is who he is.

If the Creator God wanted to be called *Yahweh*, he would not have had Moses call him *Haya*.

"And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, by the name of God [El] Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH [YHWH] was I not known to them" (Ex.6:3).

El confirms that he was only known to the Patriarchs by the names of El. But what about this name Jehovah in the King James translation?

THE WORD 'JEHOVAH'

Although many people have been taught that *Jehovah* is the correct name of God, it is not. A quick and easy search of Bible concordances, references, dictionaries and word study books will show that the word *Jehovah* is a totally incorrect translation of the Hebrew word used for this deity:

"This word 'Jehovah' is generally held to be the invention of Pope Leo X's confessor, Peter Galatin . . . who was followed in the use of this hybrid form by Fagius. But it seems that before Galatin, the name Jehovah had been in common use . . . since it is found in Raymond Martin's 'Pugio Fidei' written in 1270" (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, article, Jehovah, volume VII, p.88).

This and many other sources leave no doubt that the word *Jehovah* is an incorrect translation of the Hebrew word 'YHWH.'

WHY ALL THE CONFUSION?

Why is there so much confusion about the name of God? The reason is that the true pronunciation of the Hebrew word 'YHWH' has been lost. Because the Hebrew language uses consonants and semi-consonants and does not use vowels, it was easy for the exact pronunciation of 'YHWH' to become lost.

After the days of the prophet Jeremiah, the Jews became very superstitious and decided that the name YHWH was too holy to be spoken. Instead, they used the word *Adonai*, which means *Lord* or *Master*. Over time, the proper pronunciation of YHWH became lost. No one today knows exactly how to pronounce YHWH; therefore, there is much confusion about this name.

THE TETRAGRAMMATON:

Translation and Pronunciation

Many people performed extensive research into the tetragrammaton (YHWH) and many have assumed that by strength of mind, intellect, or divine guidance they would be able to discover the correct pronunciation of the tetragrammaton. However, even with the thousands of hours of scholarly research, labor, and reams and volumes of research papers and books written on the subject, the pronunciation of the tetragrammaton seems to be as elusive as ever.

There are many who think that they have found the answer and can give a very convincing argument. But, so can their opposition. Where does this leave the non-scholar? Which researcher, scholar, body of theologians, or historians is one supposed to believe?

The Name YHWH

"And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, and by my name YHWH I never made myself known to them" (Ex.6:3).

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament by Harris, Archer, and Waltke gives the following explanation of the mysterious word 'YHWH' that is used in Exodus 6:3:

"The tetragrammaton YHWH, the Lord, or Yahweh, the personal name of God and the most frequent designation in scripture, occurring 5,321 times . . . in the O.T. except seven times where the name is particularly stressed [Ex.6:3; Ps 83:18 . . . Isa.12:2; 26:4] . . . or combined with other elements, such as Jehovah Jireh [Gen.22:14; Ex.17:15; Judg. 6:24; consistently Jehovah]" (p.210).

Although The Theological Wordbook has about two and a half pages of some of the best scholarly work to be found on this subject, it is not the final authority. There are many who disagree totally with the conclusions reached by the authors of this book. However, the most important authority on this subject is the Bible.

GOD THE FATHER AND THE SON

In John 1:1-14 there are some very difficult scriptures, which cannot be understood without the knowledge of who and what the Family of God is. If one believes in Monotheism, Dualism, or Trinitarianism, one cannot understand what is being said in the first chapter of John. But, if one knows that the Family of God consists of two members—God the Father and the Creator God (God the Son)—these scriptures can be understood.

John 1:1-3 KJV

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn.1:1 KJV).

In this context, the *Word* (Greek: *Logos*) does not mean a part of speech or language. It is a title of the Son of God: Logos, the Word, the personal manifestation, not of a part of the Divine nature, but of the whole Deity" (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p.1253).

At the beginning of creation there was one called the Word and this Word was with God (Greek: *Theos* which means *Deity*). Not only was this Word with the Deity (God) but also the Word was a Deity.

"The same was in the beginning with God" (Jn.1:2 KJV).

John makes a further distinction between these two spirit-beings (the Logos and the other Deity) by restating the fact that this Logos was with the Deity. Why would John emphasize this distinction if there is only one God?

"All things were made by him [the Word, i.e., the Logos]; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (Jn.1:3 KJV).

John says all things were made by the Logos who was with the Deity. Why did John have to explain this? We know that he was writing to Christians and Israelites who should have known the identity of God. So why was he expounding on this fundamental principle?

The Mystery of God

The apostle Paul spoke of God the Father and Jesus Christ as a mystery that was understood by the Colossians and the Ephesians. When this mystery is understood, it becomes much easier to comprehend the gospel message and its importance to the plan of God for the salvation of humanity:

"For I want you to know how great a struggle I have concerning you, and those in Laodicea, and those who have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts may be comforted, being joined together in love, and to all the riches of the full assurance of the understanding, to the full knowledge of the mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Jesus Christ" (Col.2:1-2 Para.).

"And to make all see what the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent now to the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal wisdom which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph.3:9-11 KJV Para.). See also verses 3-6.

Paul also makes the same distinction that John did regarding these two distinct, individual spirit-beings and the relationship between them.

Paul also substantiates the writings of John in stating that there is one God who is in charge (the Supreme Sovereign) and directed Christ to create all that exists:

"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1.Cor.8:6 KJV).

John 1:4-5, 10, 14 KJV

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (Jn.1:4-5 KJV).

Simply put, the vast majority of the people who saw and heard Jesus did not know or understand who he was or why he came to earth. The same can be said for the generation in which we live today; very few people really know who he was and the truth and purpose of his coming.

This powerful spirit-being came to earth to perform a mission of great importance, and the vast majority of the people he came into contact with did not even know who he was:

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not" (Jn.1:10 KJV).

This may seem sad on the surface; however, it was part of the plan that was made before the foundation of the earth by the one called *Logos* and the One called *Theos*.

John further explains who our Savior was: *"And the Word [Logos] was made flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father. . ."* (Jn.1:14 KJV).

Here, John introduces the reality of the spirit-being called *the Father*, and there is no doubt from the context that this spirit-being is distinctly different from the Word. The Father is the one whom John says the Word was with. The Father is also the one who Paul says made all things by Christ.

If Jesus Christ is the Mighty One who created all that was made, which is plainly stated by John and Paul and a multitude of scriptures, who is this spirit-being John calls 'the Father'?

THE MIGHTY ONE OF ISRAEL

The Sacred Names groups assume that the Mighty One of ancient Israel is the one we call the Messiah, and that he and his Father are the same spirit-being. This assumption contradicts what Jesus and the apostles said about the Father. The truth is that the scriptures speak of two separate spirit-beings—God the Father and God the Son.

NO HUMAN HAS SEEN GOD

"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him" (Jn.1:18 KJV).

"And the Father himself, which has sent me, has borne witness of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape" (Jn.5:37 KJV).

Many people believe that these two scriptures refer to the Creator God when they say that no man has seen God. However they actually refer to God the Father, who sent the Creator God to become his physical son and to reveal him as the Sovereign Father of all that exists and to teach his message of salvation.

John clearly says that no man has seen God, and Jesus says that no one has heard the Father's voice or seen his shape; therefore, there should be no question that the God spoken of by John and Jesus is not the same God that walked and talked with humans on earth.

Adam and Eve Walked and Talked with God

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (Gen.2:16 KJV).

Some try to justify their monotheistic belief by explaining that the spirit-being people saw and talked with was only an angel who represented God. However, the scriptures plainly state in the accounts where God met and talked with people that it was actually God who spoke with people, not an angel:

"And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Gen.3: 8 KJV).

Not only did Adam and Eve hear the voice of God but also they were afraid to stand in his presence.

"And the Lord God called to Adam, and said to him, Where are you? And he said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat? And the man said, The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said to the woman, What is this that you have done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. . . To the woman he said . . . And to Adam he said. . ." (Gen.3:9-21 KJV).

After speaking at some length to Adam, Eve, and the serpent, the Creator makes a statement that proves he was not the only God.

"And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (Gen.3:22 KJV).

To whom was the Creator referring when he said "*as one of us*"? Was he talking to an angel or was he talking to someone else? Remember, the One we call our Savior was the One who created all things (Jn.1:1-5; Eph.3:9). This reference to a plurality of god-beings becomes very important in reaching a conclusion as to the Father and Son relationship.

Cain Spoke with the Creator

"And the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he [the Creator] said, What have you done?. . ." (Gen.4:9-10 KJV).

There is no mention of an angel speaking for the Creator here. It is clear that the Creator is the one speaking.

God Spoke to Noah

"And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Gen.6:13 KJV). See also Gen.7:1; 9:1.

Conversations with Abraham

The Creator appeared to Abram and also sat down and ate a meal with him and his wife Sarah:

"Now the Lord had said to Abram, Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you" (Gen.12:1 KJV). "And the Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day" (Gen.18:1 KJV).

"And Abraham ran to the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it to a young man; and he hastened to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat" (Gen. 18:7-8 KJV).

Because this type of food preparation takes a considerable amount of time, there would have been ample time for conversation while waiting for the food to be cooked and served. During this meeting God reveals to Abraham why he came:

"And the Lord [YHWH] said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do . . ." (Gen.18:17 KJV).

The rest of chapter eighteen details the conversation between the Creator and Abraham about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jacob and the Creator

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaks. And he said, I will not let you go, except you bless me. And he said to him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince have you power with God and with men, and have prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray you, your name. And he said, Wherefore is it that you do ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God [Elohim] face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen.32:24-30 KJV).

The common belief is that Jacob wrestled with an angel, but this is not true; it was actually the Creator who wrestled with Jacob:

"And God [Elohim] appeared to Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. And God said to him, Your name is Jacob: your name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be your name: and he called his name Israel. And God said to him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of you, and kings shall come out of your loins" (Gen.35:9-12 KJV).

Moses, Aaron, and Israel

Exodus, chapters 3 and 4, show that the Creator personally spoke to Moses and Aaron and he appointed them to be his servants. Moreover on one occasion, he spoke to the entire nation of Israel:

"And the Lord said to Moses, Lo, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you for ever. And Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, Go to the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, And be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai" (Ex.19:9-11 KJV).

In Exodus, chapter 20, God speaks to the people of Israel, which was a frightening experience for the Israelites. In fact, it was so frightening to them that they requested that the Creator speak to them through Moses, not directly to them.

Moses and the Elders

Moses and the Elders of Israel not only had a meeting with the Creator but also they ate a meal with him on Mount Sinai:

"Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink" (Ex.24:9-11 KJV).

Face to Face

"And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. . ." (Ex.33:11 KJV).

This is a very clear statement, which shows the kind of close, personal communication the Creator had with Moses. Most people seem to think that the Creator hid himself from mankind and only dealt with his creation through visions or angles. However, this was not the case.

The Creator's Glory

"And he said, I beseech you, show me your glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, You cannot see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen" (Ex.33: 18-23 KJV).

It is apparent from the biblical evidence, that many people have seen the Creator in the physical form of a man, and some people were allowed to see a small glimpse of his glorified form. Without a doubt, the scriptures show that humans have talked to and seen the Mighty One who created all that exists for the Sovereign God. Therefore, who is the being that Jesus and the apostles continually refer to as 'the Father' whom no one has seen nor heard?

JESUS SENT TO REVEAL THE FATHER

"All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt.11:27 KJV). See Jn.17:25-26.

Only Christ can reveal who the Father is and he does this through the Bible for those who are sensitive to the things of the spirit. See Psa.111:10.

"I am one that bears witness of myself, and the Father that sent me bears witness of me. Then said they to him, Where is your Father? Jesus answered, You neither know me, nor my Father: if you had known me, you should have known my Father also" (Jn.8:18-19 KJV).

Jesus says that if they had really known the God whom they professed to obey, they would have known that Jesus was the God of their fathers, whom they prophesied would come in the flesh. And if they knew that they would have been able to know that Christ came to reveal the Father to them and they would know both Jesus and his Father.

"I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and you do that which you have seen with your father" (Jn.8:38 KJV).

"These things have I spoken to you, that you should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yes, the time comes, that whosoever kills you will think that he does God a service. And these things will they do to you, because they have not known the Father, nor me" (Jn.16:1-3 KJV).

Christ Did Not Send Himself

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (Jn.3:16-17 KJV).

Christ did not send himself, as some people teach. The scriptures clearly say the One who is called 'God the Father' sent him to become the Savior of humanity.

"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent him" (Jn.5:23 KJV).

"I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me" (Jn.5:30 KJV). See also verses 36-38.

"I am come in my Father's name, and you receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive" (Jn.5:43 KJV). See also Jn.5:30-37; 6:44, 57.

Jesus clearly says that he came to earth as a representative of his Father. Just as the people did not believe the clear statements of the Savior then, they do not believe his written word today:

"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuses you, even Moses in whom you trust. For had you believed Moses, you would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if you believe not his writings, how shall you believe my words?" (Jn.5:45-47 KJV).

WHO IS THE FATHER?

The Savior was the Mighty One who created all that exists for the Sovereign God, which is plainly stated by John, Paul, and in a multitude of scriptures. But, who is this Father who sent him to earth? Who is this being John calls 'the Father'?

"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in your sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt.11:25-27 KJV). See also Mk.4:11-12.

It is Jesus who is able to reveal the things concerning the Father and the mystery surrounding their Father-Son relationship.

Why did Christ have to reveal certain things about the Father? The only logical answer to why the Father sent Jesus to reveal his existence and so many things about himself (e.g., who he is, what his name is, and what he is doing), was that humanity did not know of his existence and it was time to reveal himself in order for the next phase of his plan for humanity to go forward.

John 17:1-8 KJV

"These words spoke Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you: As you have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn.17:1-3 KJV).

At this point in history, there were very few people who had any knowledge of who the Father and Jesus Christ were.

"I have glorified you on the earth: I have finished the work which you gave me to do. And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (Jn.17:4-5 KJV).

Here, Jesus asks God the Father to return him to his former state of existence as an immortal God in the Family and Kingdom of God.

"I have manifested your name to the men which you gave me out of the world: yours they were, and you gave them to me; and they have kept your word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever you have given me are of you. For I have given to them the words which you gave me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from you, and they have believed that you did send me" (Jn.17:6-8 KJV).

Jesus had fulfilled his mission to prepare those whom the Father had called to salvation and to be taught the truth of God concerning the Family and Kingdom of God and their plan for humanity.

THE FATHER IS IN HEAVEN

"Jesus said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt.16:17 KJV).

"And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matt.23:9 KJV). See Matt.18:35.

"I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in your sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt.11:25-27 KJV). See also Mk.11:25-26; 4:10-12; Jn.17:25-26; Eph.6:19.

These are just a few of the many scriptures that reveal the Father is in heaven. A small amount of study will reveal that the Father will not come to the earth to reside until the final phase of the plan for humanity.

It is extremely important to understand that, unless a person knows who the Father is, there can be no understanding of the gospel message that Jesus taught, because it is the Father's message.

WHAT IS THE FATHER LIKE?

"Thomas said to him, Lord, we know not where you go; and how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you should have known my Father also: and from henceforth you know him, and have seen him. Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us. Jesus said to him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known me, Philip? he that has seen me has seen the Father; and how say you then, Show us the Father?" (Jn.14:5-9 KJV). See 2.Cor.4:3-4.

In reply to Thomas and Philip, Jesus says that he had revealed what the Father was like to them. Jesus revealed the Father's existence, attitudes, thoughts, desires, love, and personality through his own example and teaching.

THE FATHER'S NAME

The next few pages contain many of Jesus' references to the Father. Through these scriptures, it is possible to know what the Father is like and what he wants to be called:

"These things have I spoken to you in proverbs: but the time comes, when I shall no more speak to you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day you shall ask in my name: and I say not to you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said to him, Lo, now speak you plainly, and speak no proverb" (Jn.16:25-29 KJV).

"I have manifested your name to the men which you gave me out of the world: yours they were, and you gave them me; and they have kept your word" (Jn.17:6 KJV).

"O righteous Father, the world has not known you: but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me. And I have declared to them your name, and will declare it: that the love where with you have loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn.17: 25-26 KJV).

"And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mk.11:25-26 KJV).

"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in your sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knows who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him" (Lk.10:21-22).

Why did Christ have to reveal the Father and the Father's name if the Father was the Creator God? The nation of Israel knew the Creator God's name. Therefore, it should be obvious that, if God the Father found it necessary to send someone to reveal who he is, he is not the God the Israelites had known.

His Name is Father

Our Savior said to call upon our *Father* who is in heaven. The Greek word used in the New Testament to refer to the Father is *Pater*, which is from a root word, that means *nourisher*, *protector*, and *upholder*. See Matt.6:9; Lk.11:12; Jn.14:13; 15:16.

Some who believe in a monotheistic, dualistic, or a triune God think that somehow our Savior was praying to a part of himself, which he left in heaven while he was on earth. Confusing? Yes, it is confusing and it is not very logical in light of all the very clear scriptures that state Jesus prayed to a being called the Father.

TO WHOM DID JESUS PRAY?

"And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as you will. . . He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, your will be done. . . And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus to him, Put up again your sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Think you that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt.26: 39-53 KJV).

"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said to them, When you pray, say, Our Father which is in heaven, Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" (Lk.11:1-2 KJV). See also Matt.6:9.

Mark records a very revealing statement that our Savior made just before his death:

"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calls Elias" (Mk.15:34-35 KJV).

Jesus quotes a prophetic Psalm (quoted below) that foretold what the Messiah's thoughts and words would be in the last moments of life as a human:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day time, but you hear not; and in the night season, and am not silent" (Psa.22:1-2 KJV).

In Mark 15:34-35, when Jesus speaks to the Supreme Sovereign, he calls him *God*. It makes no sense whatsoever for Christ to pray to a part of himself, as the doctrines of Monotheism, Dualism, and Trinitarianism teach. All of the scriptural evidence shows Jesus praying to a spirit-being who had authority and power over him. See Jn.14:28.

ASK OF THE FATHER IN JESUS' NAME

Our Savior gave instructions on how to ask the Father for what we need in what is commonly called the Lord's prayer:

"After this manner therefore pray you: Our Father which is in heaven, Hallowed be your name" (Matt.6:9 KJV). See also Lk.11:2 KJV.

"And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (Jn.14:13 KJV).

"Whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (Jn.15:16 KJV).

Christ says that his followers should pray to the Father who he came to reveal. Conceptually, if a person prays to the God of ancient Israel, they are praying to the wrong God. The Father was not the Sovereign God of ancient Israel; he is the Sovereign Father of all that exists. This concept can only be understood if one understands that the Father and the Son are two separate and distinct individuals in the Family of God.

THE FATHER'S MESSAGE

The good news that Jesus Christ was sent to proclaim was not his message. He was the messenger, just as John the Baptist was the messenger who foretold and prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus Christ did not send himself as some teach; he was sent by God the Father to bring his message to humanity:

"The word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (Jn.14:24). See also Jn.1:1-15; Rom.1:1-3; 2.Cor.4:4-6.

"That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent him" (Jn.5:23 KJV).

"I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me" (Jn.5:30 KJV). See also verses 36-38.

"I am come in my Father's name, and you receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive" (Jn.5:43 KJV). See also Jn.5:30-37; 6:44, 57.

Clearly the good news message that Jesus brought is from God the Father who is the Sovereign of all that exists.

The apostle Paul also says that the good news message that he preached as a servant of Jesus Christ was not his message but was a message sent from God the Father (2.Thes.1:1-12):

"Paul a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the good news of the Sovereign God that he had promised before by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, that was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of the Sovereign God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom.1:1-4 Para.).

The Message

Since the life, death, and resurrection of the Father's Son, there has been much preached solely about Jesus as a person. As a result, millions do not believe that the message the Father sent his Son to proclaim is the Father's good news.

The Sovereign Father sent his Son bearing his good news of how to become a part of his divine Family and Kingdom, and that his Family and Kingdom are coming to earth to bring peace and happiness to this troubled world.

The Father's message is a message of hope for a wonderful, peaceful, and happy existence under his care and protection for eternity. This is the good news that Jesus, the apostles, and the early Church proclaimed. This is the message that has not been preached in its totality for centuries.

Moreover, this is the message that Jesus said would be proclaimed and published to all of the world just before his return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

A DEITY BECOMES FLESH AND BLOOD

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:14 KJV). See also Heb.2:9; 1. Jn.1:5-7; Jude 1.

"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him" (Jn.1:18 KJV).

WAS THE SAVIOR AN ANGELIC BEING?

Some of the Sacred Names groups teach that the spirit-being who came as the Savior was an angel sent from the Creator. They believe that the Savior was not God incarnate, but a spirit-being of lesser status and power. If this were true mankind would be without a Savior, because an inferior being cannot be the ultimate sacrifice for our sins as long as there is a spirit-being who is superior in quality of life. Only a spirit-being who was the Supreme Sovereign or equal in status and power to the Supreme Sovereign could fulfill the position of the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of humanity.

The Supreme Sovereign (God the Father) directed the Creator God (Jesus Christ) to create all that exist and to reveal him as his Father and God the Father (Jn.1:1-18; 1.Cor.8:6; Eph.3:9; Heb.1:1-2, 7-10). Jesus revealed the Father and also fulfilled the requirement of the supreme sacrifice, because he was superior to all that he had created (Gen.1:26; 11:7). Only when the Sovereign Creator gave up his immortality and became flesh was he inferior to the Elohim family (Jn.14:28; Heb. 2:9), and this inferiority was only one of mortality versus immortality and flesh versus spirit.

If the Sovereign Creator was not the supreme sacrifice, we do not have a Savior (Heb.9:9-28; 10:1-22; 6:4-8). It is an abominable thing to disdain the sacrifice of our Savior as anything less than the supreme sacrifice. The price paid for our salvation was the death of the Sovereign Creator God. Most of Quasi-Christianity do not understand the magnitude of the sacrifice that was made for each human. There is no salvation for anyone who does not believe that the Savior was the son of the Father. He was not a lesser being; he was the literal son of the Father—the son of god. Humanity desperately needs to understand this vital truth because without it there is no pathway to salvation. Read Jn.1:18,34,36; 3:16-18; Matt.3:16-17 to see how serious a matter it is to disdain our Savior's sacrifice.

A FATHER/SON RELATIONSHIP

John 5:18-26 KJV Paraphrased

"Therefore the Jews intensified their efforts to kill him, because they not only thought he had broken the Sabbath, but he also said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do: for whatever he does, these things the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he does: and he will show him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises up the dead, and makes them alive; even so the Son gives life to whomever he wants to. For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son: That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father has life in himself; so has he given to the Son to have life in himself."

Read the whole chapter of John 16 for a detailed explanation of the Father and Son relationship between the two Supreme Deities in the Family of God.

TWO SEPARATE BEINGS DOING TWO SEPARATE WORKS

The Father does a work and Christ does a work: *"But Jesus answered them, My Father works hitherto, and I work"* (Jn.5:17 KJV). Here, we find two separate god-beings doing two separate works:

THE ONENESS OF THE GOD FAMILY

One of the great mysteries of popular Christianity is the concept of one Supreme spirit-being who is composed of many spirit-beings (i.e., Monotheism, Dualism, Trinitarianism, Pantheism, etc.). These concepts are very confusing and they cannot be reconciled with the Bible.

Isaiah 9:6

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God [El], The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Some people believe that this scripture indicates that the Creator is also the Father who is spoken of in the New Testament. The first chapter of the Gospel of John shows that the Creator was the One who became the Christ. However, this same Christ said that he came to reveal the Father whom no one knew. Simply stated, the Creator was the Father of all living, but not the Supreme Father whom he came to reveal. See Matt.3:13-17; 11:27; Jn.16:25-29; 17:25-26.

Isaiah 45:21-22

"And there is no god [elohiym: gods] else beside me; a just God [El: A Mighty One or The Almighty] and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look to me, be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God [El], and there is none else."

To the Israelites this Almighty One was the only Sovereign (Psa. 83:18). They had no other god, because he was the One who had created all things (Jn.1:3; Eph.3:9) and he had not yet come to reveal the Father.

ELOHIM IS A FAMILY

Many times, Jesus called the Supreme Sovereign 'Father' and talked about his Father—Son relationship with him. Despite this evidence, most of the professing Christian world believes there is only one God. The reason for their false belief is that Satan has deceived the whole world into thinking the God Family does not exist (Rev.12:9; 18:23; 19:20; 20:10).

There are scriptures which plainly speak of this Sovereign Family: *"For this cause I bow down my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"* (Eph.3:14-15). The Family in heaven now consists of 'the Father' and 'the Son' and in the future it will include those who are called to be Sons (i.e., the true followers of God), the elect of God.

Our Savior called the Father *Eloi, Eloi'*, when he was crucified. The apostles and writers said his name was *Theos* and *Deity* and recorded that Christ called him *Pater*. Those who will be sons of the Supreme Sovereign call him *our God* and *our Father*, which is what our Savior commanded us to do. (Matt.6:9; Lk.11:2; Jn.14:13; 15:16).

THE FATHER IS GREATER THAN THE SAVIOR

"All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father, neither knows any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt.11:27 KJV). Only Jesus can reveal who the Father is and he does this through the holy spirit and the Bible to those who are sensitive to the things of the spirit:

"You have heard how I said to you, I go away, and come again to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice, because I said, I go to the Father: for my Father is greater than I" (Jn.14:28 KJV).

THEY ARE ONE

The scripture most used in an attempt to prove that there is only one deity is John 10:30, *"I and my Father are one."* This scripture is true. The problem is not with the statement; it is with the understanding of what it means. God the Father and Jesus Christ are one; they are of one family and one kind. They have one purpose, one thought pattern, one attitude, one opinion, and one spirit. The Hebrew words used in this verse convey the concept of 'oneness', not the singleness of a being or person. There are too many scriptures that say there are two separate individual spirit-beings in the Sovereign Family of God to believe that this one scripture actually says these two beings compose one being.

ACCESS TO CHRIST THROUGH THE FATHER

"No man can come to me [Jesus], except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn.6:44 KJV).

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God [the Father], and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (Col.1:1-3 KJV).

ACCESS TO THE FATHER THROUGH CHRIST

There is no contradiction whatsoever with the Creator saying he was the only Savior and only God. The Creator was in absolute authority over the earth before the advent of the Messiah. Only after the Creator became the Messiah could humans gain access to the Father who is the Most Supreme Immortal Sovereign (Heb.4:15-16):

"My little children, these things write I to you, that you sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1.Jn.2:1 KJV).

"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches" (Rev.3:5-6 KJV).

WHO IS AN ANTI-CHRIST?

"Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is anti-christ, that denies the Father and the Son. Whosoever denies the Son, the same has not the Father: he that acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1.Jn.2:22-23 KJV Para.).

WHAT ARE THE FATHER'S AND THE SON'S NAMES?

Among those who profess to know the exact personal names of God the Father and Jesus Christ, there is much conflict as to the exact characters used to depict the name, the exact vowels used for these symbols, and the exact pronunciation of these characters and vowels.

Here is a partial list of the names that the various groups say are the correct personal names of God. Can you pick the right one?

Yahowah	YAHO	Yahowah-rapha
Yaho-Hoshu-wah	Yah	Yahowah-ra-ah
Y.H.W.H	Yahowah-tsidkenu	Yahweh
Yahowah-shalom	Yahveh	Yahowah-sabaoth
Yahvehshua	Yahowah-yireth	Yahshua
Y.H.V.H	Yeshua	Yahowah-nissi
Yasha	Yehovih	Yeshuwa

In addition, the following are absolutely not the original names of God the Father or his Son the Messiah: Adonai, Jesus, Christ, Jehovah, Iesus, Iesus, Christos, God, Gott, Kuros, Theos, and Yod. Perhaps his personal name is not even in the list above. If your salvation depended on your choosing the right name, which one would you choose? The simple fact is that we do not know the exact pronunciation of their names.

THE MANY NAMES OF GOD

Even though the correct pronunciation of the names of the Mighty Ones (the Elohim) is probably lost, it is still important to know the many names and titles of the God family. Knowing these names will help one appreciate their true character. The following is only a partial list of Elohim's names and titles with their meanings:

Hebrew/English Names

Elohim	Mighty Ones
El	A Mighty One
El-Elyon	Exalted One; Most High
El-Shaddai	Almighty God
El-Olam	God the Everlasting One
El-Roi	God Who Sees Me
El-Berith	God of the Covenant
El-Elohe Israel ..	God of Israel
Emmanuel	God With Us

Greek Names

Kuros Supremacy

Theos Lord, God, Deity

Logos The Word

"As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the Lord [YHWH] our God [Elohim], that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand your truth" (Dan.9:13).

After Babylon conquered the Kingdom of Judah, Hebrew eventually ceased to be the language of the Jews. It was replaced in part by Aramaic, which was spoken throughout the Babylonian Empire. Daniel wrote chapters 2 through 6 of the Book of Daniel in the Aramaic language. And the priest Ezra wrote chapters 4 through 7 of his record in Aramaic. When these two men referred to the Creator in these chapters, they used the Aramaic word *ELAH* seventy-eight different times. If YHWH were the only name that is to be used to refer to the Creator God, these men would have been careful to use it, especially because they represented the Creator God in an official capacity.

The following are references to other names of God:

- The God of Hosts (Am.4:13; 5:27)
- The Lord of Hosts (Isa.47:4; 51:15; 54:5; Jer.46:18; 48:15)
- Zealous (Ex.34:14)
- Yah (Psa.68:4)
- The lofty one. . .whose name is Holy (Isa.57:15)
- YHWH, whose name is Jealous (Ex.34:14)
- You shall call me Ishi (Hos.2:16)

MISINTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

Anyone who has read Sacred Names literature rapidly becomes aware of one thing: Scriptures are misinterpreted and literalism is used excessively to force scriptures beyond the limits of context in order to substantiate their doctrine. Most Sacred Names adherents are absolutely locked into the concept that the word 'name' can only mean one thing—the correct pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. However, as the following references prove, this is not the case.

According to the Sacred Names groups, Psalm 68:4, which says we are to extol God by his name—Yah—means that God has only one name—Yahweh. However, this text does not say God has one name only; it says his name is Yah, not Yahweh.

Ezekiel 39:7 is quoted in an attempt to prove that the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton has not been lost. But this text indicates that the events being depicted in this chapter, including the revealing of the name of God, will occur after the return of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 111:9 is used in an attempt to support the notion that the sacred name must be called upon and revered if one is to receive salvation. This text simply states, "*Holy and Reverend [awesome] is his name.*" It does not say what his name is or what its pronunciation should be, nor does it say eternal life is promised to those who use it.

Hebrews 13:15-16 is cited as a text which proves that the use of the sacred name in the worship of God is required. Again, this text does not say which name to use, nor does it say that any name other than Yahweh displeases him.

Jeremiah 8:8-9 is used to describe how the sacred name was removed from the Scriptures. However, this text says nothing about a sacred name. It simply states that wise men have rejected the Word of the Lord, not the name of the Lord.

Exodus 23:13, Joshua 23:7, and Psalm 16:4 are said to prove it is wrong to mention (use) any other title or name except Yahweh as the name of 'the true Mighty One'. The English word *mention* that is used in these scriptures is translated from the Hebrew word *zakar*, which means *to infix, penetrate into the mind, recall, or to preserve in memory*. It does not refer to 'not mentioning the names of other gods', which was often done by the prophets; nor does it state that the use of any name other than Yahweh is sinful.

Exodus 20:7 and Leviticus 19:12 supposedly condemn the substitution of any name other than Yahweh, because the word *vain* means *to falsify, to bring God's name to nought, or to substitute*. The Hebrew authority Gesenius says the usage of the word *vain* in these scriptures means, *utter not the name of Jehovah upon a falsehood* (i.e., do not swear falsely). This means that one should not use the name of Yahweh when falsely swearing, but it has no reference to using a substitute name for God (see Gesenius, p.807).

Malachi 1:6 supposedly condemns the priests who despise God's name and is a reference to the ministers today who refuse to give honor to God by not using the sacred name. However, Sacred Names advocates fail to quote Malachi 1:7-14, which shows how the priests were despising God's name.

Matthew 17:11 is used to support the concept that John the Baptist preached the sacred name. However, an examination of this text does not support the idea that John's message included the restoration of a sacred name.

John 17:6, 26 is given as proof that Jesus revealed the sacred name to his followers and stirred up much controversy for doing so. Luke 11:52 is also used to show he attacked the Pharisees for deleting the sacred name from the sacred texts. But, there is no evidence in these scripture that supports this claim or shows that Jesus used the sacred name.

Amos 4:13, which the Authorized Version translates as "*The Lord, the God of hosts, is his name*" is taken by Sacred Names advocates to differentiate between the name and title. Stating that 'The Lord' (Yahweh) is the name, and 'The God of hosts' is the title. The Hebrew text does not contain punctuation here, so there are no commas to indicate a differentiation between a name and a title. The text is more actually translated, "*Eternal God of hosts is his name.*"

Amos 5:27 states, "*Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is The God of hosts.*" Sacred Names advocates say this text should be read: "*The Elohim of Hosts, whose name is Yahweh.*" This is another example of violating the Hebrew text. The Hebrew text reads: "*The Eternal, the God of hosts (is) his name.*" This shows Yahweh is not the exclusive name of the God of the Old Testament.

Sacred Names advocates insist that, in the New Testament, Jesus came with his Father's name, Yah. They claim that the Messiah's name *Yahshua* is a combination of Yah with *shua* (salvation). John 5:43 and John 14:26 are quoted to prove their point. However, neither of these texts say Jesus came with his Father's name. They state he came in his Father's name, which is a reference to his coming with the Father's power and authority. These texts clearly do not prove the Messiah used the name *Yahshua*.

THE ENGLISH WORD 'NAME'

The English word *name* is often translated from the Hebrew words *shem* and *shum* and the Greek word *onoma*. None of the words are limited to the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton as Sacred Names groups would have us believe. The following are some of the meanings of the Hebrew words *shem* and *shum* and the Greek word *onoma*.

Old Testament Hebrew

- A Label: Gen.2:19; 26:33; 1.Sam.25:25
- Fame, Renown, Reputation: Gen.6:4; 11:4; 12:2; Num.16:2; Deut.22:14,19; Ru.4:11; 2.Sam.7:9; 8:13; 23:18,22; 1.Chron.5:24; 11:20,24; 12:30; Nehe.6:13; Job 18:17; 30:8; Pro.10:7; 22:1; Ecc.7:1; Ezk.16:14; 22:5; 34:29; Zeph.3:19-20
- Authority, Power: 1.Kgs.21:8; Est.3:12; 8:8; Jer.29:25
- Representative: 1.Sam.25:5,9; Est.2:22
- Attributes: Pro.21:24
- Memorial: Isa.55:13; 56:5
- Byword: Ezk.23:10
- Person: Deut.7:24; 9:14; Jos.7:9; 1.Sam.24:21
- Ownership: Deut.28:10; 2.Sam.12:28; Psa.49:11; Isa.4:1

New Testament Greek

- Name, Label: Lk.1:26; Acts 10:1
- Reputation: Mk.6:14; Rev.3:1
- Authority, Power: Matt.10:41-42; Eph.1:21
- Person, People: Acts 1:15; Rev.3:4-5; 11:13
- Character: Lk.6:22
- Title, Category: Matt.10:41-42; Mk.9:41

A name is a created thing, which God commands us not to worship. We are commanded to worship God, not his name. When we ascribe power to a name, we are ascribing power to something that was created, not to its creator. A name has no significance or meaning without the person. A name only serves to identify. Names and titles applied to God describe his attributes, character, and being. Those who call on a name or title as the way to salvation should read Matthew 7:21-22 and Luke 6:46, which speak of people who call upon and appropriate the name of the Lord but do not do the things that he commands.

Further examination of the words *shem* and *shum*, reveals that Moses spoke *in* God's name, not *of* God's name (Ex.5:23). Psalm 138:2 clearly says that God's word is magnified above his name:

"I will worship toward your holy temple, and praise your name for your loving kindness and for your truth: for you have magnified your word above all your name."

JESUS WILL HAVE A NEW NAME

"He that overcomes will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name" (Rev.3:12 KJV).

Revelation 19:12 shows that Jesus' new name has not yet been revealed. *"He [Jesus Christ] had a name written, that no man knew, but himself" (Rev.19:12 KJV).*

"In that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one" (Zech.14:9 KJV). Jesus will have only one name when he returns to earth with the elect of God, but he has many names now.

THE NAME 'EL'

The nation of Israel has the Sovereign's name imprinted upon it. The name *Israel* literally means *He will rule as God* or *He will reign over his people*. Genesis 32:28, Numbers 6:27, and Deuteronomy 28:10 say God's name was to be placed on the children of Israel. The 'El' in Israel is God's name.

THE TEMPLE BETH-EL

The Creator Sovereign of Israel said he would place his name on a place where he could be worshiped. The scriptures that indicate what the building should be called show that there is a new name used for God.

2.Kings 21:7

"And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the Lord [YHWH] said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever."

Jeremiah 7:14,30

"Therefore will I do to this house, which is called by my name, wherein you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh . . . For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the Lord: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to pollute it."

2.Chronicles 33:4,7

"Also he built altars in the house of the Lord [YHWH], whereof the Lord had said, in Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. . . And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God [Elohim], of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever."

Notice in the above two scripture that his house is called by two different names for God: *YHWH* and *Elohim*.

The phrases *cause his name to dwell, place his name there, put his name there, and my name shall be there* all demonstrate that the meaning of *shem* and *shum* (English: *name*), can mean *to claim ownership*. See Deut.12:11;14:23;16:2, 6; 1.Kgs.8:1-66; 16:29; 9:3; 2.Kgs.23:27. "What God owns he openly possesses by placing his name upon it" (Toward an Old Testament Theology, by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., p.134,196-197).

SOLOMON BUILDS THE HOUSE OF 'YHWH ELOHIM'

"You know how that David my father could not build an house to the name of the Lord [YHWH] his God [Elohim] for the wars which were about him on every side, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent. And, behold, I purpose to build an house to the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spoke to David my father, saying, Your son, whom I will set upon your throne in your room, he shall build an house to my name" (1.Kgs.5:3-5 KJV Para.).

1.Kings 8:16-20; 28-29, 42-44

"Since the day that I brought forth my people Israel out of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build an house, that my name might be therein; but I chose David to be over my people Israel. And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God [YHWH Elohim] of Israel" (1.Kgs.8: 16-17 KJV).

Notice his name is the Lord God (YHWH Elohim) of Israel. Here, two distinct names are combined into one name, which the Creator God says is his name.

"And the Lord said to David my father, Whereas it was in your heart to build an house to my name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless you shall not build the house; but your son that shall come forth out of your loins, he shall build the house to my name. And the Lord has performed his word that he spoke, and I am risen up in the room of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised, and have built an house for the name of the Lord God [YHWH Elohim] of Israel" (1.Kgs.8:18-20 KJV Para.).

"Yet have you respect to the prayer of your servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God [YHWH Elohim], to hearken to the cry and to the prayer, which your servant prays before you today: That your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which you have said, My name shall be there: that you may hearken to the prayer which your servant shall make toward this place" (1.Kgs.8:28-29 KJV Para.).

"(For they shall hear of your great name, and of your strong hand, and of your stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house; Hear you in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calls to you for: that all people of the earth may know your name, to fear you, as do your people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have built, is called by your name. If your people go out to battle against their enemy, wherever you shall send them, and shall pray to the Lord toward the city (Jerusalem) which you have chosen, and toward the house that I have built for your name" (1.Kgs.8:42-44 KJV Para.).

The House of God/Temple

A short study into the word temple will reveal what some Israelites called the House of God.

1.Chronicles 6:10 speaks of the temple that Solomon built for God. The word used for temple in 1.Chron.6:10 is *bethel* or *bet-el*, which literally means *House of El* (i.e., House of God).

The prophet Daniel wrote of the temple and called it "*the temple [palace] of the house of God [Elahh]*" (Dan.5:3). In his description of the temple, Daniel uses a Chaldean word to describe God. Now one would think that Daniel the prophet would know what to call the temple and indeed he did. He called it the temple of Elahh, which is another name for God.

The House of God was not called the House of Yah or Beth-Yah; it was called Beth-El, Temple of YHWH Elohem, Temple of Elah and other descriptive terms that referred to the Creator God for whom it was built. This alone should cast a great deal of doubt upon the Sacred Names doctrine.

THE HIDDEN NAME

Thousands of years ago the prophet Agur was inspired to ask, "*Who has ascended up into heaven, or descended? who has gathered the wind in his fists? who has bound the waters in a garment? who has established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if you can tell?*" (Pro.30:4 KJV).

Clearly, Agur was speaking prophetically about God the Father and the One who was to become his son (the Creator God). During his lifetime, Agur revealed that there were names for the Sovereign God and his Son that no human knew.

There is also some indication in Jeremiah 23:25-27; 44:26, Psalm 45:17, and Ezekiel 39:7 that the name of God was forgotten from time to time by the Israelites. Perhaps the reason that the name of God is so hard to discern and was allowed to be lost was to prevent man from worshipping it in an idolatrous way.

THE PROPHESED NAME OF OUR SAVIOR

The Sacred Names doctrine says that the Savior has only one personal name by which he must be called. However, scripture does not support this belief.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isa.9:6 KJV).

Here, there are five different names for our Savior and each has a different meaning and exemplifies a different aspect of his character. They all are his names and give glory to him.

- 'Wonderful' is translated from the Hebrew word 'pele', which means 'a miracle' or 'marvelous thing'.
- 'Counselor' is translated from the Hebrew word 'yatts', which means to 'deliberate', 'resolve', 'advise', 'give counsel', 'determine', and 'guide'.

- 'Mighty' is translated from the Hebrew word 'gibbor', which means 'powerful', 'champion', 'chief', 'excellent', 'giant', 'mighty man', 'strong man', and 'valiant man'.
- 'Everlasting' is translated from the Hebrew word 'ad', which means 'duration', 'perpetuity', 'eternity', and 'world without end'.
- 'Prince' is translated from the Hebrew word 'sar', which means 'a head person', 'chief', 'general', 'governor', 'keeper', 'lord', 'master', 'prince', and 'ruler'.

Truly, our Savior is all of these and more. Our Savior is so great that it takes these names and many more to describe his attributes.

WHAT DID JESUS' PARENTS CALL HIM?

What was the Savior called by his earthly parents and friends, while he was living in the flesh?

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel [God is with us]" (Isa.7:14 KJV). See also Isa.8:8-10.

What did our Savior's physical parents and friends call him? Did they call him *Yah* or *Yahshua*? If they had called him any of these names they would have probably been stoned for sacrilege.

Almost 2,000 years have passed since our Savior walked the earth. This is a very long time, yet some people place their entire salvation on their ability to pronounce and recognize an ancient name correctly.

For anyone to believe that they know the ancient pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton is amazing considering that the scholarly world of theologians and other researchers cannot totally agree on its exact pronunciation.

Notice what the angel says to Mary's husband, Joseph:

"And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. [Matthew inserts an explanation of this dream] Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt.1:21-23). See also Lk.1:28-35.

Even the Lamsa Translation of the New Testament, which many of the Sacred Names groups look to for validation of their doctrine, translates the name of our Savior as 'Jesus'.

Joseph and Mary were both told to call his name Jesus and that the child would be the Emmanuel spoken of by the prophets (Matt.1:21-23; Lk.1:28-35).

There is absolutely no way to reconcile these scriptures with the Sacred Names doctrine of having one name for the Savior. It simply cannot be done. Either the Bible is not inspired and is not the Word of God or there is another explanation.

The only logical explanation is that the phonetic sound of a name is not important. The things that are important are the attributes that the name describes and the spirit-being that the name represents. It is obvious that one single name cannot possibly describe the wondrous attributes of our Savior.

WHO DID OUR SAVIOR SAY HE WAS?

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the son of man am? And they said, Some say that you are John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He said to them, But whom say you that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt.16:13-17 KJV). The Lamsa Translation agrees with the King James translation here.

Why did Jesus ask these questions? Most Sacred Names groups believe that he was called by Yaho-Hoshu-wah, Yehoshuah, or some other derivation of Yah. If they are correct, Peter gave the wrong answer. Peter says that Jesus was 'the Christos', which means 'The Anointed One'. This phrase is a title not a personal name. Notice that our Savior agreed with Peter's identification of him. Who is right? Peter? Our Savior? Or the Sacred Names groups?

THE NAME JESUS

Some of the Sacred Names groups believe that the name Jesus is actually a corruption of the names of a number of pagan gods, and therefore should not be used to identify the Savior. The following will show that this belief is without merit.

Scholars

Scholars have demonstrated that there is no etymological connection between the names Jesus and Zeus. Jesus is the Anglicized form of the Latin word Iesus; Iesus is the Latin form of the Greek word Iesous. Iesous is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Yeshua. Zeus and Iesous are not cognates (related in origin). Moreover, there is no connection between the name Jesus and the god called Yes. Yes, one of the names of Bacchus, is not connected to the name Jesus by adding the Latin termination sus. Bacchus was one of the names of Nimrod; therefore, there is no etymological connection between the name of the god Yes' and Jesus.

A point to consider is that when Paul preached to Greeks at Athens, he preached about Jesus (Acts 17:18). The Greeks accused Paul of being a 'setter forth of strange gods'. They did not connect the name Jesus with the Greek god Zeus. This simply points out that there is not a single historical or scholarly source that etymologically connects Jesus with the god Zeus. All authorities state that Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Joshua or Aramaic word Jeshua.

The idea that Iesous is the Ionic masculine form of Iaso, the Greek goddess of healing cannot be substantiated. In the abridged and unabridged editions of Greek-English Lexicon by Liddell and Scott there is no such word connected with Iaso. Iesous is listed as the name of Jesus, which this Lexicon says is the Greek form of the Hebrew name 'Joshua'. Iesous is in no way related to Iaso, the Greek goddess of healing.

Christ

Now what about the title Christ? Sacred Names advocates admit that they have been ridiculed in times past for suggesting that the word Christ is derived from the Indian deity Chrishna or Krishna. Their answer to this criticism is that, in the book The Two Babylons, p.60, by Alexander Hislop, there is an illustration of the serpent Calyia slain by Vishnu in the reincarnated form of Chrishna. They say that this portrayal of Genesis 3:15 depicts Chrishna as the serpent-crusher of India, and that Dr. Ignaz Goldhier who wrote the book Mythology Among the Hebrews, links the deities of India and Greece together. Therefore, the Sacred Names advocates believe that the name 'Christ' is closely associated with pagan worship.

It is admitted by both sides of the Sacred Names issue that the word 'Christ' ceased to be a title and became a part of the proper name 'Jesus Christ'.

THE NAME YAH

A letter found in a mound northwest of the modern town of Ta'annek written in the fifth century B.C. proves that Yah was a deity of the Canaanites. Yah is associated with the Canaanitish Mother-goddess, Ashtart-Anat as seen by the Father-Mother titles of the deity of the Jews at Elephantine. There, the title of Anat-Yaw is seen, as well as Ashim-Bethel and Afat-Bethel where the titles of Astarte are combined with the Sun-god, Bethel. At Gaza, Yah appears as a Sun-god on a coin and coins were frequently inscribed with the figure of Ashtart-Yaw, Anat-Yaw, and Anat-Bethel, which corresponds to the Phoenician Melk-Ashtart and Eshmun-Ashtart (The Mythology Of All Races, Vol. 5, p.44).

Yah was identified with the Aramaic Thunder-god, Adad. A coin from of the fourth century B.C. in southern Philisti (when the Jews were in subjection to the Persian kings) has the only known representation of the Hebrew Deity. The letters YHW were inscribed just above a bird which the god held on his arm. The most likely identification of the god Yah of Gaza is the Hebrew, Phoenician, and Aramaic Sun-god El or

Elohim whom the Hebrews had long since identified with Yah (ibid., p.42-43).

The collection of ancient manuscripts found at the Jewish colony of Elephantine demonstrates the use of Canaanite religious terminology in conjunction with the name of Israel's God—Yahu. Such compound names as Anath-Yahu, Anath-Bethel, Ishum-Bethel, and Herem-Bethel are found there. These names all represent the attempt to combine differing philosophies and religious beliefs that were prevalent in the centuries following the Israelite conquest of Canaan. For example, Anath was the ancient Canaanite goddess, the sister of Baal (Bruce, p. 53), and Baal was one of the ancient names for Nimrod (Hislop, p.232).

It was from the divine name Yah that the Greeks took 'Ie' in the invocations of the gods, especially the god Apollo. The name 'Ie' was written from right to left and inscribed over the great door of the temple of Apollo at Delphi (Taylor, p.183). Iao, a variant of the Tetragrammaton, was applied to the Graeco-Egyptian god Harpocrates or Horus. Horus was called Harpocrates by the Greeks. The ancient Greeks had an acclamation similar to Hallelujah (Praise you Yah). They used Hallulujee in the beginning and ending of their hymns in honor of Apollo (Taylor, p.183).

THE CORRUPTION OF GOD'S NAME

From the earliest times, it was the habit of the heathen nations to apply the appellations 'Savior', 'Redeemer', and 'Physicians of souls' to their gods, demigods, and heroes. The appellation 'Our Savior' was the usual designation of the god Aesculapius as well as Bacchus, Jupiter, and Hercules. 'Son of God' and 'Savior of the world' were expressions with which the heathen were quite familiar. Mercury was distinguished in the pagan world by the title of 'Logos' or 'The Word' (Taylor, p.8, 153,156,183). Taylor is correct in his observation that the heathen used such appellations, but he is incorrect in his assumption that the Christians copied these expressions from the heathen. The Bible reveals that it was the other way around.

Orpheus, the earliest poet in Greek legend, states that Bacchus was a lawgiver. He calls him 'Moses' and says he was the one who gave the two tables of law. In all the ancient forms of invocation to the Supreme Being similar expressions are found such as 'Io Terombe', 'Io Baccoth', 'Hehovah Evan', 'Hevoe', 'Eloah', and 'Io Nissi'. It was from Nissi ('my banner'—one of the names of JHWH was JHWH-Nissi) that the Greeks formed Dionysius (Taylor, p.188-189). Taylor admits that the heathen took the names of the true God and applied them to their deities.

Much of the confusion regarding the appropriation of names has been generated by writers, such as Robert Taylor who, in recognizing the absorption of paganism into what is called Christianity today, assumes the Hebrews did the same thing in the development of their religion. But history and the Bible demonstrate the opposite. It was the heathen, during the Old Testament period, who absorbed the names of the true

God into their paganism. That the name Zeus is a corruption of one of the names of the true God, which is seen in the Aramaean account of the Flood. When Deucalion (Noah) entered the Ark with his wife and family, all the beasts came to him in couples because Zeus (Adad) had ordered it (The Mythology of All Races, Vol. 5).

Informed Bible students are aware that both the names of the Greek Zeus and the Roman Jove are derived from the Hebrew YHWH. As Paul states, "*The heathen did not like to retain God in their knowledge*" (Rom. 1:28) and they applied the names of God to their idols.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

History shows that the followers of the Savior were referred to as Nazarenes by Tertullus the orator (Acts 24:1-5) and many others of his time. The Romans called them Christians or followers of Christos. If the elect of the early church were called by any name associated with the terms followers of or assemblies of Yahshua, Yah, Yahweh, Yahowah or any of the other supposed names of the Savior and the Father, why isn't there any historical evidence to this usage in reference to the early church? Two excellent works that have many references to the early church's name are the two books on the Sabbath by Samuele Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath to Sunday and Divine Rest for Human Restlessness.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, (Vol. XIII, p.657, 1903 edition), the Jews:

"Fancied that the real name of the founder of the new religion must be Christos or 'Excellent', and they constantly spoke of the Christians as 'Chrestians'. . . 'If you call us Christians', said Tertullian, 'You bear to the name of our Master; if you call us Christians you testify to the blamelessness of our live!'"

The historian Josephus wrote the following about Jesus:

"Now was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews, and many Gentiles. He was (the) Christ." Josephus, 1849 edition, by E. Morgan and Co., p.364.

The Roman historian Tacitus mentions Jesus specifically in his annals in explaining the word 'Christians':

"Christ from whom they derive their name, was condemned to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Emperor Tiberius." 1 Annals xv:44; written A.D. 115-117.

Christ who was the revelator of the Book of Revelation says, *"I know your works: Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it: For you have a little strength, and have kept my word, and have not denied my name"* (Rev.3:8). The Sacred Names doctrine teaches that this scripture means that we must use the correct name for Christ or we will be denying it.

According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, the word *name* in verse 8 is translated from the Greek word *onoma*, which literally or figuratively *means a name, authority, or character*. The Greek language shows that the true intent of verse 8 compliments true Christians for not denying the authority and character of Christ.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There are many questions to be asked about the Bible and its teachings and the answers may vary greatly depending upon the source. If the questions are not related to one's salvation, the answers received won't really matter much. However, our Savior said: *"Narrow is the way that leads to salvation and there be few that find it."*

To some, the sacred name has become a magical sound that, when uttered, imparts some mystical presence with a supernatural power of its own. This is exactly the same kind of practice found in the occult, which uses incantations and chants to summon the power of evil spirits. Is there some power in the pronunciation of the name, and if so is that power really from the Mighty Ones?

THE POWER AND AUTHORITY OF THE NAMES

Some people have confused the proclaiming of the Savior's name with the false belief that, with the use of his name, comes some inherent power or authority; however, a name is inanimate and has no intrinsic power or authority. A name is not the thing itself; it merely identifies the thing through symbols or sounds.

The disciples cast out demons and performed great supernatural works in the name of the Savior. However, they did all these works through the power and authority that is available through an authorized use of his name; the power was not in the phonetic sound of his name.

Even if a person were to know the correct name of the Savior and how to pronounce it correctly, they would not be guaranteed that they would be able to perform supernatural works or obtain salvation through this ability. There is no magic in the name itself; the power to perform supernatural works and obtain salvation comes through an authorization to use the Savior's name to access and use spiritual power and to communicate with God the Father.

Jesus said that many would perform supernatural works in his name, which is what many have done and are still doing. However, it does not mean that Jesus has sent or authorized the people who do these works. Each individual whom the Father has called to salvation during this age

of the church is warned to test the spirits (1.Jn.4:1) to determine for themselves if the source of the teaching or supernatural works is good or evil:

"Not everyone that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work lawlessness" (Matt.7:21-23 KJV). See also Lk.21:8.

THE MAGICAL POWER OF THE NAME

To say that Sacred Names advocates are obsessed with the necessity of using the 'Name' would be an understatement. The following statements are taken from the article The Sacred Name is it Sacred or Mystical? (Church of God, The Eternal p.30-31).

"Before this you have seen nothing compared to what you will see in the days ahead in the lives of true saints who witness in the name of Yahshua. Now is the time for you to begin to know and use and understand the Sacred Name . . . Great and wonderful things are promised to the believers who are 'in' the Name of Yahshua . . . A blessing is pronounced upon those who think on his name . . . It is by this means that victory over Satan can be gained. There is only one Name given whereby the human race can be saved. That name is exclusive, holding salvation within itself . . . No other name holds the quality of everlasting life within itself. To trust in another name will not save you. In order to be saved you will have to be in the body of the Messiah bearing the name 'Assemblies of Yahweh' . . . While the charge is hurled against us that we ascribe some kind of mystical or magical power to the Sacred Name, this is not the case. There is no magic to be found in any name. However, Semitic culture has always understood the importance of a Person's name, that in some way the one who pronounced it has a special avenue of communication with the individual spoken to."

Although Sacred Names advocates state that there is no magic to be found in the name, they also contradict themselves by stating that there is a special power given by using the sacred name.

AN ATTEMPT TO USE DIVINE POWER

"In an attempt to use divine power, magicians used various biblical names and titles of God in their incantations. These included El, Elohim, Eloah, Adonai, Sabaoth, and Shaddai. But the one name which came closer to the inner reality of the God of the Old Testament was the Tetragrammaton, the YHWH. It was held in such profound awe that it was rarely pronounced for fear of profaning it and possibly for fear of the magic of enemies if they should discover its pronunciation. This belief led to a theological problem. If God could be coerced by the use of his name, then he was not omnipotent. Therefore, a magical explanation

was advanced to solve the problem. The invocation of God's name does not oblige him to do the will of the one who invokes his name, and he cannot be coerced by the recital of his name. Rather, the 'name' itself is invested with the power to fulfill the desire of the man who pronounces it." Cavendish, article 'Names'.

"The Tetragrammaton was considered to be connected with awesome mysteries. The 'wonder-workers' of the Middle Ages, and later times, were believed to have known how to pronounce the Tetragrammaton. Such a wonder-worker was called a 'Baal Shem' meaning master of the name." The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia; Vol.10, article 'Tetragrammaton'.

"In the Cabala, the creation of the universe was regarded as the unfolding of God's name and the ten Sefiroth, being aspects of God's identity, constitute the sacred name of God. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet, used in various combinations and changes, came to be regarded as extremely powerful objects of meditation and magical tools—tools through which the universe was created and which contained the secret of the structure of all things. Thus, the object of Jewish mystical contemplation was the name of God which reflects the hidden meaning and totality of existence. It is the name of God through which everything acquires its meaning. Who, therefore, can succeed in making this great name of God, which is the least concrete and perceptible thing in the world, the object of his meditation is on the way to true mystical ecstasy." Cavendish, 'Names'.

NAMES AND SPECIAL SOUNDS

"The idea common to all magic is that words, names, and sounds have special powers and this applies particularly to names of gods, angels, and demons. To know the name and how to pronounce it and use it made it possible to utilize its power. It is an ancient widespread belief that a secret name can have power over everything in the universe. This belief is especially held by the Jews, and the names of God are frequently used in the practice of magic. This is why the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton is so important. The correct pronunciation is absolutely essential for the working of magic." The Supernatural—Magic, Words, and Numbers, Editorial Consultants: Colin Wilson and Uri Geller, p.68.

"The Talmud makes no bones about the magic of the names of God. According to it, the divine names of God were used to perform miracles by those who knew their combinations." The Jewish Encyclopedia, article, 'Names of God'.

In the 11th century A.D., the Jewish scholar, Hai Gaon, claimed that the use of God's name should be restricted to the Holy Land (The Jewish Encyclopedia, article, 'Shem ha-Meforash'). Physicians even tried to learn the pronunciation of the name of God, because of its marvelous powers, and it is in conjunction with magic that the YHWH was introduced into the magic papyri (ibid., article, 'Tetragrammaton').

According to Eliphaz Levi, the YHWH is the key to divine power and all magical science is comprised in the knowledge of this sacred name (Transcendental Magic, by Eliphaz Levi, p.17, 55).

"In sorcery, the magic circle is a must and the names of Hebrew divinities were often inscribed within the magic circle including the Tetragrammaton." Witchcraft, Magic, and Alchemy, by Grillot De Givry, p.104.

"When the 'Name' was worn by the person, it was regarded as an amulet for the purpose of protecting against danger, sickness, and evil spirits." Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, by Albert Pike, p.204.

"The supreme magician, Henry Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), believed that the name 'Jesus' was all powerful and contained all the power of the Tetragrammaton. Cornelius Agrippa advocated the idea that he had drawn close to the Creator Himself and knew how to call upon the names of God. As Yates notes, this occult religion of Agrippa, which called itself Christian, claimed access to the highest power because it accepted the name of Jesus as the chief of the wonder-working names" (Yates, p.37, 46).

"It was the interest in the Cabala during the Middle Ages that supplied the mystical formulas found in the occult, and the divine names were introduced into the ceremonies of magic and sorcery. Astrological talismans were coupled with Bible verses, Hebrew divine names, and various formulas borrowed from the Cabala." De Givry, p.206, 339-340.

"One of the peculiarities of the modern tongues movement is the belief in the value of words. . . there was an ancient widespread belief that certain words and phrases contained magical power. Of these words, the best known was the Tetragrammaton. Among the Gentiles the reverence for words was displayed in oracles and ritualistic incantations." (Glossolalia in the Apostolic Church, by Ira J. Martin, p. 22-23).

One of the major characteristics of those involved in the movement of Speaking in Tongues (i.e., speaking in unintelligible languages in an attempt to worship God) is the concept of the importance and value of words, which shows that there is a historical link between the Tongues movement and the Sacred Names movement.

Occult attachment to the Sacred Names movement is seen by comments that say there is a blessing pronounced upon those who think on his name. Sacred Names advocates say that, although the name often stands for the person, the name helps them to understand the person. Moreover, they say that meditation on the sacred name is one of the ways by which believers in the deity can come to know the deity better and define and understand their own position better.

Just because a person states something as fact does not make it so. This simple truth is often forgotten by those who are trying to support a theory or position of religious doctrine.

MANY TO COME IN HIS NAME

Jesus says that many will come in his name (i.e., using his name) and deceive many (Matt.24:4-5). The Savior came in his Father's name, not his own (Jn.5:43). There are over 20,000 various church organizations claiming to be 'Christian', and they all differ from each other in their doctrine.

Many think they are doing the will of God because of works and physical manifestations of supernatural power. However, the scriptures say that, if one does not keep the laws of God, everything else they do is in vain (Matt.7:21-23; 15:9). The devil has deceived most professing Christians into thinking God's law has been done away with and is not to be kept by the followers of Christ. But, Jesus says that, if a person is lawless, they will not be in the Kingdom of God.

IS THERE SALVATION THROUGH THE USE OF A NAME?

According to the 'The Assembly of Yahowah the Eternal', one can only gain salvation through the pronunciation of a name:

"Do you know that without the true personal name of the Family of heaven, Yahowah and Yaho-Hoshu-wah, you cannot receive the forgiveness for your sins? That's how serious it is. If you are still calling upon and using the false substituted names and titles—God, Lord, Jesus, Christ, Iesous, Iesus, Christos, Yahweh, Yahveh, Yahshua, Yeshua, Yahvehshua, and Jehovah—you do not have salvation and your sins have not been forgiven." Bishop Gordon Kieth Pearce.

Each Sacred Name group states that there is only one pronunciation of the Saviors name by which one can be saved. If in fact this is the case, we must indeed pronounce this name exactly and with impeccable precision, not missing a single intonation or decibel of intensity. If their statements are correct, we must search out and vocalize these names precisely or lose out on salvation. Of course, this may be an impossible task, because time, chance, and human error enter the picture as we search for this supposed auditory elixir of eternal life.

According to The Jewish Encyclopedia:

"The correct pronunciation of the YHWH was known by members of the Babylonian Academy as late as 1000 A.D. It is believed the name is derived from the Hebrew verb 'to be' (havah). It is for this reason some Sacred Names advocates insist the pronunciation of the YHWH should be Yahvah. Many Sacred Names people are troubled over the various forms of the Sacred Name, but the majority have chosen Yahweh and in faith believe this is the name because scholars predominantly agree in this choice. So, until a better form is learned from the Hebrew grammar

and Hebrew authorities, most will continue teaching the Sacred Name as Yahweh."

"One fact is certain, sacred name advocates are not in agreement themselves as to the correct pronunciation of the Name. Some contend for Yahweh, others for Yahveh or for Yahvah or for Yaheveh. None of the selected forms, such as Jehovah, Yehovah, Yahweh, Yahveh, Yahwe, Yahvah, Yahaveh, and Yahawehe are really demonstrated to be on a sound basis. What is significant is that the YHWH has no true vowel points in modern Hebrew. Its vowel points are those of Adonai.

"The much quoted statement from the Encyclopedia Judaica, that the pronunciation of the YHWH was never lost is predicated upon the idea that a few of the early Greek writers of the Christian Church testify to a pronunciation very nearly like Yahweh. What Sacred Names writers fail to mention, with respect to the statement in the Encyclopedia Judaica, is that the preservation of the proper pronunciation of the YHWH is limited to the first syllable, Yah, only" (Volume 12, p.118). See also Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 1, article 'God, Names of.'

Can anyone prove beyond a doubt what the correct spelling and pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton is? All of those who try to do so are forced to go to human sources for verification. But, there is no agreement in this search. The best that can be said is that the various forms used today for the Tetragrammaton are educated guesses. Yahweh may be more nearly correct, but is this good enough?

The various derivations and pronunciations of the Tetragrammaton are still in doubt. What is now generally assumed is that the YHWH is the causative form of the verb 'to be' and should be pronounced Yahweh or Yahveh. See Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, article, 'Tetragrammaton'.

YAHWEH IS NOT A HEBREW NAME

In The Law and the Prophets, there is some information that destroys any linguistic or historical credibility for the Sacred Names doctrine:

"This explanation was first advanced by Jewish writers in the Middle Ages and has found wide acceptance now. The serious objection to this explanation is that the verb 'to be' has no causative stem in the Hebrew. So, in order to express this idea it is necessary to employ a different verb. In Exodus 3:14 the assumption is drawn that Yahweh is derived from the verb 'to be'. But the verb 'to be' in the Hebrew is 'hayah', not 'hawah'. 'Hawah' belongs to an earlier era of the language. In the historical sense, then, YAHWEH is not a Hebrew name.

"The curious fact is that the ancient pronunciation of the YHWH has been totally lost. The Dead Sea scrolls did not solve the problem, but merely demonstrated that the ban was in effect two hundred years before the time of Christ. The form Yahweh is thus an incorrect hybrid with an early 'w' and a late 'eh'. The indication, though, is that often the inspired writers of the Old Testament were not interested in etymology. Rather,

they wanted to draw attention to the similarity of sound, that is, to use the pun and write a word descriptive of the event. Therefore, it is quite likely that the interpretation of the Name in Exodus 3:14 may not be etymological at all.'

"What should be obvious in all this is that the pronunciation of the YHWH is an academic matter and the God of Israel is more interested in our personal relationship to Him rather than the pronunciation of his name. In fact, from the evidence now available, it may be argued that Yahweh is incorrect and Jahoweh might be the true pronunciation" (p. 215-224, edited by John H. Skilton, Milton C. Fisher, and Leslie W. Sloat).

ALMOST CORRECT IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH

"One thing is certain: critical speculation about the origin and meaning of the name YHWH seems endless" (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 1, p. 210-212, edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke).

If the Sacred Names doctrine is correct, pronouncing the name as closely as possible is not good enough. Either one has salvation, or one does not.

If the exact pronunciation of God's name were important to him, there would be no problem finding out what it is. In fact, the exact phonetic pitch, decibel range, intensity, and cycles per second would be clearly and distinctly recorded for us to mimic in order to obtain salvation.

COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

One Sacred Names group claims that, in order to worship the Supreme Sovereign, we have to know his name and if the name is not known, there is no hope of ever worshipping him. However, there is no scripture that says we must know God's name in order to worship him. One Sacred Names group asks:

"Have you offered pure worship to him by calling upon his name, just as did the ancient patriarchs. Are you sure that you're in communication with the true Almighty Heavenly Father today?"

MUST WE KNOW THE FATHER'S NAME IN ORDER TO WORSHIP HIM?

If the phonetic sound of God the Father's name were extremely important to him, it would also be important to his Son who is our Savior. But was this phonetic sound important to our Savior when he taught his Father's way to salvation? Notice what Mark records that Jesus said just before his death:

"Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calls Elias." (Mk.15:34-35 KJV).

These verses in Mark show the prophetic fulfillment of Psalm 22:1-2:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day time, but you hear not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

The Lamsa Bible, which is supposedly translated from an original Hebrew text, quotes Mark 15:34: "*Eli, Eli, lemana shabakthani.*" If one must use only the proper phonetic sound of the proper name when addressing the Supreme Sovereign of all that exists, our Savior used the wrong name during the most critical moment of his life. These words, *Eli, Eli, shabakthani*, are not Hebrew, but are of Chaldean derivation.

On numerous occasions, Jesus spoke directly to the Supreme Sovereign God using the term 'Father' as his name. This same intimate title is to be used by all those who are the children of God the Father.

THE ONLY NAME IN WHICH THERE IS SALVATION

The Sacred Names advocates base their entire doctrine on Acts 4:10-12, which they claim is proof that there is only one name by which one can be saved. If this is true, we should indeed pronounce this name correctly. However, Acts 4:10-12 does not prove this.

"Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him does this man stand before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12 KJV). See also Psa.54:1.

In verse 10, the English word name is translated from the Greek word *oloma*, which can mean *authority* or *power*.

A further study of this verse shows that the phrase *in the name of* means *in the authority of*, and it makes much more sense than ascribing some mystical power to a name or a phonetic sound.

There is no question that verse 11 clearly states that there is no salvation in any other spirit-being than Jesus the Christ, but how do we reconcile this with what the psalmist David said about asking to be saved by the Creator God?

"Save me, O God, by your name, and judge me by your strength" (Psa.54:1). How could the psalmist David be saved by God's name?

Acts 4:11 says that the name of our Savior is the only name by which we can be saved. The logical answer is that the same spirit-being is being spoken of, but from a different reference point in time.

"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned" (Mk.16:16 KJV).

Here, those who are saved are those who believe, repent, and are baptized. Where does a sacred name fit into this method of salvation? Nowhere does the Bible support the use of the Tetragrammaton as a prerequisite to salvation. Scriptures that Sacred Names advocates advance to support this idea are either forced or given a private interpretation.

Isaiah 9:6 foretold that the Messiah would be called, Pele, Yatts, Gibbor, Ad, and Sar.' Later Isaiah was inspired to say that he would be called Immanuel (Isa.8:8-10; 17:14). Just before Christ's conception, an angel was sent to say his name would be Jesus and Emmanuel. None of these scriptures support the theory that the Savior had only one name by which he was to be called. Actually, they show just the opposite. They show that he has many names, because his greatness cannot be communicated by only one name.

THE ONLY SAVIOR

Once we understand that the Sovereign God of ancient Israel is the God who became the Messiah, it is easy to reconcile the following scriptures, which state that his is the only name by which there is salvation:

"I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no savior" (Isa.43:11 KJV).

In Isaiah 44:24, the Creator says that he is the Redeemer. And in Isaiah 60:16 he says, he is the Savior and Redeemer.

"Tell you, and bring them near; yes, let them take counsel together: who have declared this from ancient time? who have told it from that time? have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just god and a savior; there is none beside me" (Isa.45:21 KJV).

"Yet I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt, and you shall know no god but me: for there is no savior beside me" (Hos.13:4 KJV).

A Samaritan woman said to Christ:

"I know that Messiah comes, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, I that speak to you am he . . . Now we believe, not because of your saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (Jn.4:25-26,42 KJV).

The following statements verify that the God of ancient Israel is the Savior who became Christ:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he has visited and redeemed his people" (Lk.1:68).

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 KJV).

"For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe" (1.Tim.4:10 KJV).

It is true that there is only salvation through the Messiah. However, salvation is not given because of his name; it is given because of what he did for us. This is why the patriarchs—Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others—will have salvation along with all who remain in Christ. If salvation was tied to the phonetic sound of the name, these people would not be able to attain salvation. All of them would be lost. It is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the power and authority of the God family that one can be saved, not through the phonetic sound of a name.

The reason that there is not salvation in any other name (authority) is that the God who came to earth fulfilled the supreme sacrifice; he gave his life for us. Thereby, he made an eternal atonement for our sins. Jesus is the only name (authority) under heaven by which we can be saved. Because Jesus was the Creator God through which Israel could attain salvation, it makes sense that he is still the only name (authority) through which all people can be saved.

SALVATION BY WORKS OR BY GRACE?

Forgiveness of sin is not an act of man, it is an act of God. A name cannot save us. It is the Savior who saves us. It is the result of his action, not ours. Salvation does not come to humans by the act of pronouncing a name or making a phonetic sound. If knowing and using the Savior's name could get us salvation, it would come by the works of people, not by the grace of God through the sacrifice of the Savior. From Sacred Names literature, it is apparent that they believe salvation for them is gained by works (i.e., the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton); it is the result of what they do, not what God is doing through the Savior. This assumption shows a lack of faith in the grace of God the Father and the power of his Son's sacrifice, which allows us to gain salvation without works.

The whole point of Acts 4:10-12 is not that a name saves anyone. The point is that salvation can only be obtained through the sacrifice, authority, and office of the Savior.

HISTORY OF THE SACRED NAMES DOCTRINE

Today's Sacred Names doctrine seems to have its roots in the mid 1930's with two elders, Andrew Dugger and C.O. Dodd, who were rivals and contenders for power within the Church of God in the United States. When it became apparent to Dodd that Dugger was leading in this power struggle, Dodd found a new and exciting cause to champion in order to create a following for himself. This new cause was the 'Hebrew Name Doctrine', which a few small groups have accepted, modified, added to, and tried to validate to this very day. And the controversy continues among these various groups as to which is the real personal name that one should use to gain salvation.

LITTLE OR NO AGREEMENT

There is little or no agreement among the various Sacred Names groups as to the correct symbolic and phonetic representation of the tetragrammaton. However, they do all seem to agree that recognition and pronunciation of the name are matters of life and death to someone who is seeking salvation. Moreover, they also seem to agree that the name must be recognized in its original form and uttered with impeccable precision or one cannot obtain salvation.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Almost all Sacred Names groups rely on and quote extensively from Bible dictionaries, commentaries, historians, encyclopedias, concordances, and other Bible helps for their major sources of proof. The problem with this approach is that these sources very seldom agree on any of the points that are used as proof. How do the various Sacred Names groups know who is right when even the scholars who wrote these materials from which they quote cannot agree among themselves as to the names of the Supreme spirit-beings in question. It also seems a bit incongruous that the Sacred Names groups would place so much faith in those who, according to their belief, are lost and without salvation.

When one looks into the issue of the names and pronunciation of the names in the Bible, it becomes obvious that this subject is extremely technical and controversial and is not a subject for a novice to tackle with little study and preparation. As a result of the difficulty of the subject, the Sacred Names groups' arguments, prey on the ignorance of those who are not well versed in Bible study and research.

Why would anyone place their eternal salvation in the hands of a group of people who cannot prove their belief? The Bible tells us to place our faith in no man, but to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling (Phil.2:12). If a person cannot prove a point of salvation to himself, his faith is weak and perhaps not valid. The scripture says to:

"Prove [test] all things; hold fast that which is good" (1.Thes. 5:21).

THE BASIC COMMANDMENTS

"And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, which have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make to you any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy to thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain" (Ex.20:1-7; Deut.5:7-11).

The first commandment states that one must worship God—not his name, his description, or even his title. There is no indication whatsoever that one should worship his name. The name has no substance or relevance other than descriptive terminology.

Idol worship is defined throughout the Bible as any doctrine, person, place or thing that a person obeys, worships, or holds in reverence above the God Family. An idol can even be something that God has created for his people's benefit. Anything can become an idol to a person if that thing is looked to as equal to, or more important than the God that caused or allowed it to come into existence.

There are many who profess the Christian faith, but believe and practice idol worship. However, few of these people will state that idol worship is acceptable to God. This study has shown that the Sacred Names doctrine of recognizing, worshiping, and serving a name is nothing more than pure and unadulterated idolatry. However, as with all false doctrine, the primary source is always Satanic.

For those who wish to make a further detailed study into this subject, we recommend that you get a copy of The Sacred Name Is It Sacred Or Mystical?, the Church of God, The Eternal P.O. Box 775 Eugene, Oregon, 97440.

CONTROVERSIAL OR NEW DOCTRINES

In reference to controversial or new doctrines, the apostle Paul had some very good advice for any Christian who takes their salvation seriously:

"Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers." (KJV) "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness" (NKJV) (2.Tim.2:15-16).

To the Thessalonians Paul writes:

"Prove [test] all things; hold fast that which is good" (1.Thes. 5:21 KJV).

CRY ALOUD AND SPARE NOT AND SHOW MY PEOPLE THEIR SINS

The Sacred Names doctrine brings people to the brink of idolatry and some cross over the line and worship a name instead of God because of a lack of knowledge:

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, that you shall be no priest to me: seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children" (Hos.4:6 KJV).

One of these laws that Hosea speaks about has to do with idolatry. The punishment for worshiping an idol is death, no matter what the idol is: a physical thing, a philosophy, or a name.

The important issues to be dealt with in the Sacred Names doctrine are not the exact recognition and pronunciation of the names of God the Father and Jesus Christ. The real issues here are idolatry and salvation. Once these two issues are put to rest, the whole matter of how to recognize and pronounce the names of the Sovereign Family becomes insignificant by comparison.

Many have crossed the boundary between the worship of God the Father and serving Jesus Christ and the worship of their names. This kind of worship is idolatry as defined in the Bible (Ex.20:1-5; Deut.5:6-9). There is a fine line between reverence and respect for a name that symbolizes power and authority, and the step into idolatry. It appears that some people have crossed this line and, if it is not repented of, they are in danger of losing the salvation that they seek to gain by worshiping a name.

The Bible maintains that mankind must worship and serve God the Father and his Son, because both are worthy. Nowhere does the Bible show that we must worship and serve a name. Moreover, to do so is to worship and serve an idol.

LOOKING AT THE OBVIOUS

What should be obvious to the reader is that the arguments advanced by Sacred Names advocates to support the notion that Yahweh is the exclusive name that must be used in order to gain salvation cannot be substantiated. Moreover, there is no valid historical or biblical tradition that verifies the proper pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton.

SUMMARY AND WARNING

- Yahweh is not an exclusive name that applies to the 'Heavenly Father'. The name Yahweh or some form of this name applies to both the Father and the Son and is a Family name.
- Sacred Names advocates who are confused as to the identity of the God of ancient Israel assume he was the Father. However, the Bible clearly reveals the God of ancient Israel became the Savior, and that God the Father remained in heaven, while the Creator God (the Savior) was on earth to proclaim his (the Father's) good news message.
- There is no historical or biblical support for the idea that Hebrew or Aramaic are sacred languages and that the New Testament was originally written in Aramaic. Moreover, there is no proof that the New Testament we have today is a faulty Greek translation of the original text.
- The obsession with using a Sacred Name had its origin in occultism and witchcraft, which is proven by history.
- Sacred Names advocates are locked into the concept that the word 'name' in the Bible can only refer to one thing—the proper pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. The truth is that the word 'name' has many meanings that are not related to the proper pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton.
- There is neither historical nor scholarly support for the assertion of Sacred Names groups that names, such as God, Lord, Christ, and Jesus are of pagan origin. What is demonstrated by history is that many pagan religions appropriated the names of the true God, including the Tetragrammaton, and applied them to their pagan deities.

A DECEPTION

The Sacred Names doctrine is just another satanic deception that leads to a very subtle form of idolatry and clouds the truth of the Bible. Moreover, it captures and draws away those who are not well-grounded in truth and faith:

"As also in all his [Paul's] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction" (2.Pet.3:16 KJV).

WARNING

If you believe you have discovered the correct pronunciation of the personal name of the Sovereign Family in heaven and you want to use this name instead of other descriptive words for them in your particular language, there is no conflict with God's word. However, you must not worship or serve the name; worship and honor God the Father and his Son who is the Savior of humanity. To do otherwise is idolatry, which requires the administration of the death penalty to those who practice it:

"Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour" (1.Pet.5:8 KJV).

By B.L. Cocherell

b10w22

CHAPTER
TWENTY-ONE
THE SECRET RAPTURE

The teaching of a secret coming of Christ is known as the Secret Rapture and it is believed almost universally by professing Christianity as a biblical fact. Although there are many variations of the Secret Rapture teaching, most who believe this teaching believe that Christ will return twice:

Christ's First Return

- He will secretly come to gather the saints to protect them from the great tribulation.
- He will return around the middle of the tribulation, or at its end, seven years later.

Christ's Second Return

- He will return to destroy the Antichrist and begin his reign on earth.
- He will return to totally destroy the earth and take remaining believers to heaven.

EMANUAL LACUNZA'S BOOK

The beginnings of the Secret Rapture theory seems to have come from a book by Emanuel Lacunza who had become a Chilean Jesuit in 1747. When the Jesuits were expelled from Chile, Lacunza settled north of Italy where he devoted the remainder of his years to writing 'The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty' in which he speculated that Christ will come twice: once for his saints and again with his saints. He completed his book in 1790 and presented it under the pen-name of Ben-Ezra to avoid exposure, which was wise, because his book was placed in the Index of Forbidden Books by Rome in 1824.

Although the teaching of a pre-tribulation secret rapture of the saints is not found in Lacunza's book, he had actually stumbled onto a Biblical truth, and his speculation seems to have been the catalyst for the doctrine of the Secret Rapture.

THE YEAR 1830

There does not seem to be any literature referring to a secret coming of Christ until after 1830 when many individuals began to come forth with the concept of a secret coming. Among those who taught this concept were the Anglican Curate J.N. Darby, Newton, George V. Wigram, Andrew Jukes, and J.P. Tregelles

THE BIBLICAL FACTS OF CHRIST'S COMING

The biblical facts clearly show the following two returns of Christ:

Christ's First Return

He will openly return to gather the saints three and a half days after the death of the Two Witnesses. See Matt.24:23-51; Rev.11:7-13.

Christ's Second Return

He will openly return with the saints and his heavenly hosts to destroy the governmental and religious system of the Antichrist and False Prophet and establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. See Jude 14-15; Rev.19:11-15; Rev.11:15.

CHRIST TO RETURN OPENLY TWICE

Throughout the Bible, there are many references to God coming to earth to reward the saints and establish his government upon the earth in order to bring peace and prosperity to humanity. Most Bible scholars will agree that God says he will indeed come to earth to establish his government. The problem is not with what these references say, it is with the various beliefs of when and how this will happen.

A close review of each reference that details the presentation of rewards given to the Sovereign Father's elect children and the establishment of his Kingdom on the earth shows two distinct returns of Christ. Christ's first return involves gathering the saints for their rewards and change into immortal spirit-beings. During his second return a short time later, he comes to conquer the earth and establish his heavenly Father's government and worship system which will rule the earth from Jerusalem.

Jesus to Come in Clouds

When the high priest Caiaphas asked Jesus to tell him whether or not he was the Messiah, he did not expect the answer he received:

"The high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, You said it. I tell you more. From this time you shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of the heavens. Then the high priest tore his garments, saying, he has blasphemed! Why do we have any more need of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy" (Matt.26:63-65 Para.).

Jesus told the high priest that the next time he sees him, he will be on his throne next to the Father, and when he returns, it will be in the clouds.

After Jesus' meeting with his disciples and his disappearance into the heavens two angels told them essentially the same thing that Jesus had told Caiaphas about the events surrounding his return:

"While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11 KJV). See also Matt.24:30.

The Creator God and Clouds

The biblical record tells us that when the Creator God appeared in his glorified form on Mount Sinai that he appeared in a thick cloud and that there was the sound of a trumpet along with lightning, thundering, and smoke rising up from the mountain. The following are a few of the many biblical references which speak of a spirit-being in his glorified form appearing in clouds:

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud,. . ." (Ex.13:21 KJV). See also Ex.16:10; 19:9-16; 24:16; 34:5.

"And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spoke to him,. . ." (Num. 11:25 KJV).

"And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire enfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire" (Ezk.1:4 KJV).

"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven,. . ." (Dan.7:13 KJV). See also Psa.104:3; Psa.18:7-15; Rev.1:7; 14:14.

CHRIST RETURNS TO GATHER THE ELECT

When Jesus enters the earth's atmosphere in his glorified form, the elements will begin to disintegrate under the power of his presence as happened when the Creator God in his glorified presence descended on Mount Sinai. As Christ enters earth's atmosphere, the air will become supercharged with electricity, lightning, thunder, fire, and smoke will fill the sky as his angels collect the elect:

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1.Thes.4:16-17 KJV). See also 2.Thes.2:1-8.

"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt.24:31 KJV). See also Isa.43:5-7; Mk.13:24-27; 14:62; Rev.1:7.

The Elect Rise to Meet Christ

What happens as the righteous of all ages rise to meet Christ in the clouds above the earth?

"Listen I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1.Cor.15:51-52 NIV).

The change of the Sovereign Father's earthly children to immortal spirit-beings will be a spectacular event that will be accompanied by the blast of a trumpet that will be heard around the world. Notice that the elect will not only become immortal, but they will assume an appearance similar to that of Christ.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1.Jn.3:2 KJV). See also Rom.6:1-5; Phil.3:21; Rev.1:13-16.

To be like Jesus is to be like him in his glorified form and presence. Notice what the prophet Daniel recorded about the appearance of the righteous who will become immortal spirit-beings in the Kingdom of God:

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan.12:3 KJV).

As the saints rise into the sky, they will be instantly changed into glorified spirit-beings, and they will begin to shine with the brightness and power of the stars. At the instant of their change, the very power of their presence will rip apart the atmosphere, dissolving its basic elements. The noise of this awesome event will be almost unbearable to the human ear as sonic booms, explosions, blinding light, thunder, smoke, and clouds fill the sky. The sights and sounds of this day will put terror in the hearts of all those who witness it. To many, it will seem as if the world is coming to an end.

CHRIST RETURNS TO CONQUER AND RULE

After many plagues are poured out on the earth, Jesus will return with the Elect of God to conquer the beast power and establish the Kingdom of God:

"Now you prophesy against them all these words, and say to them, the Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar over his dwelling place. He answers with a shout, like those who tread out the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A roaring will go to the ends of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with the nations. He will enter into judgment with all flesh; he will give the wicked to the sword,

declares the Lord" (Jer.25:30-31Para.). See also Isa.43:5-7; Mal.3:2-3; 4:1; Am.9:1-4; Oba.vs.15-16.

"And I saw the heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he does judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God" (Rev.19:11-13 KJV).

The Elect Return With Jesus

During the time period between Christ's first and second return, his army of spirit-beings which includes the righteous of all ages then immortal spirit-beings in the Family of God will be preparing to invade and conquer the earth in preparation for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints [the elect], To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15 KJV).

"And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev.19:14-15 KJV). See also Rev.2:26-27; 3:4; 17:14; 19:8.

When Christ returns as the conquering king, the elect of God will come with him as a part of his vast spirit army:

"And to you, who are troubled, rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, that will take full vengeance on those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, these will pay the penalty of everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his strength, when he comes to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired by all those who believe in that day, because of our testimony" (2.Thes.1:7-10 Para.).

Christ's Rule Begins

"And his feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall divide from its middle, from the east to the west, a very great valley. And half of the mountain shall move toward the North, and half toward the South (v4). . . And the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with you" (Zech.14:4-5 Para.). See also Hag.2:6-7.

His Rule to Last Forever

"And the seventh angel trumpeted. And there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world became our Lord's, even of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev.11:15).

This is the time that was spoken of from the beginning of humanity when salvation will begin to come to all of humanity through the Kingdom of God:

"For a Child is born; to us a Son is given; and the government is on his shoulder; and his name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. There is no end to the increase of his government and of peace on the throne of David, and on his kingdom, to order it, and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness, from now and forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this" (Isa.9:6-7 Para.) See Lk.1:32-33.

Whether or not Darby, Newton, Wigram, Jukes, Tregelles or for that matter anyone else used Emanuel Lacunza's writings a basis for their theory of a secret rapture, the Bible shows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that when Jesus returns to gather the elect of God, the event will neither be secret nor silent. The Secret Rapture theory is just that; it is a theory. It is not biblical fact or truth.

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b10w23

CHAPTER
TWENTY-TWO

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE DEAD?

One of the most misunderstood subjects in the Bible is the state of the dead. The main barrier to gaining a clear understanding of this subject is the teaching that assumes humans have an immortal soul which goes to heaven, hell, paradise, or someplace in-between after death.

Because this belief in the immortality of the soul is extremely comforting, most people avoid thinking about the validity of these teachings about heaven and hell. Instead, they avoid the clear scriptures which show that the dead are not alive in some form and in some other place, because these scriptures threaten the very foundation of the teaching of an immortal soul.

Although the beliefs of Catholics and Protestants differ radically in many respects, both believe in the immortality of the soul. They also believe that humans only die physically, but the spirit (i.e., the soul—the sentient being) remains alive in heaven, hell, or some transitory state in-between.

However, the Protestant theology of going to heaven or hell immediately upon death cannot be proven from the Bible. Moreover, the Catholic concept of purgatory as a place or condition of spiritual cleansing is also a non-biblical teaching. Neither of these teachings are valid biblical concepts; they are simply figments of theological imagination, which were conceived to explain the state of the dead in the context of humans having an immortal soul.

What really happens to humans at death? Are they alive in another dimension, or do they cease to exist? If you study the Bible and believe what it actually says, these questions can be answered truthfully.

TWO DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

In order to understand the state of the dead, it is important to understand what a human being is. Many theologians and others believe humans have a soul which is non-physical. The Bible does say that humans have a spirit, but is this spirit a physical creation or is it from another dimension of existence?

The scriptures show two distinct dimensions of existence, and that humans are composed of elements from both dimensions. There is both a physical and a spirit dimension of existence and each is separate from the other in function and creation. However, both work together to enable humans to exist on a higher plane of consciousness than the rest of the physical creation:

"And I say to you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I [Jesus] will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him [God the Father], who after he as killed has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, Fear him" (Lk.12:4-5 KJV).

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him [God the Father] which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28 KJV).

The English word *body* in these two verses is a translation of the Greek word *soma*, which means *a human/animal body* or *a corpse*. The Greek word used in these two scriptures for *soul* is *psyche*, which can be translated as *life* or *mind*. These two scriptures mention two distinct elements of human life: physical and non-physical, both of which can be completely destroyed by God.

The English word *destroy* in the above verses is a translation of the Greek word *apollumi*, which means *to destroy fully, to kill, to perish, to completely do away with*. There is no doubt that the words used in Matthew 10:28 mean that God has the power to completely destroy all aspects of human life.

Jesus says that there are two elements of the human existence and we must fear God who can terminate both the physical and non-physical elements.

Paul also refers to the two elements of human existence in his letter to the Thessalonians:

"And may the God of peace Himself fully sanctify you, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1.Thes.5:23 Para.).

In verse 23, the English words *spirit*, *soul*, and *body* are translated from the Greek words *pneuma*, *psyche*, and *soma*, which respectively mean *physical breath* or the *soul*, the *spirit* or the *mind*, and the *physical body*.

THE PHYSICAL ELEMENT OF HUMANS

In order to determine what the physical element of human life is, the creation of mankind should be reviewed:

"And the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen.2:7 Para.). See also vs.8; Deut.32:18.

"In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground; for out of it you were taken: for dust you are, and to dust shall you return" (Gen.3:19 KJV).

"You hide your face and they are troubled; you gather your breath, and they expire and return to their dust" (Psa.104:29 Para.; Job 34:13-15).

In Genesis 2:7, the English word *soul* is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which means *a breathing creature or animal, vitality, beast, body, or breath*. There is absolutely nothing in the word *nephesh* which indicates anything other than physical life human or animal. The Hebrew word *nephesh* means *a state of being alive*. God created a lifeless body in the form of man and made it a living soul (*nephesh*) by blowing air into its lungs; thus, he gave it life.

"The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life" (Job 33:4 KJV).

PHYSICAL LIFE IS IN THE BLOOD

"And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eats any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul [nephesh] that eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people," (Lev.17:10 KJV).

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood; . . . Therefore I said to the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood. . . For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof. . ." (Lev.17:11-14 KJV).

In this modern age, we can understand the biological implications of this scripture. The heart circulates the blood throughout the body, which in turn performs its life sustaining functions.

If God had not activated Adam's life functions by inserting air into his lungs, Adam would not have lived. But, is human life no more than a chemical-electric reaction of a well designed structure of gas, fluid, and solid matter reacting to internal and external stimuli? Is this the sum of what God created as physical man? If so, humans would be no different from any other animal.

But humans are different from animals and the rest of creation in many obvious ways. Humans are on a higher plane of existence than the rest of creation. But, what is it that makes humans different? The unseen physical and spirit elements of the human creation makes it different from the rest of creation.

THE SPIRITUAL ELEMENT OF HUMANS

There is another element to human life besides the physical. This element is the spirit in man that separates mankind from the rest of creation:

"But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding" (Job 32:8 KJV).

Here, the English word *spirit* is a translation of the Hebrew word *ruwach*, which means *wind* or *mind*. It does not mean a physical being or even a being at all. Rather, it denotes something which is not physical.

"The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, says the Lord, which stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him" (Zech.12:1 KJV). See also Ecc.12:5-7.

The human spirit is a non-physical element of the human body that truly separates humans from the rest of the physical creation. God calls this non-physical element the spirit in man and he has designed it to be a part of the human body. It is this spirit that gives mankind the ability to be on a higher thought-plane than all other physical creatures on earth.

The spirit in man is only one of the two elements of human life that the scientific community neither understands nor ascribes to the human life function. Nevertheless, the spirit in man is of major importance to human life after death.

THE GOD OF SPIRITS

The scriptures show that God formed the spirit which lives within the human body:

"And they fell on their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?" (Num.16:22 Para.).

"Let the Lord God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation" (Num.27:16 Para.).

The spirit in man is neither an undefinable essence nor mysteriously apart from man. The spirit of man is man. The physical body is the habitation of the spirit, which is the sentient and conscious element of the human creation.

THE HUMAN LIFE FORM

Human life is unique in all of creation. A human being is the only life-form on earth which is both physical and spiritual and has the opportunity to be elevated to the highest of all life-forms—a spirit-being in the Family of God.

Animals do not have the potential for immortality and they do not relate to God in the same way as humans. Furthermore, they do not have the ability to worship or interact with God like humans do. See Rom. 8:14-16. For a detailed explanation of the destiny of humanity obtain a copy of the book, *The Gift of Immortality*, ISBN 978-0-9844608-4-7.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HUMANS DIE?

The Bible describes two major events which take place at the death of a human being. These events are of extreme importance to the final destiny of each individual, because each event decides whether or not each individual will have a future existence.

What the Bible says about the physical and spirit record and the events that happen to humans after death is very different from what is taught by the religions of this world. According to the Bible, after a human dies, there are two records of their existence: one which is kept in heaven and one which is kept on earth.

NO MENTAL ACTIVITY AFTER DEATH

At death, the cerebral functions cease; there is no more thought process, no reward, no memory, no knowledge, and no access to this world. Death terminates an individual's interaction with this physical dimension of existence.

The Psalmist Wrote:

"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa.146:3-4 KJV).

Solomon Wrote:

"For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun" (Ecc.9:5-6 NIV).

"Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go" (Ecc.9:10 KJV).

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psa.115:17 KJV).

The reason the dead cannot praise God is because they are no longer alive; their life has been silenced. In death, there is no thought process.

"Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for your mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?" (Psa.6:4-5 KJV).

"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for you have cast all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot celebrate you: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth. The living, he shall praise you, as I do this day: . . ." (Isa.38:17-19 KJV).

It is obvious by the abundant scriptural proof that all conscious thought and life-functions cease at death. The scriptures which speak of human speech, desires, and admonitions after death are either poetic metaphors or analogies, and in some cases, they are describing demonic impersonations of dead people.

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible which indicates the human life function continues in one state or another after death. The Bible says just the opposite; it clearly shows that the physical life of a human is a temporary condition, which can be terminated forever.

THE SLEEP OF DEATH

Many scriptures speak of the state of the dead as analogous to sleep. Because the dead do not have a conscious thought process (Psa.146:4; Ecc.9:5-6), sleep is an excellent description of the condition of death. Below are a few references that show how God views the condition of death:

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan.12:2 KJV).

"He said these things. And after this He said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going that I may awaken him. Then His disciples said, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. But Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that He spoke of the sleep of slumber. Then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead" (Jn.11:11-14 Para.).

"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. When he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59-60 NIV).

"But man dies and is cut off, and man expires; and where is he? As the waters go from the sea, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. Who will grant that You would hide me in Sheol; You would hide me until Your anger turns back; that You would set a limit for me and remember me? If a man dies, will he revive? All the days of my warfare I will wait, until my change comes" (Job 14:10-14 Para.). See also 1.Kg.2:10; 1.Thes.4:13-17.

The billions of humans who have lived and died over the centuries are completely unaware of the passage of time. The interim period between the moment of death, when their conscious thoughts ceased, and the instant when they awake to life again at the resurrection does not exist for them. It will be as if they had gone to sleep and awakened without dreaming; the passage of time is meaningless to them.

The Righteous Dead

In his first major evangelistic sermon after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostle Peter says, "*Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day. . . . For David is not ascended into the heavens*" (Acts 2:29, 34 KJV).

Peter made these statements about the dead fifty days after Jesus had been resurrected. At this point in history, King David was still dead and buried; he had not been resurrected to life.

The Writer to the Hebrews

In Hebrews, chapter 11, there is a long list of righteous individuals who died without receiving God's promises:

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:" (Heb.11:33-35 KJV).

If any are worthy to receive the promises of God, it would surely be these champions of faith: Abel, Enoch, Abraham, and Moses whom God called his friends, Rahab who had faith that God would protect her for her kindness to the Israelite spies, and King David who loved God with great zeal. All of these are among the great men and women of faith. However, about thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection when the letter to the Hebrews was written, these righteous individuals were still dead.

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40 KJV) See also verse 13.

Twice in this eleventh chapter these righteous individuals are mentioned as having died without receiving the promises that God made to them.

The simple truth is that the righteous of all ages, are not alive; they are dead awaiting the return of Jesus to resurrect them and give them their reward. See Matt.24:29-31; 1.Cor.15:50-54; 1.Thes.4:16-17; 2.Thes. 2:1-8.

WHERE DOES THE BODY GO AT DEATH?

Science defines death as the cessation of the life function (i.e., all systems cease to operate—the heart stops circulating blood, the brain stops sending orders to the organs, all thought process cease, the body becomes immobile, all regeneration processes stop, and the body starts to decay). The Bible defines physical death in the same way:

"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground. For you have been taken out of it; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen.3:19 Para.).

God says our bodies were made from the elements of the earth and they will return to these same elements after death.

"All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again to dust" (Job 34:15 KJV).

Solomon Wrote:

"For that which happens to the sons of men, and that which happens to beasts; even one event is to them. As this one dies, so that one dies; yea, one breath is to all; so that there is to the man no advantage over the beast; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are of the dust, and return to the dust" (Ecc.3:19-20 Para.).

Solomon says that both man and beast have the same death process; they both die and return to the elements from which they were made. There is no quarrel with the scientific definition here. At death the physical body in which God placed the spirit of man ceases to function. However, there is more to the physical body than the visible elements from which it is made.

WHERE DOES THE SPIRIT GO AT DEATH?

"Who knows the spirit of the sons of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goes downward to the earth?" (Ecc.3:21 Para.).

Solomon asked the same question many have asked over the centuries about the destination of the spirit in man. However, the great difference between Solomon and most others who ask this question is that Solomon knew the answer:

"Then the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecc.12:7 Para.).

The spirit of man returns to God who gave it. King David and Jesus also understood that God was the custodian of the human spirit.

"Into your hands I commit my spirit: you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth" (Psa.31:5 KJV).

"And crying with a loud voice, he said, Father into your hands I commit my spirit. And saying this, He breathed out the spirit" (Lk.23:46 Para.).

At death, this spirit, which is composed of material from the spirit-realm, returns to God the Father who inhabits the spirit-realm.

The Spirits Cry Out

The Book of Revelation has an allegorical reference to the spirits of the righteous dead crying out for God to avenge their death:

"And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those having been slain for the word of God, and the witness which they had. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev.6:9-10 KJV). See also Gen.4:10; Heb.11:4.

Although the spirits under the altar are unconscious and unaware of anything happening on earth or anywhere else, they symbolically cry out for justice. This scripture confirms that these human spirits have been returned to the Father from their earthly habitation.

IS THE BODY MORE THAN FLESH AND BLOOD?

The scriptures show that the human body is just a chemical-electric reaction of a well designed structure of gas, fluids, and solid matter reacting to internal and external stimuli with the spirit of man inhabiting it. And at death, the body becomes lifeless and useless:

"Then shall the dust [physical body] return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecc.12:7 KJV). See also Gen.2:7; Deut.32:18.

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jms.2:26 KJV).

THE INVISIBLE ELEMENT OF THE BODY

The scriptures clearly show two separate elements that are combined to form the creation called a human being. It is also extremely clear that at death the body returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God. However, how do we answer the clear scriptures which indicate a dead person is both in heaven and on the earth?

A brief study into physical and spiritual law will show that an object cannot occupy two different dimensions of time and space simultaneously. This knowledge helps solve the mystery surrounding the scriptures which seem to indicate that the dead are in two places at the same time. See Ecc.12:7; Psa.31:5; 49:14-15; Lk.23:46; Acts 2:27-29, 34; Heb. chp.11.

There is an invisible physical element to the body which is preserved on earth after the body dies. This invisible element of the human creation is extremely important to the destiny of each individual. Without an understanding of what this essential element is, much of the Bible does not seem to make sense when it comes to the state of the dead and the various resurrections.

THE MYSTERIOUS REPHAIM

Who or what are the Rephaim? Bible Scholars have had great difficulty discovering the intended meaning of this Hebrew word, because its usage indicates that all dead humans remain on earth, instead of going to heaven or hell, which is a common belief.

The Hebrew word rephaim is often used as an allegory which describes the dead and gives vital insight into an extremely important unseen element of the human body.

The Hebrew word *rephaim* has three basic meanings: *giant men*, *ghost of the dead*, or *shades* (i.e., shadows). There are many references which refer to the dead as *rephaim*. These references also indicate that the *rephaim* occupy *sheol*, which is located within the confines of earth's environment. The following scriptures reveal the allegorical use of the word *rephaim* to describe dead humans:

"Sheol below is excited for you, to greet your coming, waiting for you rephaim, all the rulers of the earth. Rising them from their thrones, all the kings of the earth" (Isa.14:9 Literal Translation).

"The dead will not live, rephaim will not rise, therefore you have punished and eliminated them, and caused their memory to perish" (Isa.26:14 Literal Translation).

"The dead will live, their corpses will rise, Awake and shout for joy, dwellers in the dust! For dew of lights [morning] is your dew, and earth will give birth to rephaim" (Isa.26:19 Literal Translation).

In verse 14, Isaiah laments the state of the dead. But, in verse 19, he speaks of the hope of the resurrection. He says the *rephaim* (the dead) which are dead in the dust of the earth will be resurrected:

Psalms 88 speaks of those who are dead in the depths of the earth being devoid of life or conscious thought.

"For the dead will you do a wonder? Will the rephaim rise and praise you? Selah!" (Psa.88:10 Literal Translation).

The following verses in Proverbs show that the foolish will occupy sheol where the rephaim are:

"The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who

lack judgment. "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" But little do they know that the dead [the Rephaim] are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave" (Pro.9:13-18 NIV).

"And he does not know that the rephaim are there. In the depths of sheol are her invited guests" (Pro.9:18 Literal Translation).

There is no doubt that the *rephaim* are a part of the human creation. The question is what part? The scriptures show that the rephaim are in sheol, have no conscious thought, are lifeless, and will be resurrected. See also Psa.6:5, 31:17; Pro.9:18; 21:16; Isa.26:14-19.

The rephaim cannot be any part of the spirit of man, because the spirit of man returns to God at death, but the rephaim are in a state of preservation on earth. A rephaim is the invisible yet permanent part of a physical human body, which continues to exist on earth after the human body decomposes and returns to the elements from which it came. The rephaim is the record of the human body which will be used when the body is resurrected to a physical existence.

SPIRIT AND PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF EXISTENCE

The scriptures show that spirit-beings and spirit-substance can exist in this physical existence (See Gen.chps.18,19; Numb.chp.22; Job 1:6-12; Lk. chp.24; Rev.12:7-9). However, the scriptures also show that physical beings cannot exist in the spirit-realm (See Jn.3:3-5; 8:13-23; 13:33-36; 1.Cor.15:50). Therefore, it makes sense that the spirit element of the human creation returns to God at death (Psa.31:5; Ecc.12:7; Lk.23:46), but the physical element of the human creation remains on earth (Gen.3:19; Job 34:15; Ecc.3:19-20).

Because God designed the human life-form with both spirit and physical elements, both of these elements will be used to reconstruct individuals at the time of their resurrection.

THE DEAD SHALL RISE FIRST

In Paul's writings to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians, he speaks of the first general resurrection of the dead at which time the elect of God will be given immortality at Christ's coming:

"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1.Cor.15:51-52 KJV).

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which sleep [are dead], that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep [are dead] in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not

prevent [precede] them which are asleep [are dead]. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead shall rise first" (1.Thes.4:13-16 KJV).

These scriptures are very important, because Paul says the dead shall be raised and it is obvious that Paul understood the dead remained on earth awaiting their resurrection. See 1.Sam.2:6; Psa.49:14-15; Jn.3:13; Acts 2:29-34; Heb.11.

Because the spirit record of the elect returns to the Father, when Paul speaks of the dead rising from the earth, he must be referring to a physical record, that will rise from the earth where it resides in sheol awaiting the resurrection.

THE RESURRECTION OF ISRAEL

Another key to understanding the rephaim is found in Ezekiel, chapter 37. This chapter speaks of the resurrection of the Israelites to physical life sometime after the return of Christ.

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. And caused me to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry" (Ezk.37:1-2 KJV).

This event transpires on earth, and these bones represent people who will be brought back to life.

"And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you know. Again he said to me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say to them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones; Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezk.37:3-6 KJV).

Here, God promises to resurrect these dead Israelites to physical life (Ezk.37:11). The word for *bone* in Hebrew can also be used allegorically to mean a dead person.

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, Prophecy to the wind, prophesy son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (Ezk.37:8-10 KJV).

There are similarities between this resurrection and the creation of Adam and Eve. God made Adam's body from the elements of the earth; then, he took a bone from Adam's body and made Eve. In this resurrection, God takes the bones (an allegory of the dead Israelites) to use as the foundational substance with which to reconstruct each individual Israelite. Adam, Eve, and these resurrected Israelites are constructed from the elements of the earth. And like Adam, these Israelites have no life force until air is placed into their lungs and they begin to breath.

"Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And shall put my spirit in you and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the Lord have spoken and performed it says the Lord" (Ezk.37:12-14 KJV).

In order for these reconstructed bodies to function as sentient beings, the spirit of man must be put back into the body: *"The body without the spirit is dead . . ."* (Jms.2:26). At death, the body dies and becomes useless to the spirit which inhabited it.

THE RECORDS OF THE DEAD

The Father promised to resurrect not only all of the Israelites who have ever lived and died without an opportunity for salvation but also the rest of humanity who have not had this opportunity. In order to accomplish this task, he has a record of each person's intellect (mind), which is stored in heaven.

The Sovereign God made provisions for a record to be kept of each individual who has ever existed. Humanly, we can understand that everything in the physical universe operates under a system of immutable laws, which control and sustain the physical creation. The physical record of man does not exist in some mysterious magical non-physical dimension of time and space; it exists as a physical thing, which was created as a part of the human being and exists under the specific laws which regulate its physical existence.

The rephaim or the record of a dead human body which occupies sheol is neither spirit nor human, does not have conscious thought, and is not animated or alive. However, it is real and made of physical substance which occupies this physical existence.

Because of the abundance of allegorical and factual references about sheol and the rephaim (record of dead bodies) which occupy it, the rephaim must be the physical record and pattern of each human body.

Logic tells us that, because this record or pattern is invisible yet physical, it must be composed of pure energy in one form or another. This invisible yet physical element is the physical record/pattern that God will use to reconstruct each individual's unique physical body at the proper time in his plan for the salvation of humanity.

The physical body decays and returns to its basic elements, while the rephaim, which is the record/pattern of the physical human form, remains on earth because it is a part of this physical existence and cannot enter the spirit-realm.

The Resurrection Process

The spirit record of a human is kept in heaven, the physical record stored on earth, and each is being held ready for the resurrection process. The scriptures show that there will be two kinds of resurrections: one is to spirit life as a spirit-being, and the other is to physical life as a human being. Therefore, it is important to know the process involved in each.

Resurrection to Immortality at Christ's Return

"The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1.Thes.4:16-17 KJV).

During the resurrection of the righteous dead, the following will occur:

- Each person's unique physical body will be reconstructed using the pattern that is stored on earth.
- Each person's unique spirit will be returned to earth from wherever it was stored in heaven and placed into the reconstructed body.
- Each person will then be changed to an immortal spirit-being.

Resurrection to Physical Life

The dead will be resurrected to physical life for the purpose of giving them an opportunity for salvation or for destroying them because of incorrigible wickedness. During the resurrection the following will occur:

- Each person's unique physical body will be reconstructed using the pattern that is stored on earth.
- Each person will then have the breath of life placed into their lungs to start the physical life processes.
- Each person's unique spirit will be returned to earth from wherever it was stored in heaven, and then it will be placed into the reconstructed body.

SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

Many people believe in what are commonly called ghosts, which are believed to be the spirits of dead people interacting with this physical existence for various reasons. The interaction with people by some of these supposedly dead individuals may seem to be harmless, but in reality such interactions are far from harmless.

It is well documented that supernatural events do occur. Hazy apparitions of people do appear in houses and other places. Banging, thumping, doors opening and closing seemingly on their own, objects moving about in a room, places which become extremely cold for no apparent reason, and many other types of seemingly unexplainable events occur regularly throughout the world.

These occurrences are not actually the manifestations of dead people, but are caused by evil spirits masquerading as people and causing these events to happen in order to terrorize people or to deceive people into interacting with them.

If one believes the biblical narrative, the answer to this question is simple. The Bible clearly shows that when a person is dead they are dead and have no thoughts or ability to interact with mankind or this physical existence (Psa.146:3-4; Ecc.9:5-6). The only exception noted in the Bible is the account of Saul, Samuel, and the Witch of Endor in which Samuel was awakened by God to pronounce a curse of death on Saul for his violation of the law concerning witches and necromancy.

Events attributed to ghosts of the dead interacting with the living and other such occurrences can easily be explained as natural phenomena or the manifestations of evil spirits.

SUMMARY

The dead are simply dead; they have no life function; they are not alive in heaven or any other place; they are dead without conscious thought awaiting a resurrection. Some of the dead will be resurrected to eternal life and immortality, some will be resurrected to physical life and be given their opportunity for salvation, and some will be resurrected to the punishment of a second death from which there is no return.

By B. L. Cocherell

b10w24

NOTES AND COMMENTS

CHAPTER
TWENTY-THREE
ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED ?

Most people who profess to believe and teach a biblically based worship system, teach that all a person has to do in order to be saved from an eternal punishment and enter the Kingdom of God as an eternal being is to: Believe Jesus Christ is their personal savior, participate in the ritual of baptism, and receive the indwelling of the holy spirit, after which, a person is guaranteed eternal salvation and is assured of entry into the Kingdom of God as a spirit-being.

If the teaching of Once Saved Always Saved as taught by the majority of professing Christianity is correct, then a person who professes to believe in Christ, repents of sin, and participates in the prescribed rituals can from that point forward live their life in any fashion they choose without fear of being cast into the Lake of Fire reserved for those who do not believe.

Because the teaching of Once Saved Always Saved is a foundational belief that affects a person's eternal destiny, it is extremely important to obtain correct answers to the following two questions:

- Is the Once Saved Always Saved teaching as taught by the majority of professing Christianity true, or is it a clever deception designed to give people a false sense of security in order to prevent them from knowing and understanding the true path to eternal salvation?
- Is there something else that a person must do in order to obtain eternal salvation and be guaranteed entry into the Kingdom of God other than belief in Christ, asking for forgiveness for one's sin and participating in a baptismal ritual?

It is a fact that the biblical record clearly teaches that, once a person is truly saved from the penalty of death for the violation of God's law, that person has absolutely and irrevocably secured eternal salvation. However, the Once Saved Always Saved concept as taught by the vast majority of professing Christianity attempts to circumvent the process through which a person must successfully pass in order to secure eternal salvation as a spirit-being in the Sovereign Father's eternal family and kingdom.

In order to clearly understand the difference between the counterfeit teaching of how to obtain eternal salvation and the biblical teaching, one must understand the following two important issues:

- The initial requirements in order to begin the process of securing eternal salvation.
- The ongoing requirements that must be fulfilled in order to secure eternal salvation.

THE INITIAL REQUIREMENTS

The question concerning how to obtain salvation (i.e., how to avoid the termination of one's life and live forever) is an answer every rational individual should be interested in having.

After his forty day fast and his encounter with Satan Jesus began his formal ministry in Galilee with the following proclamation:

"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: you repent, and believe the gospel" (Mk.1:14-15 Para. KJV).

The message that Jesus brought from his heavenly Father revealed who the Sovereign God is, his plan for the salvation of mankind, and how to enter his family and kingdom as a spirit-being. This is the same message that the apostles and the early church taught and it is the same message that is taught today by those who truly understand it. On the festival of Pentecost, after the death and resurrection of the Messiah, the apostle Peter said to a group of people:

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38-39 KJV).

Although Peter revealed a simple and easy to follow method concerning how to be saved from the second death in the Lake of Fire, millions of people who profess to believe in the Bible and follow the teachings of Jesus do not truly understand the gospel message or what Peter said concerning repentance, of what to repent, how to repent, how to be properly baptized, how to receive the holy spirit, or what is required of them after they have fulfilled these basic requirements.

REPENT

Many feel that to repent means to feel sorry for being a sinner and to ask God to forgive one's sins. Others feel repentance is just a matter of going through the ritual of baptism. Still others feel that it is a matter of the heart and they believe one must just give one's heart to the Lord. However, to truly repent is far more than just being sorry you have sinned, feeling remorseful, saying a few words, and participating in a ritual.

True repentance is extremely important, because it is the first step in the process of receiving salvation. If a person is not truly repentant, they will not receive God's spirit and will not receive eternal salvation.

The Word Repent

The repentance that Peter speaks of in Acts 2:38, is not the *metanoia ametameletos* (repentance) that Paul speaks of in 2.Cor.7:8 KJV, which means *regret* or *sorrow*. Although a person should regret violating God's laws and way of life, to truly repent means to do much more than just feel sorry.

The English word *repent* that is used in Acts 2:38 comes from the Greek word *metanoia*, which is a very complex word because it deals with the mind and thought process. In the context of Acts 2:38, the word *metanoia* clearly refers to changing from that which is evil to that which is good. The words repent, repentance, and change when used in a spiritual sense are synonymous with each other.

True repentance requires a total change in a person's basic attitude and behavior. This change is to lead a person away from all aspects of evil and lead toward that which is godly in attitude and behavior. True repentance also requires a total commitment and an unconditional surrender to God's rule and authority in one life.

Repent of What?

If a person does not first know and understand exactly of what to repent (i.e., what to change), how can a person accomplish repentance (i.e., change)? Obviously one cannot. Repentance involves knowledge and understanding. A person must know what to change from, what to conform to, and why this change is necessary.

Does God the Father call a person to salvation, lead them to repentance, then require one to repent without revealing of what is to be repented (i.e., changed) in order to gain salvation? Absolutely not! This would not make any sense and is totally illogical. God the Father does not leave a person he calls to salvation in ignorance as to what he expects of them and why it is expected.

What Is Sin?

From the very first few chapters in the Book of Genesis to the last few chapters in the Book of Revelation, the biblical record continually stresses the need for individuals to remove sin from their life and maintain a sinless nature. But exactly what is sin? In past centuries there has been much debate and confusion as to exactly what sin is and is not. Notice how sin is defined in the New Testament:

"Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1.Jn.3:4 KJV).

"All unrighteousness is sin" (1.Jn.5:17 KJV).

"Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But the one who has doubts, if he eats, he has been condemned, because what he does is not of faith. . . and all that is not of faith is sin" (Rom.14: 22-23 Para.). See also Jms .4:17.

Sin is the violation of God's physical and spiritual law. Sin is any deviation from God's righteous laws, precepts, and principles which define how a person should live their life and serve and worship the Sovereign God.

Nothing New

What Peter was inspired to say about repentance on the festival of Pentecost was nothing new, because God has always required a person to remove sin from their life and replace it with righteousness in order for a person to be in harmony with him. What was new, was the process through which one could establish and maintain a harmonious relationship for all eternity with God the Father and his son the Savior of mankind.

True repentance is extremely important because it is the first step in the process of receiving salvation. If a person is not truly repentant, they will not receive the indwelling of God's spirit (Acts 5:32) and will not receive eternal salvation.

True repentance requires a total change in a persons life, a change that leads away from all aspects of evil, and leads toward that which is godly in attitude and behavior. True repentance also requires a total commitment and an unconditional surrender to the rule and authority of God.

Obedience to God's law

Just as the question of eternal life is on the minds of people today, it was on the minds of people during Jesus' day: A young man asked Jesus the following question concerning how he could live forever:

"Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if you will enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt.19:16-17 KJV).

Why did Jesus tell this young man to keep the Commandments? The answer is simple. The young man had a choice; he could either obey God's laws, precepts, and principles and gain eternal life, or he could disobey and pay the penalty for disobedience, which is eternal death (Rom.6:23). Repentance is an ongoing process and requires a person to expend effort in order to accomplish a positive change in their attitude and behavior.

The overall plan of God for an individual's salvation has not changed from the foundation of the earth. A major part of this plan requires a person come into conformity with God's laws, precepts, and principles. A fundamental teaching contained in the biblical record before and after Christ's death and resurrection is that a person must put forth a serious heartfelt effort to change from disobedience to obedience before being granted eternal salvation. The counterfeit teaching Once Saved Always Saved does not require a dramatic change in a person's life or diligent obedience to God's laws, precepts, and principles, of which there were over 600 given to national Israel plus those noted in the New Testament which are a part of the agreement between God the Father and his elect children.

THE ONGOING REQUIREMENTS

It is very important to understand that the process of salvation does not end after a person receives the indwelling of the holy spirit, this process continues until one's physical death. This is because it takes time and effort to grow toward spiritual maturity and to maintain a harmonious relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Many professing Christians falsely believe that all a person has to do to obtain eternal salvation is to have an intellectual belief in Christ, ask for forgiveness of sin, and receive the holy spirit. This may sound correct on the surface; however, it is not the kind of belief required in order to gain eternal salvation. If a person does no more than these things and does not follow through with the instructions given in the biblical record for the manifestation of true belief in their life, that person does not truly believe. True belief is more than an intellectual exercise, true belief requires an ongoing effort to make positive changes in one's personal life.

While speaking to those at Rome about the law (in the context of all that is set forth as a way of life for those who truly believe and follow the teachings of the Sovereign God), the apostle Paul states a principle that will help you bring the Father's vision and goal for your life and salvation into focus:

"For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom.2:13 KJV). See also Psa.119:172; 2.Jn.5-6.

Many people hear the Sovereign God's truth and the way of truth which includes his laws precepts and principles; however, merely hearing God's truth and way of truth does not translate into a positive change in a person's life. Paul explains that a person is justified (i.e., made righteous) by what one does, as well as what one hears. It is the application of God's truth and way of truth that brings a positive result in one's life.

Learning the Sovereign Father's truth, his way of truth, and the rules of conduct that he has established for his earthly family is meaningless unless what is learned is put into practice in such a way that it furthers the Father's purpose for one's calling and existence as a member of his earthly family of king-priests. The application and practice of God's truth and way of truth in one's life is an ongoing requirement in order to obtain eternal salvation, otherwise Paul's statement to the elect at Rome about justification is meaningless.

Willful Sin

The prophet Ezekiel recorded God's word's concerning his fairness in his treatment of individuals regarding their evil or righteous behavior and his decree concerning individuals who willfully violate his law:

"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins it shall die" (Ezk.18:4 KJV). See also Ezk.18:20.

Under the agreement that the Sovereign Father makes with those he calls to salvation during the gospel age, the penalty for willful sin is death. The apostle Paul restates this penalty for willful sin to the elect at Rome:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

Many professing Christians quote this scripture acknowledging that the penalty for sin is death, but continue to say that, through Christ's sacrifice, all who believe in him are forgiven their sins and have no sin. The problem with this statement concerning the forgiveness of sin and sinlessness is that it is a half truth which causes a person to be lulled into a false sense of security.

Before moving on to show the absurdity of the Once Saved Always Saved teaching believed and taught by most professing Christians today, let us review what Paul wrote to the elect at Rome about the wages of sin and the gift of God in its proper context.

In Romans, chapter 5, Paul writes of being reconciled to the Sovereign God through Christ's sacrifice, the forgiveness of sin, and eternal salvation. It is in this context that Paul begins to deal with an erroneous concept concerning the elect's necessity to live in obedience to God's law:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? (Rom.6:1-2 KJV).

Yes, the elect at Rome were dead to past sins (i.e., violations of God's law) through the sacrifice of Christ, but being dead to past sins did not mean that individuals having the indwelling of the holy spirit have a license to violate God's law precepts, and principles with impunity (1.Pet.2:16; 2.Pet.2:19).

"Don't you know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom.6:3-4 KJV Para.).

A person's old sinful life dies in the baptismal waters, and the person is raised to a new sinless life having new and different motivations and goals than existed in their former life. This new life is to be a sinless life, which a true Christian must diligently practice in order to successfully secure eternal salvation.

"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom.6:5-6 KJV).

Paul states a simple fact that everyone who has the indwelling of the Sovereign Father's holy spirit should know. But sadly, few today truly understand or take to heart this instruction to avoid all sinful behavior.

Sin is the violation of the laws, precepts, and principles that God has codified in the biblical record by which his people should live.

"For he that is dead is freed from sin" (Rom.6:7 KJV).

Yes, individuals who have the indwelling of the holy spirit have been freed from past sins and their penalty and will be set free from future sins through repentance and the application of Christ sacrificial blood. However, as documented by many scriptural warnings, individuals who willfully and consistently violate God's law without changing their attitude and behavior to conform to God's truth and way of truth will die the second death in the Lake of Fire.

"Now if we are dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over him" (Rom.6:8-9 KJV).

The condition of a person having the indwelling of the holy spirit is one of eternal and immortal life awaiting consummation at the return of Christ. A hidden truth in verse 9 is that Christ can never die again because he is now immortal and has obtained eternal salvation through his perfect obedience and practice of God's laws, precepts, and principles. See 1.Pet.2:21-22.

"For in that he died, he died to sin once: but in that he lives, he lives to God. Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:10-11 KJV).

Being dead to sin, means to be sinless. Being alive to God, means to be sinless. Therefore, individuals who have a harmonious relationship with their heavenly Father and who want to remain alive to him must maintain a righteous lifestyle through their diligent practice of their heavenly Father's laws, precepts, and principles which he has prescribed for them to live by.

If a person truly understands that they are dead to sin through the sacrifice of Christ, that person should also understand that their attitude and behavior concerning God's law will determine whether or not they secure eternal salvation. Paul wrote the following concerning violating God's law:

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield you your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin: but yield yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom.6:12-13 KJV).

A righteous person must not let violations of God's law rule their physical life, nor should one allow any part of their body to be used as a tool to violate God's law.

What does it mean to yield to God as one who is alive from the dead? The resurrection to life as a son of God in the divine Family and Kingdom of God is only for righteous individuals, all others are to die the second death in the Lake of Fire. Paul is making the point that individuals having the indwelling of the holy spirit should give their entire being, body and spirit, in service to one's heavenly Father to be used for his purpose.

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom.6:14 KJV).

Many believe that what Paul states in verse 14, means that followers of Christ are not obligated to practice God's law, because they are under grace. However, this is an erroneous assumption because the English word *grace* in verse 14 is translated from the Greek word *charis* which can mean *graciousness* (as gratifying), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude). The Greek word *charis* does not connote being set free from an obligation.

In verse 14, Paul is making the point that the elect should not allow sin to dominate their life, because their heavenly Father is being gracious to them by forgiving their sins and removing its penalty.

"What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Don't you know, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?" (Rom.6: 15-16 KJV Para).

A willing and continual violation of righteous behavior as set forth in God's laws, precepts, and principles brings a person dead to the penalty of sin, back under its penalty. Therefore, it is far better to control one's life in a righteous manner and live for all eternity than to live in disobedience and die the second death from which there is no return.

"But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness" (Rom.6:17-18 KJV).

The Ancient Israelites and Righteousness

In the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, he promised that if they would keep his law (Deut.5:29-33; 30:15-20), they would be righteous and sinless before him.

Maintaining a right-standing with the Creator God was a major part of the terms and conditions of the Old Covenant. God told the Israelites that if they would obey him, he would bless them, but disobedience would bring curses (Deut.28:1-68).

It is very important to understand how those who lived before the advent of Christ maintained a good relationship with their Creator; because, it is this same good relationship with God the Father that ensures a person eternal salvation under the terms and conditions of the gospel age agreement:

"And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us" (Deut.6: 22-25 KJV).

Here, we see that the commandments are defined as righteousness. If a person could always keep the commandments perfectly without ever violating one of them, he or she would be a righteous individual in God's eyes and would escape the second death. This is exactly how Christ qualified himself as a righteous individual and as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Continuing in Romans 6:19:

"I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity to iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness to holiness."

Whatever some of the elect at Rome were doing was very dangerous to their spiritual health; therefore, Paul's instruction to yield themselves to righteousness and holiness.

"For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness. What fruit had you then in those things whereof you are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death" (Rom.6:20-21 KJV).

Our past behavior, for which we should be ashamed, would have led to our eternal death, if not for our heavenly Father's mercy toward us and the sacrifice of Christ. Paul clearly makes the point that the end result of sinful behavior is death in the Lake of Fire. Can a person who has the indwelling of the holy spirit willfully violate their heavenly Father's laws, precepts, and principles? The obvious answer is, yes, that person has the freedom to reject his truth and way of truth and disregard their agreement with him. However, the penalty for doing so is the second death. See Rev.21:7-8.

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:22-23 KJV).

Yes the wages of sin is death and yes the gift of God is eternal life; however, as many scriptures reveal, a person must maintain a righteous attitude and behavior in order to receive the gift of eternal life.

WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION

Paul wrote the following to the elect at Philippi concerning working out their salvation:

"Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil.2:12-13 KJV).

Notice that Paul speaks of obedience and the working out of one's salvation. If the popular teaching of Once Saved Always Saved were true, Paul would not have given this instruction to work out one's salvation with fear and trembling. Working out one's salvation clearly reveals that eternal salvation is only guaranteed to individuals who are working toward that eternal goal.

The English words *fear* and *trembling* are translated from the Greek words *phobos* and *tromos*, which respectively mean *alarm* or *fright* and *quaking with fear*. Should a person who has the indwelling of the holy spirit be seriously concerned that they could fail to be found worthy of eternal life and entry into the kingdom of God. The answer is, Absolutely, one should fear to fail to work out their salvation, because failure means the second death in the Lake of Fire as many scriptures warn.

The securing of eternal salvation is a growth process that requires an ongoing effort. God the Father gives the opportunity for salvation, but it is the responsibility of each individual to make an ongoing effort to conform to his laws, precepts, and principles, develop spiritual maturity, and perform the work to which they have been called.

If the teaching of Once Saved Always Saved were true in the context of being free to live one's life in any fashion one chooses after receiving the indwelling of the holy spirit, then a person would not have to be concerned about working out their salvation or being found worthy of eternal life and entry into the Kingdom of God. However, the scriptures clearly warn that a person should be concerned about working out their salvation and being found worthy of eternal life and entry into the Kingdom of God.

Worthy or Not Worthy

In the following letter to the elect at Thessalonica, Paul speaks to the issue of being righteous and being found worthy:

"So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which you also suffer" (2.Thess.1:4-5 KJV).

The English word *worthy* in verse 5, is translated from the Greek word *kataxioo*, which means to *deem entirely deserving*. The use of the word *kataxioo* in the context of verses 4 and 5, clearly indicates that works are involved in the determining if a person is worthy or not worthy to enter the Kingdom of God.

In verse 11 Paul states the following in which he shows his and others concern that the elect at Thessalonica be found worthy of their calling:

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power" (2.Thess.1:11 KJV).

The English word *worthy* in verse 11, is translated from the Greek word *axioo*, which means to *deem entitled* or *fit*.

If the teaching of Once Saved Always Saved as taught by the vast majority of professing Christianity were true, there would be no need to determine if someone is worthy or not worthy. Such a determination is only necessary if there is a question concerning a person's worthiness and a penalty to be paid for not being found worthy.

FAITH AND WORKS

The teaching of Once Saved Always Saved as taught by the vast majority of professing Christianity requires faith that one will receive eternal salvation, but does not require works in order to prove one's faith.

The apostle James was inspired to write the following about faith and works:

"Dear brothers, what's the use of saying that you have faith and are Christians if you aren't proving it by helping others? Will that kind of faith save anyone? If you have a friend who is in need of food and clothing, and you say to him, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat hearty," and then don't give him clothes or food, what good does that do? So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. You must also do good to prove that you have it. Faith that doesn't show itself by good works is no faith at all—it is dead and useless" (Jms.2:14-17 LBP). Please read and study the entire second chapter of James.

Notice that you will be judged by what you do, as well as by what you believe. It is very important to understand what James is saying about works. James says it takes effort, as well as a correct attitude to secure eternal salvation.

It is not enough just to have faith, because belief without works is no faith at all; it is dead and useless. It follows that, if a person's faith is dead and useless, that person's faith has no power to secure eternal salvation.

The teaching that the only requirement to secure salvation and eternal life is professing one's faith (i.e., belief) is in error. God the Father requires more than just professing one's faith and believing in him and his Son (Rom.10:8-19). He requires people to prove that they are sincere in their desire to live a life that is pleasing to him by learning and practicing his ways in obedience to his law. In order to do this, a person must experience life in the flesh and grow into spiritual maturity. Securing eternal salvation takes time and effort.

To worship God as one should takes both physical and mental effort. One must study God's word, communicate with him, and learn to make righteous decisions. In short, it takes living a righteous lifestyle (faith and works) to truly show God that one is sincere in their desire to please him and be a part of his eternal family.

Reprimands and Warnings

In the Book of Revelation, Christ gives stern reprimands and serious warning to those who are guilty of unfaithfulness and also promises to reward individuals who successfully overcome the barriers to living a righteous life.

The Message to Sardis

In his warning to those who comprise the Sardis congregation of his Father's earthly children, Jesus says the following concerning their behavior and what is required of them in order to have their names remain in the Book of Life:

"And to the angel [messenger] of the church in Sardis write: These things says he [Jesus Christ] that has the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember, therefore how you have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If you will not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis that have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy" (Rev.3:1-4 Para.).

Within the Sardis grouping of the elect, there are only a few who have not defiled themselves spiritually. The implication is that, unless there is a major change in their attitude and behavior, most who have the attitude of the Sardis church will end up in the Lake of Fire.

The warning to those of Sardis is that they had better quickly wake up to their deadly lethargy and watch out, because their salvation is in jeopardy. Christ also warns that within the congregations of Sardis there are only a few who truly love the Father and his Son and are following the ways of God. Jesus encourages these few to continue to be watchful and they will receive their reward. However, most of their brothers and sisters in Christ only appear to be spiritually alive but are in reality spiritually dead and will die the second death in the Lake of Fire, if they do not repent of their evil ways. Vigilance is a part of the price of liberty under Christ.

Most of Sardis are in great danger. They have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as their own and have known the Father; therefore, they are having their opportunity for salvation. But, because of their sins, they are on the pathway that leads to eternal death. That is why this warning is so severe. They have little or no will to prayerfully study God's word or to use it on a continuing basis to help them overcome their spiritual flaws. They are so self-deceived that they do not even realize that the little truth they have is slipping away and that they are in danger of losing their salvation.

Christ says in order to be among the overcomers whom he will accept, any with the Sardis attitude must awaken from the deadly lethargy and show signs of repentance and change:

"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white garments; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches" (Rev.3:5-6 Para.).

The English word *overcomes* in verse 5 is translated from the Greek word *nikao*, which means *to subdue* (literally or figuratively). The use of the word *nikao* is used in all of Christ's closing comments to the seven churches noted in the Book of Revelation. This tells us that an ongoing effort is required in order to not be removed from the Book of Life.

The messages to the seven churches not only contain severe reprimands and warnings from Christ, these messages also give hope and encouragement. For those who fail to heed these reprimands and warnings to work out their salvation, there is death and dishonor ahead. For those who heed and put forth the effort necessary to secure their eternal salvation, there is eternal life and immortality in the Family and Kingdom of God.

Those Not Found in the Book of Life

While beseeching God to spare the Israelites who had rebelled at Mount Sinai, Moses said, *"Yet now, if you will forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray you, out of your book which you have written. And the Lord said to Moses, Whosoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book"* (Ex.32:32-33 KJV). See also Psa.69:28; Rev.3:5; 22:19.

Yes, there is a book containing the names of individuals who are found worthy of living forever and yes, an individual's name can be erased from this book for cause.

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev.20:14-15 KJV).

Under the terms and conditions of both the Old and New Covenants, those who live righteously in obedience to God's laws are granted eternal life in his kingdom (Matt.25:31-34). Moreover, the disobedient and the unrighteous whose names are not found in the Book of Life, will be destroyed because of their wickedness and unwillingness to obey his law (Matt.25:41-46).

Those who qualify for eternal salvation before the return of Christ will be given immortal life and will rule with Christ in heaven and on the earth. Those who refuse to obey God will simply have their existence terminated in the Lake of Fire. There will be no eternal pain and torment, just eternal non-existence. See Psa.37:9,11, 22, 29, 34; Ezk.18:4, 20.

Only those who are found to be righteous become sons of God. All others will have their life terminated as prophesied by Malachi. See Mal.4:1-3.

The Overcomer and The Second Death

In the Book of Revelation, there are the following four references to the second death. By carefully reviewing these references we can understand what the second death is and we can also understand that something more than just belief in Christ, repenting, being baptized, and receiving the holy spirit is required in order to obtain salvation.

"He that has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches; he that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev.2:11 KJV).

If the indwelling of the holy spirit guarantees salvation, then verse 11 and other scriptures which speak of only the overcomers being immune to the second death and entering the Kingdom of God make no sense.

"He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:7-8 KJV).

Notice that only the overcomers will be in the Kingdom of God and that individuals who violate God's law will have their existence terminated in the Lake of Fire. These scriptures clearly show that if a person is to obtain eternal salvation, that person must be engaged in a process described as overcoming and must also be practicing God's law.

After repentance, baptism, and receiving the holy spirit, there is to be a process of growing toward spiritual maturity and perfection, which is referred to in the scriptures as *overcoming*. This process of overcoming is a lifelong endeavor which includes learning about God the Father and Jesus Christ, making correct decisions, and living a righteous life to the best of one's ability. As a part of this process, people find themselves going through varying degrees of trials and tests. See Rom.12:21; 1.Jn. 5:4; Rev.3:5.

Some Mistakes are Fatal

In Paul's warning and exhortation to the Thessalonians to be alert to the dark forces of the spirit-realm who seek to destroy the elect and to do the things that are expected of them as children of God, he says, *"Do not extinguish the spirit"* (1.Thes.5:19 Para.).

This is a serious warning, because when the spirit of God within a child of God is extinguished, that person has removed themselves from the Family of God and is no longer considered a child of God.

But, how does a person extinguish the spirit? Some of the ways to extinguish the spirit are to become self-deceived, self-willed, apathetic toward one's calling, or to stubbornly refuse to obey God's will in one's life:

"Now the spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisies; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1.Tim.4:1-2 KJV).

Again the scriptures show beyond doubt that a person can depart from the faith and disqualify themselves from being found worthy of eternal salvation. Additionally, there is an unforgivable sin:

"I say to you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy concerning the spirit shall not be forgiven men. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him. But whoever speaks against the holy spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, not in this age or in the age that is coming" (Matt.12:31-32 Para.).

The Sovereign Father is willing to forgive all kinds of sin; he is even willing to forgive the most vile things that are spoken against his first-born Son the Savior of humanity. However, he will not forgive the ridicule of the holy spirit, which in actuality is a rejection of the things that the holy spirit represents. Blasphemy of the holy spirit is a conscious rejection of the Father's power, grace, and right to rule in one's life; therefore, it is an attitude and a behavior that is unforgivable.

A child of God who becomes a habitual and unrepentant sinner destroys the ability of the temple (which they are) to house God's spirit. When the Father removes his personal spirit, his holy spirit, and the spirit of Christ from one of his elect children, that person has no more hope of eternal life.

The extinguishing of the holy spirit causes a breach between the Father and his disobedient child that is irreparable. This breach results in the death penalty being passed upon the unrepentant sinner who has defiled God's temple. This person's spirit will go back to the Father in a corrupted state to await the resurrection to the second death, which is destruction in the Lake of Fire.

Falling Away and Willful Sin

Among the many warnings to those who decide to depart from the faith, after they have accepted the call to salvation are those of the writer to the Hebrews, which show beyond doubt that individuals who have the indwelling of the holy spirit can lose their opportunity of salvation:

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame . . . But that which bears thorns and briars is rejected, and is near to cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb.6:4-6;8 KJV). See also Heb.2:1-3; 2.Pet.2:20-21; Ezk.18:24, 26.

The writer to the Hebrews leaves no doubt that the teaching of Once Saved Always Saved as taught by the vast majority of professing Christianity is without merit and is in fact a teaching that leads to the second death in the Lake of Fire.

An individual who continually breaks their baptismal agreement and makes a practice of violating God's laws, precepts, and principles will die an eternal death, because a truly converted person can never again become purely human. This is their only opportunity for salvation and they will either succeed or fail, depending on their desire and effort to become immortal.

If there is no sustained effort to live according to God's ways, God will not grant eternal life, instead, he will destroy the wicked person with fire—*"For the wages of sin is death"* (Rom.6:23).

The No Works Teaching

Today, we hear preachers saying "Oh just come as you are, God will accept you just as you are." This "just come as you are" teaching incorporated with the erroneous Once Saved Always Saved teaching tells a person that no works are necessary in order to secure eternal salvation.

The problem with the "come as you are" teaching is that the Sovereign God will not accept you just as you are. The Sovereign God demands that a person must stop breaking his laws and begin to live in obedience to him before he will accept a person into his fellowship and place his holy spirit within them. Notice what the apostle Peter said to the Sanhedrin Council and the High Priest concerning his and others proclaiming Christ as the Savior and the Sovereign God's presentation of his holy spirit:

"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the holy spirit, whom God has given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32 KJV).

Notice that obedience is required before the Sovereign God will place his holy spirit within a person. Moreover, the Sovereign God demands ongoing obedience to his laws, precepts, and principles while a person is physically alive. There are hundreds of laws in the Bible that apply to individuals called to salvation during this gospel age. Do you know what these laws are? Well you should, because the penalty for willfully breaking these laws is the second death in the Lake of Fire.

The teaching of Once Saved Always Saved is a perversion of the Sovereign God's promise of eternal salvation to those individuals who truly believe in him and the message he sent by his first born son, who is the Christ.

The teaching Once Saved Always Saved as taught by the vast majority of professing Christianity does not take into consideration the many warnings to those having the indwelling of the holy spirit to diligently practice God's laws, precepts, and principles in order to maintain a harmonious relationship with their Heavenly Father and to enter into eternal salvation as a spirit-being in his divine Family and Kingdom.

The biblical rebuttal to the teaching of Once Saved Always Saved as taught by the majority of professing Christians is that the penalty for willful sin has never been abrogated and the path to eternal salvation is a process. This process begins with having a personal encounter with the Sovereign God of all that exists and living a righteous life in conformity to his truth which has as its end result a person's transformation into a spirit-being in the Family and the Kingdom of God.

Most of what people believe about the good new message that Christ brought from his heavenly Father is focused solely Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind, and as a result, millions do not believe what Christ taught concerning the process of salvation and therefore many are the victims of a false Christianity and a false conversion, which does not lead to eternal salvation.

Many people believe that Jesus Christ existed. Many also acknowledge that he is the Savior of humanity, and many accept him as their personal Savior; however, there are very few who believe to the point that they are willing to follow his teachings and examples as a way of life. To those of shallow belief Jesus says, *"Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things that I say?"* (Lk.6:46 Para.).

The apostle James said, *"You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble"* (Jms.2:19 KJV).

Believing is more than just an acknowledgment that Jesus Christ did exist and was the Sovereign God's earthly son. True belief in Jesus Christ is manifested in one's life through a deep commitment to him and his heavenly Father that is evidenced by the righteous fruit of that belief. See Gal.5:22-25; Eph.5:8-10.

GUARANTEED SALVATION

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (Jn.10:27-29 KJV).

This and other promises made by Christ and his heavenly Father concerning a guarantee of salvation to those who truly believe the good news message are absolutely true. However, Christ's and his heavenly Father's promises of eternal salvation speak to the end result of a person's righteous life.

According to the apostle Paul, nothing can separate a true believer from the Sovereign Father and Christ:

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom.8:38-39 KJV).

Neither the Sovereign Father or Christ will voluntarily separate themselves from an individual who has the indwelling of the holy spirit. Nor can any physical or spirit-being, influence, or power separate such a person from the promises and love of the Sovereign Father or Christ. However, a person can separate themselves from the Father and their Savior through a failure to diligently work out their own salvation and live a righteous life in accordance to the instructions recorded in the biblical record.

SUMMARY

The teaching of Once Saved Always Saved is in fact true; however, it is only true when a person has been transformed into a spirit-being having eternal and immortal life as a god-being in the Sovereign Father's heavenly Family and Kingdom

By B. L. Cocherell

b10w25

NOTES AND COMMENTS

CHAPTER
TWENTY-FOUR

IS HEAVEN THE REWARD OF THE SAVED?

Many hold the popular belief that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved. The teaching of going to heaven immediately after death to receive one's reward for a righteous life is almost universally believed among most who profess to follow Christ. To even question this teaching would seem like blasphemy to many who believe heaven is their ultimate reward. However, among those who believe that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved, there are many different ideas as to when, and how one gets to heaven.

What does the Bible actually teach about the rewards of the saved? If the dead in Christ go to heaven immediately after death and this is their reward for a righteous life, we should be able to find abundant proof within the Bible showing when, and how people obtain this reward. Can this type of documentation be found in the Bible? You may be surprised to find that it cannot, but what is found in the Bible about the rewards of the saved is far more exciting than the nebulous idea of going off to heaven without a clue as to what one would do there for eternity.

THE WORD HEAVEN

There are three heavens referred to in the Bible:

- Earth's atmosphere (Gen.1:20; 27:28; Deut.33:28)
- Outer space where the planets and stars are (Gen.1:14-15; Psa. 8:3)
- God's dwelling place 2.Cor.12:2-4; Heb.8:1-5; Rev.2:7; 22:1-2)

Of these three heavens, most believe that their reward is to inhabit the third heaven where God dwells. But, is this actually the ultimate reward of the saved?

WAS HEAVEN EVER PROMISED AS A REWARD?

Is there any solid proof in the Bible that anyone was ever promised residence in heaven as their ultimate reward for a righteous life? This question is vitally important in order to gain an understanding of what the Bible teaches about the awesome rewards of the righteous.

In order to expose the false teaching of heaven as the ultimate reward of the righteous, each scripture used to support this teaching will be analyzed and explained. Moreover, it will be shown that no solid scriptural foundation can be found for this teaching and that those who teach it must rely on mistranslations, obscure scriptures, and traditions to support their belief.

NO MAN HAS EVER GONE TO HEAVEN

For centuries churches have tried to get their converts to set their sights on going to heaven when they die. However, do the saved go to heaven when they die? Does anyone go to heaven when they die or at any other time? Will anybody go to heaven? Has anyone gone to heaven, and if so, who and when?

Jesus himself said that *"No man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man . . ."* (Jn.3:13 KJV).

Even the Jews of Jesus' time knew that no man was in heaven. Notice what they said while condemning Jesus:

"Then said the Jews to him, Now we know that you have a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man keep my sayings, he shall never taste of death. Are you greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? . . ." (Jn.8:52-53 KJV).

Peter said the following about King David fifty days after Jesus had been resurrected. At this point in history David had not been resurrected, he was still dead and buried:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day. . . For David is not ascended into the heavens: . . ." (Acts 2:29; 34 KJV).

The Writer to the Hebrews

In the Book of Hebrews, chapter 11, there is a long list of righteous individuals who died without yet receiving their rewards:

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb.11:13 KJV).

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:" (Heb.11:33-35 KJV).

If any are worthy to receive the promises that God has for the righteous, it would have surely been these champions of faith. However, about thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection (when the letter to the Hebrews was written), these righteous people were still dead in their graves; they did not receive their reward then and they still have not received it:

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40 KJV).

The simple truth is that Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, David, the prophets, and the righteous of all ages are dead, not alive in heaven or some other place. However, upon the return of Jesus Christ, they will be resurrected and receive their reward.

WHAT ARE THE REWARDS OF THE RIGHTEOUS?

Believe it or not, the ultimate reward for being righteous is not to float aimlessly around heaven playing harp music for eternity. There is something far more spectacular in store for those who are accounted worthy of salvation:

"But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1.Cor.2:9 KJV).

The following are just some of the rewards for righteousness:

- To have one's name in the Book of Life (Phil.4:3)
- To become an immortal being (Rom.2:7)
- To have eternal life (Lk.18:29-30)
- To become a son of God (Jn.1:12; Rom.8:14)
- To be a joint-heir with Christ (Rom.8:16-18)
- To inherit all things (Rev.21:7)
- To inherit the earth (Psa.37:9)
- To inherit the Kingdom of God (Matt.25:31-34)
- To have access to New Jerusalem (Rev.22:14)
- To be in the first resurrection (Rev.20:6)
- To be a co-ruler with Christ (Rev.2:26-27)
- To become a king and a priest (Rev.1:4-6)

This list contains only a few of the enormous rewards which God has promised to the saints. The magnitude of the rewards for those who obtain salvation is so far beyond our imagination and dreams that it defies human comprehension.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

For the righteous, the Book of Life is the most important book that has ever been written, because their names are recorded within its pages. However, some believe that because the saints' names are recorded in heaven, they will go to heaven immediately after death. Therefore, it is important to know what the Bible actually says about the Book of Life and how it pertains to the righteous.

In beseeching God to spare the Israelites who had rebelled at Sinai, Moses says the following:

"Yet now, if you will forgive their sin"; and if not, blot me, I pray you, out of your book which you have written. And the Lord said to Moses, Whosoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Ex.32:32-33 KJV). See also Psa.69:28; Rev.21:27; 22:19.

The following are three major things to notice about this book:

1. It is God's property.
2. God controls whose name can be placed into or taken out of it.
3. If a person's name is taken out of it, they will not have eternal life.

It is evident the righteous have their names recorded in the Book of Life, which is in heaven. However, there is absolutely nothing anywhere in the scriptures that remotely indicates that the saved immediately go to heaven after they die because their names are written in the Book of Life. It is obvious from the many references throughout the biblical record which refer to the Book of Life, that this book is a record, not a permit to reside in heaven::

"Behold, I give to you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over, the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Lk.10:19-20 KJV). See also Phil.4:3; Heb.12:23; Rev. 13:7-8;17:8.

"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Rev.3:5 KJV).

IMMORTALITY

The quality of life which the righteous are promised is comparable to God's quality of life. God is a spirit-being who inherently possesses the highest form of life: immortality on the divine plane of existence. This kind of life springs forth from itself; it is not dependent on any other source to sustain it; it is self sustaining:

"Behold I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1.Cor. 15:51-54 KJV). See also 2.Tim.1:9-10; Rev.20:6.

"To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life:" (Rom.2:7 KJV).

It is abundantly clear that God intends to share immortality with those he has called to salvation. Immortality represents the ultimate reward for faithfulness to God.

"Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature. . ." (2.Pet. 1:4 KJV).

ETERNAL LIFE

Immortality and eternal life are rewards that allow a person to pass beyond this physical existence:

"I tell you the truth . . . no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life" (Lk.18:29-30 N.V.).

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereto you are also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1.Tim.6:12 KJV; Lk.20:34-35).

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

"And this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life" (1.Jn.2:25 KJV; Tit.3:7).

BECOME A SON OF GOD

Many believe that even if they do gain eternal life, they will be doomed to some meaningless existence. However, this assumption could not be farther from the truth:

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty," (2.Cor.6:17-18 KJV).

Part of the reward of righteousness is becoming a spiritual son of God the Father and a brother of Jesus Christ:

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren," (Heb.2:10-11 KJV).

Jesus who was the Creator God is the one who suffered death so that you and I can become children of God the Father.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:" (Jn.1:12 KJV). See also Jn.3:1-3; Rom.8:18.

"For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom.8:29 KJV).

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1.Jn.3:2 KJV). See also Phil.3:21.

What the apostle Paul reveals in these scriptures is truly astounding; to become a son of God and a brother of Jesus is a tremendous reward with truly awesome implications.

JOINT-HEIR WITH CHRIST

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we can become heirs of the Kingdom of God.

"The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom.8:16-18 KJV).

"But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal.4:4-7 KJV).

INHERIT ALL THINGS

"In many times and in many ways of old, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets: in these last days he spoke to us in the Son, by whom He appointed heir of all; through whom he indeed made the ages" (Heb.1:1-2 Para.). See also verses 5-8.

"He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev.21:7 KJV).

What an amazing reward! Not only are the righteous heirs but also joint-heirs with Jesus. Moreover, they will share in the inheritance of all that exists now and forever.

INHERIT THE EARTH

Part of the promise that God gave to Abraham was that he and his descendants would inherit the earth and be a blessing to all nations forever. See Gen.12:2-3; 13:15-16; 15:7; 8:18; 26:1-5; Rom.4:13.

"And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.3:29 KJV).

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt.5:5 KJV).

"For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth" (Psa.37:9 KJV). See also Psa.37:11, 22, 29, 34; 72:8.

The scriptures clearly show that, when the righteous become spirit-beings, they will inherit the earth. But, what possible use could they have for a physical earth? It seems that the earth would be of no use to them unless God is not finished with his plan for the salvation of humanity after Christ returns. Therein lies one of the purposes for the earth as an inheritance; it is to be inhabited by both spirit and physical beings as God's plan for the salvation of humanity continues after Christ returns.

INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.5:3 KJV).

Here, Jesus speaks of those who will obtain the ultimate joy of sharing the rewards of the Kingdom of God with him because of their humility of spirit. The undeniable fact is that there is a Kingdom (a government) of Heaven, which is owned by God the Father, and the righteous are to inherit it.

When Jesus told the parable of the shepherd dividing his sheep from the goats, he clearly reveals that the Kingdom of God was prepared as an inheritance for the righteous before mankind was created:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King [Jesus] say to them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father [God the Father], inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" (Matt.25:31-34 KJV). See also Jms.2:5.

HAVE ACCESS TO NEW JERUSALEM

Not only do the righteous inherit the Kingdom of God but also they have access to New Jerusalem from where the Father rules all of his creation.

"And there in no wise enter into it any thing that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie: but they which are written in the lamb's book of life" (Rev.21:27 KJV).

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev.22:14 KJV). See also Rev.21:1 through 22:13.

CO-RULERSHIP WITH CHRIST

"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev.3:21 KJV).

"And he that overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of Iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Rev.2:26-27 KJV).

TO BECOME A KING AND A PRIEST

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And has made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev.1:4-6 KJV). See also Rev.5:10.

Here, John speaks of the future when he says that the elect are kings and priests. This indicates that as far as the Father is concerned, this reward and responsibility has already been given to his elect children.

CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ," (Phil.3:20 N.V.).

Some believe this verse confirms that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved, because it calls the elect citizens of heaven. It is true that the righteous are not of this world, although they must live in it and be subject to many of its laws until the return of Christ.

Jesus and the apostle Paul said the following about the elect and their citizenship:

"If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn.15:19 KJV).

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God" (2.Cor.5:20 KJV).

Because one's citizenship is in a certain place does not mean one must live there.

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

Jesus tells his disciples:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn.14:2-3 N.I.V.).

Because this is one of the primary scriptures many quote to support their belief in going to heaven immediately after death, it is important to discover what Jesus actually said.

The English word *rooms* is translated from the Greek word *mone*, which can mean *staying, tarrying, abiding, or place to stay* (e.g., an inn or watch house). In the New Testament, it only occurs twice and denotes a dwelling place or an abode. Moreover, there are many Rabbinic parallels that denote the phrase *"my father's house"* as a place of rest.

In this scripture, Jesus makes a statement of fact. He will go to prepare a place for the righteous where his Father dwells. The English word *place* is translated from the Greek word *topos*, which can mean a geographical location, but it can also be used in its abstract form to mean a position or office of endeavor. Other scriptures show that what Jesus is preparing is not only a space to inhabit but also positions and offices of authority within which the elect will function.

Because Jesus says he will come back and take the elect to the place he has prepared for them, many believe this means that they are going to reside continually in heaven with Christ. However, the scriptures clearly show that ecclesiastical and governmental positions will be given to the righteous through which they will govern the physical earth with Christ for at least a thousand years.

Jesus said nothing about heaven being a reward or a continual residence for the saints from which they will never leave; he merely states that he was going to prepare a place for them and take them there so they can be where he is. Many scriptures show that after his return, he will administer the government of God over the earth from Jerusalem. See Isa.11:5-9; 27:13; 65:17-25; Mic.4:1-7; Zech.8:3-4.

In John 14, Jesus merely explains that he would go to heaven to prepare positions and offices of authority and responsibility in which the elect will function in the Kingdom of God. Just because the elect have access to heavenly Jerusalem (Rev.20:6, 21:27; 22:14) does not prevent them from reigning on earth with Jesus.

There is no doubt that Jesus went to heaven to prepare a place for the elect and there is no doubt that the elect will be wherever Jesus is going to be. In fact, one place where Jesus is going to be is right here on earth with the righteous who have obtained salvation.

OUR HOPE IS IN HEAVEN

Some believe that because there are scriptures which state the hope of the righteous is laid up in heaven, the ultimate reward of the saved will be to go to heaven. But just what is this hope that is laid up in heaven for the righteous? Is it to reside in heaven forever without ever leaving or is it something very different?

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;" (Col.1:3-5 KJV).

The English word *hope* in this text is translated from the Greek word *elpis*, which connotes *faith, trust, assurance, an expectation of the future, and comfort in distress*.

Paul says the hope of the righteous is reserved in heaven. But, what is this hope that is reserved there?

Paul does not say that our hope is to go to heaven to reside forever or that our hope is to be with Christ in heaven. He just says that our hope (faith, trust, assurance, expectation) is laid up in heaven.

Paul had faith that God was going to provide many things as a reward for righteousness and they were reserved in heaven awaiting distribution to the elect of God:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing" (2.Tim.4:8 KJV).

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Tit.1:1-2 KJV). See also Tit.3:7; 1.Thes.5:8.

Many of the things which are laid up in heaven as rewards will be given according to the effort of each individual. Jesus says, *"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal"* (Matt.6:20 KJV).

How does one lay up treasures in heaven? Many scriptures document that it takes special effort to gain rewards outside of the gift of eternal and immortal life:

"Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev.22:12 N.V.).

"Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (2.Jn.8 NIV).

The hope that is laid up in heaven is the faith that God the Father and Jesus Christ who are in heaven will fulfill their promises to give us our rewards in that great day when Jesus returns to rule the earth.

REWARDS ARE RESERVED IN HEAVEN

There are many scriptures showing that the rewards for the saints are reserved in heaven. However, do any of these references state that the saint's reward is exclusively heaven, or that they must reside in heaven forever to receive their reward?

"Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: . . ." (Matt.5:12 KJV; Lk.6:23).

"Take heed that you do not your alms [i.e., acts of goodness] before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt.6:1 KJV).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1.Pet.1:3-4 KJV). See also Acts 23:6; 24:15; Tit.1:2.

There is no denying that the above scriptures show that the reward of the righteous is reserved for them in heaven. However, are there any clear scriptures that say heaven is the only reward of the saved or that the inheritance of the saints is to live in heaven forever? No, there are not! In fact, nowhere in the entire Bible does it say that going to heaven is the only and final reward of the saved.

SUMMARY

If the righteous were to go directly to heaven at death to receive their reward, why would they need to be resurrected (1.Cor.15:52-53)? It does not make any sense to resurrect (restore to life) people who are already alive. Moreover, all of the scriptures which speak in great detail about the resurrection of God's elect would be meaningless, and there would be no reason for Christ to return and bring the elect's reward with him if they have already received it.

Remember that Paul said he and the other elect children of God will receive their reward in the day that Jesus returns to earth:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing" (2.Tim.4:8 KJV). See also Matt.16:21; Rev.11:18; 14:12-13; 22:12.

Why do those who teach that going to heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved rely on mistranslations, obscure scriptures, and tradition for their support of this teaching? The simple truth is that the Bible does not teach that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved nor does it teach that the saved go immediately to heaven after death. These teachings are another example of the many contradictions between what people believe and what the Bible actually says.

The rewards God has prepared for the righteous are far more exciting than the nebulous idea of going off to heaven. The Bible teaches that the rewards of the righteous are immortality, becoming a son of God the Father, a joint inheritance and rulership with Jesus Christ in the God family, and much more. The Bible also teaches a life full of peace, happiness, joy, and pleasures forever for those who obtain salvation:

"You will make me to know the way of life. In your presence are fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forever" (Psa.16:11 Para.).

The teaching that humans go directly to heaven after death is a false teaching and the scriptures clearly show the error of this belief. As you can see by the clear scriptures that have been presented here, there is a great contradiction between what people believe and what the Bible actually says about this topic. Moreover, personal research and study into this topic will help bring a deeper understanding of the tremendous opportunity God is offering humanity.

By B. L. Cocherell

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CHAPTER
TWENTY-FIVE

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The Sovereign Father's elect children who compose his earthly family of kings and priests are not immune to prophetic punishment. The fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the disappearance of the apostolic church reveals why there are so many different Christian churches today and why they all believe and teach so many different things about God and the Bible.

The following article reveals what happened to the early church and explains the three church ages that exist before Christ's return.

THE DYNAMIC EVANGELIZING CHURCH

Shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find a dynamic evangelizing church spreading God's truth throughout the world. However, as dynamic as this church was, it virtually disappeared from history after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. From 70 to 120 A.D., there was very little recorded about the true church of God. When historians began to write about the church again, they wrote of a dramatically different church from the one that embraced the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles. Today, we find churches that call themselves Christian, yet the vast majority of them do not even faintly resemble the early church.

Today, Christianity is one of the world's largest religions. There are thousands of Christian organizations and congregational associations which claim to be Christians and claim to worship and serve the God of the Bible. Each professes to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ as expounded in the pages of the Bible and each believes that it has a keen understanding of the Bible and God's will for humanity.

In this age, Christian organizations and congregational associations offer a variety of religious experiences. Whatever one's approach to religion, there is a Christian organization or congregational association that can be found in order to fill one's desire for religious expression.

The choices of Christian churches range from one extreme to another: from small personal groups to large crowds, from a quite scholarly intellectual atmosphere to the noisy frenzy of Pentecostalism, and from giant cathedrals to the evangelistic tent. There seems to be no end to the choices a person has when seeking a religious experience.

Most of these professing Christian organizations and congregational associations are separated by major doctrinal differences about subjects that are extremely important to one's salvation. There are many differing philosophies and concepts about how to worship the God of the Bible, and there is much confusion about what God expects of each person who wants to worship and serve him. These doctrinal differences and certain incompatible attitudes and behaviors between these various Christian organizations and congregational associations should cause anyone who is truly serious about their salvation to seriously question why there are so many different competing Christian churches and philosophies.

The problem is not with not having enough choices; the problem is which choice is the right choice. There are tens of thousands of separate Christian organizations, associations, and philosophies that profess to follow Jesus Christ. But, how do you know that the church of your choice is God's choice?

Many people frankly admit that they attend a specific church because their friends also go there, or because of its size, its standing in the community, its location, or its parking facility.

Only a small number of people who attend Christian churches claim to have spent some time researching what the early church taught before choosing a church to attend, and few wonder whether the doctrines of the church that they attend truly conform to what the early church taught.

Different Perceptions

It seems very strange indeed that most of the various Christian organizations and congregational associations use the same Bible on which to base their beliefs and lifestyles, but they all differ in how they perceive what is written in this book.

Professing Christians often say, "It doesn't really matter what you believe, just as long as you believe in God and the Bible." But, it must matter somewhat because not all professing Christians hold the same beliefs. Can all of these conflicting Christian beliefs and philosophies be right? Logically, if any one of them is right, the rest must be wrong.

Obviously, everyone who professes Christianity believes that their particular religious philosophy will get them to heavenly bliss more quickly and efficiently than all of the others. If one does not believe this, they are settling for second best. Is one Christian philosophy or religious practice just as good as another?

WHERE IS THE CHURCH THAT CHRIST BUILT?

Does the church that Jesus Christ built after his death and resurrection exist on earth today? And if it does exist, is it doing the same work that Jesus commissioned the early church to do? If such a church does exist one will have to look outside popular Christianity, because a short study into the beliefs and teachings of the early church will reveal that most popular Christian beliefs conflict with the teachings of the early church.

In order to clearly understand why there is so much confusion and competition within the Christian Community today, one must view the church that Jesus Christ built in the context of the three distinct church ages that will have existed before his return to rule the earth. Once one has some knowledge of what transpired during the first two church ages and what will transpire during the churches' third age, the following questions can easily be answered:

- What constitutes the church that Christ built?
- What caused the demise of the early church?
- Did the early church disappear and cease to exist?
- Why are there so many Christian denominations?
- Why do not all Christians believe the same doctrines?
- Does it matter how or where a person worships God?
- If the true church of God exists today, where is it?

WHAT CONSTITUTES THE CHURCH CHRIST BUILT?

When Jesus said, "*I will build my church,*" what was he going to build? To recognize the true church today and in the future, one must first understand exactly what the church is that Christ built.

The English word *church* is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means *calling out* (i.e., a popular meeting, an assembly, especially a religious congregation). The word *church* simply means a group of people meeting together. Attaching the word church to a group or organization does not necessarily make it a part of the Body of Christ.

In the purest sense, the church is composed of people who are called out of this evil world by God the Father (Jn.6:44, 65) to believe what Jesus taught and submit to his rule in their lives (Jn.14:15-24).

The church Jesus established on the Festival of Pentecost after his death and resurrection was conceived and brought forth through the power of the Father's holy spirit which Jesus sent to dwell within repentant believers. The apostle Paul said the following about the spiritual quality of the church that Jesus established:

"By one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many" (1.Cor.12:13-14 KJV). And "Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1.Cor.12:27 KJV).

Today, most professing Christians believe that God's church is composed of many different organizations with all the trappings of huge corporate structures, businesses, and governments. However, the church that Jesus rules over is not a corporate organization; the church he rules over is a spiritual organism, which consists of people whom the Father has called out of this world and made a part of his royal family and holy nation of ambassadors, kings, and priests. See 1.Cor.1:1-31; Rev.1:5-6.

Some people contend that any group that meets in the name of Jesus is a Christian group. It is true that Jesus said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matt.18:20 KJV). However, this only applies to people who are truly the Father's elect children, because they are the only ones who have the authority to meet in Jesus' name.

Many people think that, just because they are members of an organization called a Christian church and believe in God, they are Christians and are worshiping God correctly. This is a very dangerous assumption to make, especially when our eternal life depends on the way we worship and obey God. The true church is a spiritual organism, Jesus Christ is its head, and its body is composed of those called by the Father to salvation, despite their organizational or congregational affiliation or lack thereof.

THE FIRST CHURCH AGE

It is clear from secular records and the Book of Acts that, shortly after the early church was established on the Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D., the apostles established a council of apostles and elders at Jerusalem under the presidency of James. This council exercised authority, responsibility, accountability, and jurisdiction over all the Father's elect children.

After the martyrdom of James (Jesus' brother) and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., secular history shows that the true Christians were in Pella with Simeon as president of their governing body. According to Hegesippus, the blood relatives of Christ continued in the presidency of the Nazorean council until the time of Tarjan Caesar. Although there are historical references about true Christians after this time, with the death of the apostle John, the Father's royal family and holy nation of ambassadors, kings, and priests began to disappear as an organized entity under a centralized leadership.

Clearly, the church that Jesus Christ established through the apostles does not exist in its original form today. But, what caused the early church to cease to exist as a powerful entity? The answer to this question is the foundation on which to build an understanding of the conditions that exist within the Christian Community today and the prophecies about the third church age that will exist just before Christ's return.

The Great Commission

The assignment that Jesus gave to his followers to proclaim the gospel is often called the Great Commission because it should be a priority in the life of every true follower of Christ:

"Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matt.28: 19-20 KJV).

Although the primary responsibility for preaching the gospel fell to the apostles and those specifically chosen and sent to evangelize, the responsibility was not theirs alone; it was to be shared by all of the elect. All who believe the gospel message and have accepted its terms and conditions for salvation must participate in the preaching of the gospel.

At the conclusion of Mark's Gospel, he says, "*And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*" (Mk.16:20 KJV).

After the Festival of Pentecost in 30 A.D., God's elect did go forth evangelizing and spreading God the Father's good news message of salvation and the coming Kingdom of God. Their spiritual zeal changed the course of history. However, it was not in the plan of God to save the world during Jesus' lifetime or during the apostolic church age. If this had been his plan, he would have done it. See Isa.6:8-10; Matt.10:34-36; 13:10-15; Mk.4:11-12; Lk.8:9-10.

Authorizations of Power

Few people realize the awesome power that Jesus placed at the disposal of the early church as a unified body and the discretion with which they were authorized to use this power. There are at least 21 distinct authorizations of spiritual and physical gifts noted in the New Testament that were given to the organized and unified Body of Christ. Each of these authorizations was to be used to build the early church into a powerful and dynamic force:

"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body" (Eph.4:12 KJV). See also Eph.4:7-11; 1.Cor.12:8-10, 28-30; Rom.12:3-8.

There are many accounts of the elect using their powerful authorizations to perform the commission that Jesus gave to the early church (see Acts 3:6-7; 5:1-15; 6:8; 13:8-11; 15:12). The apostles and others did miraculous works at their own discretion. However, as dynamic and powerful as these people were, they ceased to exist as a powerful, dynamic and unified entity.

The Seduction of the Apostolic Church

Although Jesus foretold that the elect would be persecuted for their adherence to God's truth (Jn.15:20; 17:14-17; Acts 8:1; 2.Tim.3:12) and for teaching his ways, this is not the primary reason that the early church disappeared as a powerful, unified, and spirit-filled entity. Jesus warned that the demise of the early church would be caused by its being seduced into disobedience to God through false teachings. He also warned that most of those whom the Father would call to salvation would be deceived by a counterfeit of the Father's worship system:

"Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt.24:4-5 KJV).

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt.24:11-12 KJV).

Continual Warnings

The members of the early church were continually warned and encouraged to keep *"the Faith Once Delivered"* and to be on guard against those who wanted to destroy them.

Peter also warned that many would be misled by people who would come to the elect and bring heretical teachings:

"And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2.Pet.2:2 KJV).

Jude encouraged the Father's elect of his day to diligently seek and hold onto *"the Faith Once Delivered"*, because there were evil men among the elect who were actively seeking to destroy them:

"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ . . . These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the spirit" (Jude 3-4;19 KJV).

Confusion and Division

The apostle Paul urged the elect at Corinth to avoid confusion and division:

"Now I [Paul] beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been told of you, my brethren, by them who are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that every one of you says I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" (1.Cor.1:10-12 Para.).

The apostle Paul asked the Corinthians, *"Is Christ divided?"* (1.Cor. 1:13).

The church that Jesus Christ established should not be divided over doctrinal issues or any other thing that is important to salvation or doing a personal and collective work for the Father.

It is absurd to think that Jesus Christ is not quite sure what his Father's elect children should believe about truth or how they should function as a united body under his direction as the head of his Father's royal family and holy nation on earth. And it is just as absurd to believe that Jesus and his Father do not care how those called to salvation worship and serve them. The reality is that they do care and they will eventually punish

those who refuse to hear what the spirit says to the churches about following false doctrine. See Revelation, chapters two and three, and Ex.20:5; Deut.5:29; 12:29-32; 13:1-4; 30:15-16.

God is not the author of confusion (1.Cor.14:33); he is an orderly being. Look at the order of all that exists. From the balance of the galactic systems down to the smallest atomic structure, all of the physical creation shows great order; it is not in confusion. Because God created the physical existence to function in an orderly manner, it makes sense that he would have his people worship him in an orderly, structured way, not in many different ways. See Eph.4:4-6; 1:22-23; 1.Cor.12:12-13.

A short review of the Creator God's instructions to Moses and the priesthood concerning the construction of the tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the conduct of the priesthood, and the warnings of dire consequences for failure to comply in every detail to these instructions clearly shows that God requires his people to worship him in the manner he chooses, not in the manner they choose.

A Departure From The Faith

Paul said to the Galatians, *"I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel: Which is not another; but there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ"* (Gal.1:6-7 KJV). See also 2.Cor.11:13-15.

Paul warned Timothy, *"Now the spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron"* (1.Tim.4:1-2 KJV).

"For the time will come when they [the elect] will not accept sound teaching . . . And they shall not pay attention to the truth, and shall turn it away, and shall be turned instead to fables" (2.Tim.4:3-4 Para.).

Many who fellowshiped in the congregations of the early church would not accept sound teachings. They sought out teachers who would teach things that were pleasing to them and things that did not require their obedience to God's laws, precepts, and principles. To deceive the gullible and the spiritually lazy, these teachers replaced truth with error and taught mysticism and other philosophies that appeal to human nature.

THE PROPHECY OF ZECHARIAH

The answers to the perplexing questions concerning the demise and disappearance of the early church are only answered in part by the warnings of Jesus and the apostles. Additional answers are found hidden in the prophecy of Zechariah. Matthew, Mark, and John all record Jesus quoting the first part of Zechariah's prophecy, that foretold the scattering of Jesus' disciples after his death:

"All you shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered abroad" (Matt.26:31 KJV). See also Mk.14:27; Jn.16:32.

This is an extremely important prophecy because the rest of the prophecy, which Jesus did not quote, allows us to understand why the apostolic church ceased to exist as a powerful entity:

"I will turn my hand upon [against] the little ones [the Father's elect children]" (Zech.13:7 KJV).

The *little ones* mentioned here are the Father's elect, which is noted in many scriptures (See Matt.18:3-10; 19:13-14; Mk.9:42). But, why would the Lord of hosts turn against *the little ones*? And why did Jesus omit this prophecy?

The reason for the rejection of the 'little' ones is that they would reject the *"Faith Once Delivered"* and cease to be zealous for truth. The reason that Jesus did not quote the rest of Zechariah's prophecy, is because it was a different prophecy, which was to be fulfilled at a different time. The second part of Zechariah's prophecy began its fulfillment during the apostolic church age and will continue to be fulfilled until shortly before Christ's return.

The Early Church Became Corrupted

The early church failed to hold onto the *"Faith Once Delivered"* and became corrupted with false and misleading teachings about God, his ways, and his plan for humanity. Because of the persistent corruption of God's truth, the once dynamic and powerful entity that Jesus established on the Feast of Pentecost in 30 A.D. began to collapse from within.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and following the death of the apostle John, the organized preaching of the gospel on a powerful basis ceased. The elect were persecuted and their numbers were dramatically reduced in the great martyrdoms inflicted by the Romans. They became scattered and eventually disappeared into obscurity. Centuries of intense persecution forced the church to go underground. Until the 19th century, the only remaining records of the early church were those of their enemies. A careful study of prophecies concerning God's true body of believers clearly shows that the church Jesus built will remain small and obscure until just before Christ returns at the end of this age of human rule.

THE SECOND CHURCH AGE

"I will build my church and the gates of hell [hades: the grave] will not prevail against it" (Matt.16:18 Para.). See also Matt.28:19-20.

This scripture is often used to prove that the church that Jesus established still exists today with an unbroken succession of spiritual leaders. However, this is not what Jesus said; he did not promise an unbroken succession of spiritual leadership or that the church would endure throughout the ensuing centuries as a unified organization with great spirit-power and prominence until his return. Jesus only assured his disciples that the spiritual entity he would build for the Father would never be destroyed or cease to exist; it would endure the test of time.

Jesus has kept his promise; the Father's royal family and holy nation (i.e., the church), which he rules, does exist. It has continued to exist throughout the centuries alongside a growing counterfeit of biblical Christianity. Though small in numbers, the elect of God have existed in relative obscurity without losing the understanding of the most basic truths that are necessary for salvation.

Today

Today, the church Jesus began in 30 A.D. now consists of the Father's elect children who are scattered throughout the world with some who associate together in organizational and congregational associations and some who are without formal association with their spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ.

In order to clearly understand the condition of the true church today, one must carefully read Jesus' prophecy recorded in Revelation, chapters two and three, concerning the spiritual attitudes and behaviors of the Father's elect children who comprise the second and third church ages. This prophecy shows that most of the organizational and congregational associations of the Father's elect children are separated by major doctrinal differences, differing philosophies and concepts about how to worship the Father, as well as incompatible attitudes and behaviors.

The prophecies concerning the various churches in Revelation, chapters two and three, also clearly show that there are seven distinct groupings of individuals which characterize the Father's collective royal family and holy nation during the second and third church ages.

The condition that exists within most of the Father's royal family and holy nation today is the result of centuries of passive existence without great spirit-power or numbers, centuries without a unified centralized body of dynamic spirit-filled leaders, and centuries of having only the most basic of spiritual truths to sustain spiritual growth. Although this is the current situation, all who truly have the Father's spirit of adoption do exist as a spiritual organism, which is the collective Body of Christ (the church).

According to the prophecies concerning the end of the age, this condition will continue to exist among the elect until Christ begins to awaken them either to do a great work for him or to punish them for their rebellion in the hope that they will repent and obtain salvation.

THE THIRD CHURCH AGE

The prophetic scriptures record the advent of three Elijahs. The first was a prophet to ancient Israel, the second was John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Messiah's first appearance, and the third Elijah will appear just before and during the last and third church age. The prophecies concerning this last Elijah show that Jesus will send him to prepare for his return to rule the earth, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons and the sons to the fathers, and to restore all things:

"Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me . . ." (Mal.3:1 KJV).

"Behold I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with utter destruction" (Mal.4:5-6 Para.).

"And Jesus replied, Elijah truly will come first and restore all things" (Matt.17:11 Para.).

Jesus' reference to the restoration of all things is a reference to the restoration of God's worship system which includes the sacrifices, the priesthood, Jesus' teachings concerning the salvation of humanity, and the spiritual relationship between God the Father and his elect children.

The message of the third Elijah is focused on the restoration of God's truth. Therefore, we should expect the third Elijah to restore an understanding of how the worship system the Creator God instituted at Mount Sinai and the worship system Jesus Christ instituted work together for the salvation of those people who will believe and worship God the Father in truth.

This restoration is necessary, because most of these truths were lost to the world as God's worship system became perverted by ancient Israel and Judaism, and during the demise of the early church and the rise of a counterfeit Christianity.

The prophecies about the appearance of the third Elijah, the messages to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, and the prophecies surrounding the Two Witnesses and their associates mentioned in the books of Revelation, Haggai, and Zechariah clearly show that Jesus Christ will make an effort to awaken his Father's elect children out of their spiritual sleep and remind them of their responsibilities.

Christ's End-time Work

Although Jesus Christ has been protecting, nurturing, and guiding the members of his Father's royal family and holy nation since he established it in 30 A.D., during the end of the age just before his return, he will begin an awesome work on earth of such great magnitude that it will be beyond the comprehension of unconverted people in this world:

"Behold you among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, you will not believe, though it were told" (Hab.1:5 Para.). See also verses 1-4.

While teaching in the synagogue at Antioch, the apostle Paul repeated the warning of Habbakkuk to show the Jews the consequences of disregarding the good news message that he was bringing them:

"Beware, lest that comes upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I will work a work in your days, a work which you in no way will believe, though you are told about it" (Acts 13:40-41 Para.).

Although the prophet Habbakkuk speaks of Jesus Christ doing an awesome work just before his return, many elect will also participate in his great work as members of the third age of the church.

Greater Works

"Truly, truly, I tell you, he that believes on me, the works that I do he shall also do, and greater works, than these he shall do; because I go to the Father. And whatsoever you will ask in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the son. If you will ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (Jn.14:12-14 Para.).

As powerful as the apostolic church age was in the performance of their responsibility to proclaim the Father's message, they did not do a greater work than Jesus. However, some of God's elect who will live just before Christ's return will do this greater work. They will do a greater work because they will have the kind of faith, power, and protection necessary to do a greater work. (Dan.11:31-35; Jn.14:12-14; Rev.11:1-6.

The Awakening

The prophecies about the end of the age show that, just before his return, Jesus will again establish a dynamic, powerful people to proclaim his Father's good news and the coming Kingdom of God.

During this age, many of the Father's elect children will become unified in belief and filled with dynamic spiritual and physical power. Many will manifest the authorizations of the early church and more which is noted by the prophecies about the Two Witnesses, the third Elijah, and Daniel (Dan.11:31-34).

It is likely that some of the people whom Jesus will use in a dynamic way in the end of the age will come out of six of the seven church groupings noted in the Book Revelation, chapters two and three. These will be awakened out of their spiritual lethargy and begin performing the functions and responsibilities that they were originally called to do. During this time, many of the elect will have the ability to defy the very laws of the physical universe with their miracle working power. Moreover, no physical or spiritual power will be able to stop them from doing their God-given task.

The Promise To Philadelphia

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things say he that is holy, he that is true, he that has the key of David, he that opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens" (Rev.3:7).

The individual in this prophecy who has the key of David has absolute authority over its use and the door which it opens as does the prophetic Eliakim noted in Isaiah 22:15-25.

Revelation, chapter 3, verse 8, seems to show that the Church of Philadelphia represents a grouping of the Sovereign Father's earthly children who are to do a great work in the end of the age, and that it is Christ who has the key to open to them the knowledge and power they will need to do this great work.

Speaking to the Church of Philadelphia in verse 8, Christ says:

"I know your works: behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength, and have kept my word, and have not denied my name" (Rev.3:8).

The English word translated as *man* in verse 8 is translated from the Greek word *oudeis*, which does not mean a man (Greek: *anthropos*, which means *man-faced*, i.e., *a human being*. *Oudeis* means *none nobody*, or *nothing*).

The English word *strength* in verse 8 is translated from the Greek word *dunamis*, which means *force* (literally or figuratively); specifically, it means, *miraculous power* (usually by implication, a miracle itself).

Christ specifically says that, at the time the open door is set before them, the Church of Philadelphia has little force (i.e., miraculous power). Historically, this has been the condition of the entire collective church since the demise and disappearance of the early church as a powerful unified entity.

The inference in verse 8 is that, because of their small amount of spirit-power, the Church of Philadelphia cannot open this door on their own. However, when this door is opened for them, absolutely nothing can shut it except Christ.

Who Are the Philadelphians?

All of the various organizations and congregational associations throughout the world that overtly teach foundational elements required for salvation, including the observance of the Sabbath and the annual festivals and holy convocations, believe they are a part of the Philadelphia church mentioned in the Book of Revelation, chapter 3. Moreover, most professing Christians who know of the prophetic Philadelphians also think of themselves as having these attributes. However, most are self-deceived and have not examined what is required to be accepted by

God as a Philadelphian worthy of special consideration, empowerment, and protection.

For most people, the discovery of the identity of the Philadelphia church will come too late to forestall receiving some of God's wrath during the great tribulation at the end of the age. Clearly, the vast majority of professing Christians today do not have the characteristics that the Father and Jesus Christ require of a spiritual Philadelphian.

DIFFERENT CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

Today, there are tens of thousands of church organizations and congregational associations who call themselves Christians, but do not faintly resemble the early church. The majority of these professing Christians are in direct competition with each other, teaching many different confusing and contradictory philosophies about Christ and the Bible.

To understand why there are so many different Christian denominations today and how this situation came into existence, we must answer the following questions:

- If Christ is not divided, as the apostle Paul said, why are so many Christian organizations and associations in direct competition with each other?
- Why do the various Christian organizations and associations teach so many different confusing and contradictory philosophies about Christ, the Bible, and how to worship God?
- Why do the tens of thousands of Christian organizations and associations call themselves Christians when they do not even faintly resemble the early church?

Rebellion Against God

The first reason so many different professing Christian denominations exist, is rebellion against God. Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. The children of Israel rebelled against the Creator in the wilderness after he had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Mankind has been rebelling against God from Adam until now. See Ezk.20:1-17; Isa.30:9-10; 66:3.

Jesus said, *"I will build my church"* and he did build it; however, Jesus did not build or sanction the tens of thousands of different competing denominations that claim to follow him. Jesus inspired the apostle Paul to write the following:

"There is one body, and one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one Faith, one baptism, One God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph.4:4-6).

For some reason people seem to think they can worship God any way they want. Notice that Jesus called the religious leaders of his day hypocrites, because they were teaching their own philosophies and traditions in place of God's truth:

"You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But IN VAIN they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt.15:7-9).

Because some of God's elect children fall into this category of rebellion. Paul warned the young evangelist Timothy:

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables" (2.Tim.4:2-4 KJV).

"Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1.Tim.4:1-2 KJV).

Rebellion can come in many forms and always separates the rebellious people from God the Father and Jesus Christ, no matter what organization or congregational association people align themselves with.

Satan's Deception

The second reason for so many different Christian denominations is Satan's deception. In the early days of the church, Satan started his master deception and tried to destroy the true church from within. The apostle Paul warned the church at Corinth about this deception:

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2.Cor. 11:13-15).

Yes, Satan has ministers and even churches designed to counterfeit God's true church (Rev.2:9; 3:9). Moreover, there are many pseudo-Christian ministers who truly think they are serving the true God but are themselves deceived into serving as a minister of Satan.

The reality is that the vast majority of professing Christians today are deceived into thinking they are worshiping the true God because of Satan's deception:

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Rev.12:9 KJV).

Jesus knew this would happen and warned, *"Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying I am the Christ; and shall deceive many"* (Matt.24:4-5 KJV).

Jesus foretold the time when Satan's ministers would preach another gospel in his name, and many would be deceived into thinking they were following him. See Matt.24:11; Gal.1:6-9.

Jesus' prophecy has come true. Most professing Christians today believe and preach a false gospel, not because they have predetermined to do so but because Satan has deceived them. Satan is indeed the master deceiver. Moreover, deceived people do not know that they are deceived; otherwise, they would not be deceived.

It is obvious that the early Church was not divided into many different denominations. It is also obvious that, if all professing Christians submitted to God's rule in their lives, denominations would disappear.

Contrary to what most believe, Jesus Christ does not sanction the many different competing church organizations and congregational associations that exist today. Jesus said, *"I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matt.16:18 KJV). He did not say he would build many different competing churches; he said that he would build his church and it would endure.

After being crucified and resurrected from the dead, Jesus instructed his disciples on how he wanted his church to be constructed:

"Therefore, you go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matt.28:19-20 KJV Para.).

Jesus told his disciples to teach the things that he had commanded. Christ was not only referring to the things he had taught during his earthly ministry in human form but also the things he had taught Israel when he was their God before he became a human being.

ABOUT THE CHURCH

Let us look at what the Bible says about the people who are the church. The first thing we find about its members is that they are not very popular. In fact, they are usually hated by most people. Jesus knew this would be the case and asked God the Father to protect them:

"I have given them your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but you should keep them from evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through your truth: your word is truth" (Jn.17:14-17 KJV).

Why are God's people hated by the world? The answer is really quite simple when we understand that the human mind and nature is enmity against God, his truth, and way of truth (Rom.8:7), and that God's enemy, Satan, has deceived the whole world into following him (Rev.12:9) and influenced the world to hate the things of the true God and his people.

THE CHURCH—PERSECUTED, SCATTERED, AND SMALL

Jesus understood human nature as no other man could. As the Creator God of all things including humanity (Jn.1:1-3; Eph.3:9), he had observed human behavior throughout their history and knew that people would continue to oppose truth as long as they were influenced by their own nature and Satan. From its very beginning, the people of the early church suffered much persecution because of what they believed, practiced, and taught:

"And Saul [Paul] consented to Stephen's death. And at that time there was great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles" (Acts 8:1 KJV).

God's way of life is opposite to the way most people want to live. Most people do not like to be told how to live or that their behavior is sinful and they usually dislike people who point out their faults. The Bible is full of examples of the righteous being hated, despised, maligned, persecuted, and murdered for believing, practicing, and proclaiming truth. It is no different today. The Father's elect children will be hated and persecuted for believing, practicing, and proclaiming his truth until his kingdom rules the earth.

Although Christianity as a world religion encompasses hundreds of millions of people, it is evident from the scriptures that those who truly comprise the spiritual organism which is the Father's royal family and holy nation is a very small number of people. But, does being small in number make a group of people the true church? Of course not! There are many small groups that say they are Christian, but are so far out of line with what Jesus taught that they do not even begin to resemble true Christianity.

Hated by Popular Christianity

There are tens of thousands of different competing groups and organizations that profess to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. All of these feel that their particular interpretation of Jesus' teachings and the Bible is acceptable to God.

Those who truly follow the teachings of God the Father and Jesus Christ teach that there is only one way to worship the true God and only one way to obtain salvation, and that those who teach another way of worship and salvation are worshipping a false god.

The vast majority of counterfeit Christians hate the Father's true children because their belief, practices, and teachings are a condemnation of counterfeit Christianity. Just as the Jews of Jesus' day professed to believe in God and hated Jesus for what he taught, so it is in this age. God's people will be hated for believing and teaching the truth as Jesus taught it (Jn.17:14).

Hated by Judaism

Those of the various Jewish sects, for the most part, believe that Jesus Christ existed, but very few believe he was the Creator God, the Son of God, and the Messiah. However, a major part of the gospel message teaches that Jesus Christ is the Creator God and the Son of God, and that God the Father sent Jesus to cancel the first covenant with national Israel and replace it with a new one.

Both the Old and New Testaments and the words of Jesus condemn Judaism as a perversion of the original writings of the word of God. Therefore, it is no wonder that those of the various Jewish sects feel that any who believe in and follow the teachings of Jesus are their enemies and worshipers of a pagan god.

Christianity and Judaism

Quasi-Christians and people of Jewish sects who profess to worship the true God but whose lives and teachings are not harmonious with the truth of God always have a great deal of disdain and hatred for those who actually worship God in truth, love, and obedience. Jesus says these individuals who hate his followers are evil and corrupt:

"Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips honor me; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the ordinances of men" (Matt.15:7-9 Para.). See Isa.29:13; Ezk.33:31-32.

"For the tree is known by its fruit. O generation of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? for out of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things: and out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Matt.12:33-35 Para.). See also Matt.3:7.

Jesus called the religious leaders of the Jews "hypocrites, snakes, evil and corrupt men," because they were not teaching the total truth of God. Instead, they were teaching half-truths and their own perverted philosophy that were in opposition to God's word. The same can be said for the quasi-Christian and Jewish sects of today. Both claim to be obedient to the word of God; however, their actions and the results of their teachings are far different from what the Bible says they should be if they were truly worshiping the true God and living according to his way.

"But I say to you, That every idle word that men speak, they shall give account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you are justified, and by your words you are condemned" (Matt.12: 36-37 Para.).

The words of those who only pretend to worship the true God condemn them for what they really are. People can fool other people as to their true beliefs and intentions, but they cannot fool God. Hence, Jesus gave his condemnation of the religious leaders of his day who were, in reality, only pretending to worship the true God:

"Why come to me and call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" (Lk.6:46 Para.) See Lk.6:43-45.

The elect of God must speak out as Jesus did and condemn those who falsely claim to worship the true God. This is yet another reason that the elect of God will be hated and persecuted.

Hated by all Religions

Those who truly believe that the biblical record is the printed word of God should also believe the biblical teaching that there are only two religions in the world. The religion of God the Father who is Sovereign of all that exists and the religion of God's enemies that are separated into three basic categories: Quasi-Christianity, Judaism, and all other religions.

Because of this belief, it is little wonder that those who truly believe that they are the only true worshipers of the only true God and his Son will be hated by all religions of the world today. It is interesting that this is the same basic reason that the ancient nation of Israel was hated and persecuted by other nations.

Hated by Governments

Jesus was not persecuted by the Roman government; he was persecuted by those who said they were worshiping the one true God. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the early church existed for many years without being persecuted by the Roman or any other government.

During the time of the apostles and the early church, persecution always came from the Jews or other religions. It was only after the Romans and other governments perceived the followers of God as a political threat that they began to persecute them.

During the time of the end, the elect of God will claim to be the only ones worshipping the true God and the only true representatives of the Government of God on earth, like Jesus and the early church did. The elect will believe and preach that the government of God is about to begin its rule over all the earth, which will cause them to be hated by governments, as well as by people of other religions.

"And you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake"
(Matt.24:9).

Hated by all Israel

The nations of Israel have always been rebellious people who have seldom heeded the warnings of God's prophets and servants. As the end of this age approaches and the elect of God proclaim the gospel along with its warning and witness to the Israelites scattered throughout the world, the Israelites will respond to God in the same way that they always have in the past.

The prophet Isaiah was inspired to record the harsh reality concerning the attitudes and mind-set of the people of Israel toward God. The comments God made about his chosen people are as true today as they were when Isaiah recorded them centuries ago:

Isaiah 30:1-15 LPB

Woe to my rebellious children, says the Lord; you ask advice from everyone but me, and decide to do what I don't want you to do. You yoke yourselves with unbelievers, thus piling up your sins. . . Now go and write down this word of mine concerning Egypt [symbolic of sin, as well as a literal nation], so that it will stand until the end of time, forever and forever, as an indictment of Israel's unbelief. For if you don't write it, they will claim I never warned them. "Oh, no," they will say, "you never told us that!" For they are stubborn rebels. They tell my prophets, "Shut up—we don't want any more of your reports!" Or they say, "Don't tell us the truth; tell us nice things; tell us lies. Forget all this gloom; we've heard more than enough about your 'Holy One of Israel' and all he says" (vs.1-11).

It should not come as a great surprise that all of the politicians, military leaders, and government officials at every level of the Israelitish nations scattered around the world will hate the elect of God, because the elect of God will be preaching the same message of repentance that God's prophets have always preached to Israel.

"This is the reply of the Holy One of Israel: "Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in frauds and lies and won't repent, therefore calamity will come upon you suddenly, as upon a bulging wall that bursts and falls; in one moment it comes crashing down. God will smash you like a broken dish; he will not act sparingly. Not a piece will be left large enough to use for carrying coals from the hearth, or a little water from the well." For the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, says: "Only in returning to me and waiting for me will you be saved; in quietness and confidence is your strength"; but you'll have none of this" (vs.12-15).

Another reason for the Israelitish people's hatred and persecution of the elect of God in the end of the age is that the elect of God also teach that God the Father is now punishing the descendants of Israel throughout the world for their continued rebellion against him and his physical and spiritual laws of behavior. The elect also believe that God will give them the power to bring destruction upon the Israelitish people as a witness and warning of more destruction to come if they and the world at large will not repent of their evil ways and peacefully come under his rule. See Isa.29:9-14.

PERSECUTION

Why was Jesus Christ crucified for preaching the gospel message? Why were most of the apostles along with many of the early church martyred? And why will many be murdered just before the return of Jesus Christ for preaching the truly astounding message that Jesus taught?

Jesus Gives the Answer:

"If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn.15:20 Para.). "And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2.Tim.3:12 Para.). See also Mk.13:13; Lk.21:17.

The persecution of the elect of God is a self-fulfilling prophecy, because of their obedience to the command of Jesus to proclaim the gospel message. The elect of God will be hated and persecuted because they will be doing as Jesus instructed. They will be preaching and teaching the good news message of repentance from evil, true belief in God the Father and Jesus Christ, and the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

The gospel message that Jesus brought from the Father is a message that is so dynamic, so powerful, and so diametrically opposed to what has been taught by this world's religious leaders and philosophers that the vast majority of people will reject it when they hear it and hate and persecute those who live it and teach it.

Jesus says to let one's light shine (Matt.5:14-16). When one does this, one cannot help but bring persecution upon oneself.

Today, just before the return of Jesus Christ to conquer the earth and establish his Father's religion and government over the earth, the true servants of God must proclaim God the Father's good news just as Christ did centuries ago.

The basic reasons for the persecution of the elect are not complex or difficult to understand. Revealing the true condition of the world and laying the blame at the feet of those who are responsible for these horrible conditions will indeed bring persecution.

HOW TO FIND THOSE WHO TRULY FOLLOW CHRIST

In this world of confusing Christian denominations, how does a person go about finding the Father's elect children who truly serve him and his Son Jesus Christ? How does one find a group of true Christians? It should be obvious that Jesus is not the founder of the tens of thousands of competing Christian organizations and congregational associations, so how can a person find people who truly serve the Sovereign God and his Son?

Are there identifying marks, signs, or something that one can observe that will help one to recognize true Christians? The answer is yes! True Christians can be identified and separated from those who are not. The following are some major points to look for when determining if someone is being guided by Jesus Christ and the Father's holy spirit:

- Obedience to God's laws
- Brotherly love
- Observance of God's seventh-day Sabbath
- Observance of God's commanded observances and festivals
- Non-participation in pagan worship systems
- Distinctly separate from other religions
- Preaching of the Kingdom of God
- Understanding of the purpose of the church
- Understanding of God's plan of salvation for humanity

Gods People Obey His Laws

God's people obey his laws, precepts and principles. His people recognize that he has set in motion laws which will bring every good thing, abundant well-being, and a full, happy, and productive life if they are obeyed. God's people will boldly proclaim that his laws, precepts, and principles are not done away with, but have been expanded to cover every aspect of human activity (Isa.42:21; Matt.5:17-18). God's people say with King David, "*Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path*" (Psa.119:105) and they recognize that God's law is one of his greatest gifts to humanity.

The apostle John has a stinging rebuke for those who say they know God and do not keep his law:

"He that says, I know him, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1.Jn.2:4).

God's people recognize that a requirement for maintaining a harmonious relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ is commandment keeping. Moreover, God's people show their love for God and their concern for each other through keeping the Father's law:

Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn.14:15)*.

"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous" (1.Jn.5:2-3).

Brotherly Love

"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if we have love one to another" (Jn.13:35).

Although love for those within the body of Christ may not seem to be a major sign of God's people, it is nonetheless. In a world torn with strife, war, divorce, murder, anger, hatred and violence, true love and concern for another person is rare indeed, and it is truly a sign of the people who follow the one who loved the world enough to give his life for it.

The Seventh-Day Sabbath, Commanded Observances, and Holy Convocations

God's people observe his seventh-day Sabbath, his commanded observances, and his holy convocations:

"Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever does any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex.31:15).

"Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctifies them" (Ezk.20:12). "And hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God" (Ezk.20:20).

Other observances and holy convocations that God's people keep are the New Moons, the Passover, and the Annual Festivals. These are statutes to be kept forever and are signs of God's people. See Ex.13:9; Lev. chap.23; Isa.56:1-6; 58:13; 66:22-23.

God's People and Paganism

God's people do not observe pagan festivals and observances (e.g., Christmas, Easter, and Halloween) or rituals and traditions appropriated from this world's religions. Although many professing Christians will say there is nothing wrong with observing and practicing other religions festivals, observances, rituals and traditions, they do admit they are pagan in origin. The prophet Jeremiah gave this warning from God concerning Satanic practices:

"Do not learn the ways of other nations, and don't be terrified at the signs of heaven as other nations are. For the customs of these people are vanity; for one cuts a tree out of the forest, with an ax it is the work of the hands of the craftsman,. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, so they don't move" (Jer.10:2-4 Para). Also see Deut.12:29-31.

"Don't go after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and don't provoke me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you" (Jer.25:6 Para).

Paul warns God's people at Corinth not to bind themselves with other people who are unbelievers and practice Satan's worship systems:

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (2.Cor.6:14-16).

Separate from Other Religions

The apostle Paul instructed the elect at Corinth to avoid mixing paganism with Christianity (2.Cor.6:14-16). He also told them to separate themselves from the religions of that day:

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you" (2.Cor.6:17).

God's people must remain separate from this world's religions, because participation in them leads to spiritual adultery. The true church will be the Bride of Christ, and its people today are representatives of the Father's holy nation as its citizens, ambassadors, kings, and priests (2.Cor.5:20).

The Kingdom of God

"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel" (Mk.1:14-15 KJV). See also Matt.24:14; 28:19-20.

God's people proclaim the coming Kingdom of God as the solution to humanity's problems, as well as the other good news messages that Jesus Christ and the apostles taught concerning the Father's plan for the salvation of humanity and entrance into his family and kingdom as a spirit-being.

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel to you than that you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal.1:8-9).

These are strong words; but they do show just how important it is to the Father that his people proclaim the right message. The gospel that Jesus proclaimed is a far cry from the teachings of popular Christianity today. The true good news messages are so dynamic, so powerful, so diametrically opposite to what is taught in most churches around the world today that most people reject it:

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables" (2.Tim.4:2-4 KJV).

The Purpose of the Church

The early church was not established to become a large and powerful organization in order to challenge Satan for world rule and make this world a better place in which to live under its present leadership. Instead, Jesus established the early church for the following four basic reasons:

1. Prepare a people to help Jesus Christ rule the world.

"And has [i.e., Christ has] made us to our God [i.e., God the Father] kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev.5:10). See also 1.Thes.3:13; Rev.3:21; 20:4-6.

2. Proclaim the good news of the soon-coming government of God.

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt.24:14).

3. Teach God the Father's message of repentance and salvation.

"Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt.28:19-20).

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:38).

4. Provide a place for those whom the Father calls during the gospel age of salvation (Jn.6:44) to grow in grace and knowledge (2.Pet.3:18) and to learn and perfect godly ways in their lives so they will be able to fulfill the purpose for which they were called (Rev.5:10).

God's People Understand the Plan of Salvation

God the Father has a plan by which humans can be born into his spiritual family. This plan involves repentance, the forgiveness of sin, water baptism, and full redemption and salvation. Only people whom the Father adopts into his royal family and holy nation during the gospel age of salvation truly understand his plan for the salvation for humanity. See Mk.4:10-12; 1.Cor.2:1-8.

The apostle John wrote, *"Beloved, now we are the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is"* (1.Jn.3:2). See also Rom.6:1-5; Phil.3:21; Rev.21:6-7.

SUMMARY

There are only two religions on earth: 1.) The Sovereign God's worship system which is administered by his Son Jesus Christ and leads people who practice it to eternal life; 2.) Satan's counterfeits of the Sovereign's worship system which leads people to the irrevocable termination of their life in the Lake of Fire. Therefore, the two following questions and their answers are extremely important to anyone whom God the Father is calling to salvation during this age:

- Does it really matter what one believes about God and the Bible?
- Does it really matter which Christian organization or congregational association one attends?

If there is no God, and the Bible is not his word, it does not matter what a person believes about God and the Bible or with whom one associates to worship God. If there is no Sovereign God to whom one is accountable, why waste one's time and effort with religion? The problem with believing that there is no God is the fact that there is abundant proof that God the Father and Jesus Christ do exist and that the Bible is their word and instruction manual to the human race.

If one is truly seeking to be in harmony with the Sovereign of all that exists and wants to be given eternal life by him, one should be extremely concerned that one's life measures up to his expectations.

God's True Church Does Exist

The Sovereign God's worship system and the spiritual organism (his adopted sons—the church) which his Son rules has existed from the day he established it through his Son and his holy spirit in 30 A.D.. His body of true believers have endured the test of persecution, martyrdom, and time and this body still exists today as a spiritual organism wherever members of his royal family and holy nation worship and serve him and his Son (Matt.16:18; 18:20).

The true Church of God is a single spiritual organism consisting of people who worship and serve the Father and his Son as instructed by Jesus Christ and the apostles:

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"
(Eph.4:4-6).

Somewhere on earth there are people who truly worship and serve the Sovereign Father and his Son, either individually or as a collective group. God's church does exist. It is here on this earth right now! It is doing the same work Jesus commissioned it to accomplish, and it has the same spirit, attitude, goals, and objectives as the early apostles and the church that they ruled and served. If a person is going to find the true church, they will have to look outside this world's religions and look into the Bible for its description, doctrines, and policies, because one will not find God's true church among the popular religions of today. The reason is that the true church that Christ built is not a part of this world.

Where is the true Church today?

The true church is a spiritual organism and it is wherever you find an individual or a group of people believing, teaching, and practicing the same worship system that the early church believed in, taught, and practiced.

The prophesied disappearance of the apostolic church happened right on schedule and the events prophesied to occur during the end of this age concerning the Father's children as they witness and warn of the return of Christ will occur.

By B. L. Cocherell

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CHAPTER
TWENTY-SIX
EPILOGUE

If you are reading this after reading and studying what has been presented in this book, you have discovered that much of what is taught as biblical truth by most of professing Christianity is not truth, but many times contains half-truths, gross error, and in some cases outright lies. So, what does this mean to you? It means that you now know the identity of the Sovereign God and the Savior of mankind and much about what is expected of you, if you are to be granted eternal salvation.

AMAZING TRUTHS

There are some amazing truths in the pages of the Bible that have not been taught in their entirety for many centuries. These truths are about an opportunity that has mostly been hidden from humanity since the demise and disappearance of the early church. Today, just before Christ returns to establish his Father's government on earth, the Father's truth about his good news message and his way of truth taught by the prophets, the psalmists, Christ, the apostles, and the early church is again being taught by those who are his ambassadors on earth.

In the timelessness of eternity, a plan unfolded that is more fascinating and engrossing than any science fiction story or real life saga that has ever been told. This plan involves every person who has lived, is now living, or is yet to be born.

The following scripture is often quoted; however, most who hear it do not truly understand the awesome message from the Sovereign God contained in these few words. This little understood message to mankind is about the awesome future in store for anyone who will heed the instructions contained in the good news message sent from the Sovereign God through his firstborn:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (Jn.3:16-17 KJV).

With the creation of humans, the Sovereign God embarked upon the greatest and grandest of all his creations; he is creating beings just like himself through a process that is carefully detailed throughout the Bible and which requires an individual to learn and practice his laws, precepts, and principles during their physical existence. It is the Sovereign God's intent to share all he has created or will ever create throughout eternity with those individuals who have shown their willingness to live in harmony with him and his firstborn the Savior of mankind.

To Become an Immortal

God the Father offers much more than eternal life to those he calls to salvation in this age. The angels have eternal life and are sustained by God's life-giving power, yet they can be destroyed if they disobey him. The life God offers to the elect during this gospel age of salvation is immortal life, which can never be destroyed.

The quality of life promised by God the Father is comparable to that which he himself has. God is a spirit-being who inherently possesses the highest form of life: immortality on the divine plane of existence. Immortal life springs forth from itself and is not dependent on any other source to sustain it, because it is self-sustaining.

It is abundantly clear from studying the Bible that God the Father intends to share immortality with those he calls to repentance, baptism, and conversion prior to the first resurrection. It is the acquisition of immortality that allows a person to pass beyond this physical existence into the Family of God as a son of God.

THE LIGHT

Jesus said: *"I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"* (Jn.8:12 KJV). See also Isa.42:1-7; Mal.4:2; Acts 26:13-18.

Although the Jews of Jesus' day were extremely religious and zealous in what they believed, they were not correctly worshiping the true God. They were in fact in spiritual darkness and had departed far from the teachings of Moses and the Prophets. Jesus said of these people:

"Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophecy about you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips honor me; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the ordinances of men" (Matt.15:7-9 KJV Para.). See Isa.29:13; Ezk.33:31-32.

The spiritual leaders of the Jews had perverted God's truth, just as many who profess to follow Christ and the teachings of the Bible have done in this age. Although the Bible is the most published and most read book in the world and has been translated into almost every language and distributed to billions of people, few people understand this book or its primary message.

In the pages of this book I have shown that there is a tremendous difference between what the Bible actually records as truth and what the vast majority of professing Christianity believe and teach as truth. Few understand the awesome truth contained within the biblical record. However, you do not have to be one who does not understand what is and is not biblical truth, that is, if you are willing to challenge what is popularly taught about the Bible and put in the time and effort to study the Bible for yourself.

The simple fact is that many people would like to know what the Bible actually says, but the vast majority are too lazy to study the Bible for themselves and would rather have someone else tell them what they should believe the Bible says. Therefore, it is the few who comprehend the awesome opportunity of eternal and immortal life that is offered through the pages of the Bible.

Jesus said, *"If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (Jn.8:31-32 KJV).

The question is, Of what will the truth that Jesus spoke make a person free? The prophets, the psalmist, Jesus, and the apostles all spoke of God's truth as something to be sought after and cherished, because this truth held within it the secret to eternal freedom from death.

The Sovereign God of the Bible promises eternal and immortal life and rewards beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend to individuals who value his empirical and eternal spiritual truths and make these truths a permanent part of their attitude and behavior.

Although this is the promise, many who profess to follow the teachings of the Bible believe the application of truth is subjective and that truth itself changes from generation to generation and from situation to situation. However, this belief is erroneous, because spiritual truth is not subject to personal interpretation, spiritual truth remains the same forever according to the Psalmist:

"The works of his hands are trustworthy and favorable; all his mandates are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and equity" (Psa.111:7-8 Para.).

Truth is always truth no matter who says it or how it is said. And according to the biblical text, only those who align themselves with the Sovereign God's truth and way or truth will be granted eternal and immortal life in his heavenly Family and Kingdom.

The Bible is very clear concerning what a true follower of Sovereign Father and his firstborn son should do in order to please them. A true follower must love God the Father and his son, and love and practice his truth and way of truth. As simple as this seems, most people refuse to do this.

A Deadly Mistake

A deadly mistake in regard to what is written in the Bible is being made by many people who believe that the Bible is not to be viewed in a literal sense and that the biblical text is only philosophical in nature and open to private interpretation.

Of the tens of thousands of professing Christian denominations in existence today, the vast majority teach against obedience to biblical law and do not understand that biblical law is not an arbitrary set of rules and instructions, these laws were designed so that individuals and nations can derive the maximum benefits out of living a physical life. These laws also reveal information that if truly learned, understood, and practiced will guarantee one's entry into the Family and Kingdom of God as a spirit-being, so that one can live a happy, prosperous, and productive life for eternity. However, the rejection and violation of these laws and their underlying concepts and principles will result in the second death from which there is no return.

It is a fact that biblical truth has been perverted and counterfeited over the centuries. It is also a fact that biblical truth is seldom taught today; therefore, the vast majority of people who profess to believe in the Bible do not understand that the Sovereign God and his son the Messiah, have carefully formulated a plan for the salvation of humanity in an effort to expand the God Family. Moreover, few understand that it is mandatory for each person who is given an opportunity of eternal salvation to carefully conform to the method by which they may obtain this salvation.

Because most people believe what they want to believe or what they are told to believe, rather than searching the scriptures and believing God's truth as they should, the following prophecy has been fulfilled for centuries:

"Because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And because of this, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but take pleasure in unrighteousness" (2.Thes.2:10-12 Para.). See also Hos.4:6.

The Sovereign Father and his son, the Messiah are extremely serious about our salvation. The calling of individuals to salvation is not a game to be taken lightly—it is a life or death matter. No one who is unwilling to obey God's rules of conduct will enter his eternal habitation. For those who obey, there is salvation and eternal life; not salvation through works, but salvation through Christ. For those who do not obey, there is death and dishonor.

God will not be mocked. Those who believe that they can worship and serve the Sovereign Father and his son as they choose should remember that the writer to the Hebrews said that Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. See Heb.1:12; 13:8.

Jesus said, *"I will build my church."* He did build it; however, he did not build or sanction the tens of thousands of competing denominations and their conflicting teachings that claim to follow him. Notice what the apostle Paul wrote concerning the spiritual organism Jesus built:

"There is one body, and one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one Faith, one baptism, One God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph.4:4-6).

For some inexplicable reason people seem to think they can worship and serve the Sovereign God and their Savior in any way they choose. However, this belief is in clear opposition to the teaching of the Savior of humanity:

"You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and honors me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But IN VAIN they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt.15:7-9).

SUMMATION

In the pages of this book I have documented a few of the many gross errors and teachings of the Synagogue of Satan and Doctrines of Demons which are pervasive throughout the professing Christian community and I have shown that there is much more truth contained in the biblical record about eternal salvation than is currently being taught.

I sincerely hope that you have found the topics and other information found in this book both enlightening and beneficial and worthy of further study.

Sincerely,

B. L. Cocherell

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MISSION STATEMENT

We sincerely hope that you have found these topical studies into the Bible intellectually challenging, spiritually enlightening, and beneficial.

For those wondering who authored this study, what the study's purpose is, or how to participate in this educational program, the following brief summary will give some insight into who we are and what we are trying to accomplish.

This Work

This work is a non-profit volunteer effort, there are no salaried writers, employees, or staff. The volunteers are engaged in an ongoing effort to discover, research, understand, and publish foundational truths that have been hidden in the Bible for centuries. We believe that, when these foundational truths are correctly understood and practiced, they will bring people happy, abundant, and productive lives with the promise of eternal life after physical death.

Our Goals

Our primary goal is to share our knowledge and understanding of the Sovereign God's plan and purpose for humanity with those who are interested in living according to his law, and not by the dictates and traditions of men. Our secondary goal is to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God as a warning and a witness to humanity before the Messiah returns to rule the earth.

If You Want To Know More

If you want to know more about us, the work we are doing, or how you can participate in our biblically based educational and research projects, contact us at: www.BibleResearch.org or www.Bible-Prophecy.net

OTHER BOOKS BY B.L. COCHERELL

WHO IS GOD?

WHAT IS THE BIBLE AND ITS MESSAGE?

The identity of God is one of the greatest mysteries of the entire Bible. Without understanding who God is, it is impossible to understand the biblical record, the reason humans exist on earth, and the message that Jesus brought about how to enter the Kingdom of God as an immortal spirit-being.

People all over the world are searching for a way to live longer, healthier, and happier lives. The biblical record reveals that the purpose for your existence is to give you an opportunity to live forever in a place where no evil exists and where you will have a wonderful life filled with all that is good and enjoyable. This is the good news message that Jesus Christ brought from the Sovereign God.

This book reveals the true identity of the Sovereign God, the Creator God, and Jesus Christ. Additionally, this book unlocks many of the Bible's mysteries and secrets which explain God's awesome and wonderful plan for humanity.

BIBLICAL PROPHECIES PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The Bible is full of prophecies which speak of unimaginable pain and suffering which Jesus Christ says he is going to pour out on humanity and many of the Father's elect children before he returns to establish the government of God on earth. But, why would the loving God who gave his life for humanity as the Messiah want to inflict the kind of pain, agony, and terror spoken of throughout the Bible as '*The Wrath of God*'?

If the wrath of God is inevitable, when will it come and what does God hope to accomplish through it? These and many other questions are answered in this in-depth study about the major events which will precede and be a part of the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

This book also identifies several political alliances, people, and spirit-beings and their involvement before and during the fulfillment of the prophetic events at the end of this age.

THE GIFT OF IMMORTALITY

The magnitude of the opportunities and rewards that the Sovereign God offers to those he calls to salvation through repentance, baptism, and conversion is almost beyond comprehension; nevertheless, what is offered can be obtained by those who are willing to become obedient to his way of life.

This book answers many questions about how to enter the Sovereign God's family and kingdom as an immortal spirit-being and what he expects of his children while they live in human form.

HUMAN LIFE DEATH AND BEYOND

Is death the end of human existence? According to the Bible, the answer is No! There are several major resurrections of the dead to physical life noted in the Bible in which an individual's eternal destiny is determined.

This book explains the four major resurrections mentioned in the Bible, who will be in each resurrection, and when each one will occur. This book answers many questions about heaven, hell, the state of the dead, immortality, predestination, reincarnation, and much more.

THE COMMANDED OBSERVANCES AND HOLY CONVOCATIONS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Throughout human history, anyone who wanted to worship the true God had to do so within the boundaries of strict rules that were set forth by God. The foundational elements of this worship system are shown through the sacrificial system and the commanded observances and holy convocations.

This two volume study answers many questions about the Sovereign God's plan for humanity, explains many of the literal and prophetic meanings of the various observances and convocations, and reveals a new dimension of understanding into God's plan for the salvation of humanity—past, present, and future—that has been hidden for many centuries.

SURVIVE AND THRIVE AS A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

During the centuries that followed the demise of the early church, those who clung to the basic truths of God also accepted much error and made many departures from the truth once delivered. Along with this departure from truth, much knowledge and understanding about spiritual leadership, congregational organization and government, and problem solving within the body of believers was lost.

This book contains studies that should give any serious student of the Bible enough knowledge to understand who the spiritual leaders of the church are and are not, the organizational and governmental structure of the early church, and what one's attitude, behavior, and responsibility should be pertaining to the organizational and governmental structure of the church and those who govern and serve the elect of God through it.

BIBLICAL LAW PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Throughout much of Christian history there has been much confusion and misunderstanding as to what constitutes God's law and whether or not any or all of it applies to Christians today. This study gives some unique insights into the Sovereign God's purpose for humanity and shows how the first humans came under the authority of God's law, how the law applies to Christians today, how it will apply to humans after Christ returns, and how to have a harmonious relationship with the Sovereign God and Jesus Christ through the practice of God's law.

This book gives logical, concise, and meaningful answers to many questions about God's law and its application today.

OUR PLACE IN THE SPIRIT REALM GODS ANGELS DEMONS

The spirit realm and the beings who inhabit it and interact with this physical realm are a reality which should not be casually dismissed as being unimportant to one's daily life.

The Bible contains much information that true Christians need to know about the Sovereign God, the Creator God, Jesus Christ, and other spirit-beings.

This book is a serious discussion about the reality of spirit-beings, the tremendous positive impact that some of these beings have had, are having, and will have in the future on mankind and the serious danger posed by some spirit-beings as they interact with humans and this physical dimension of time and space.

BOOK ORDERS AND DONATION INFORMATION

5½" x 8½" soft cover copies of each book noted in the above list may be ordered from www.BibleResearch.org or www.Bible-Prophecy.net. Copies of each book and the topical studies contained in each book may be download free of charge from the websites noted. This book or the ones noted in the above list can be ordered from the printer for mass distribution at cost plus shipping and handling.

Donations are gladly accepted to help defray the cost of our publishing, shipping, and the maintenance of our websites.