BIBLICAL LAW PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

By
B. L. Cocherell
Contributors
V. O. Jones
C. E. Barrett
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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INTRODUCTION

It was not until after Adam and Eve were evicted from the garden after eating the forbidden fruit and becoming aware of the difference between good and evil, that the Creator instructed them in laws which were to govern human attitudes and behavior.

The Creator promised that, if the laws he established were practiced, the result would be a happy, prosperous, and productive physical life with the promise of eternal and immortal life in the Family and Kingdom of God. But, if these laws were ignored and violated, the result would be all kinds of unpleasantness and eventually a death from which there is no return.

The laws given to Adam and Eve, the Patriarchs, and ancient Israel, and then elevated to a higher status by Christ and explained by him and the apostles are perfect. This body of law contains precepts, principles, and value judgments which are empirical and do not depend on human validation for them to function.

Many people who seek to practice God's law not only have great difficulty in understanding basic concepts and principles of specific laws but also struggle with how to apply them. To compound the problem, the laws were written concisely with little or no explanation as to their application and recorded in the ancient Hebrew language without sentences, punctuation, or vowels, which brings into question the meaning of many words and phrases when attempting to decipher the original text.

Additionally, many centuries have passed since these laws were recorded and there is very little recorded history about their application during the early centuries after they were codified.

Without the oral law, most of God's laws which were codified by Moses could not have been implemented, applied, or practiced by national Israel with any degree of continuity. Moreover, without the stability of the oral law to guide the nation through the centuries, the interpretation and application of the written law would have fluctuated as each new generation attempted to interpret each law to fit their particular circumstances.

Although some of the original oral law has been adapted through the centuries to fit new circumstances, the oral law as originally handed down is basically intact.

There is no dispute among historians that the early church closely followed the same worship system the Jews followed and that they conducted their lives in compliance with most of the laws given to ancient Israel.
However, as the centuries passed and many of the teachings of the early church faded and disappeared, there arose many differences of opinion among those whom the Father called to worship and serve him about what is expected of them in regard to his laws, precepts, and principles.

Today, there is much controversy and confusion over how to worship and serve the Sovereign Father and Christ and how to live a holy lifestyle; therefore, many of the elect resort to emotion to determine their individual beliefs on each law.

Because we are many centuries removed from the fount of knowledge which flowed within ancient Israel and because there is no consensus of opinion among Hebrew scholars past or present as to how to apply and practice much of God's law, it is impossible to give an adequate explanation of the 613 plus laws recorded in the biblical record in one book, even if each law were completely understood and could be explained.

The laws discussed in the chapters of this book are obviously not all 613 given to ancient Israel or all the new laws instituted by Christ and the apostles. However, the laws which are discussed are important for this age and show the logic contained in God's law and the physical and eternal benefits which can be derived from their practice.

Hopefully, you will find the information in this book interesting, enlightening, and physically and spiritually beneficial.

Sincerely,

B.L. Cocherell

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MAINTAINING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The reason for the existence of humans is almost beyond belief. The Sovereign God who sent the Creator God to earth over nineteen hundred years ago to become the Messiah, is in the process of expanding his family:

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, . . ." (Jn.1:12 KJV).

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. 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.3:1-2 KJV). See also 2.Cor.6:18; Rom.8:14,19.

Through his human creation, the Sovereign God begun the greatest and grandest of all his creations; he is creating beings just like himself (Phil.3:21; 1.Jn.3:2) and he intends to share all he has created and all that he is yet to create throughout eternity with them.

Why Maintain a Good Relationship?

There would be no reason to strive to obey and practice God's law in order to maintain a good relationship with him unless there were benefits to be derived from this relationship. However, there are awesome eternal benefits that are offered through a good relationship with the Sovereign God (God the Father) and the Creator God (Jesus Christ).

"But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God [the Father] has prepared for them that love him" (1.Cor.2:9 KJV).

The biblical record clearly shows that individuals who will not put forth a sincere and diligent effort to maintain a harmonious relationship with God the Father will not benefit from a father-son relationship with him in the present or in the future. Therefore, it is extremely important to know and understand how to establish and maintain a proper relationship with him and his firstborn son.

Because of the extreme importance of a harmonious relationship between God the Father and humanity, the Sovereign God and the Creator God, designed a system that would allow such a relationship to be established and maintained.
In the following pages we will review some of the early agreements between the Creator God and people in order to provide insight into how to establish and maintain a good relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ during the gospel age of salvation.

Did God Have a Plan?

Some people who study the Bible believe that God did not fully understand the potential for evil and rebellion that was inherent within the human creation. And that, when the first humans disobeyed the instructions he gave them in the garden of Eden, he hastily developed a plan to save them from their destructive nature. Then, when the nation of Israel rebelled at Mount Sinai, God again developed a new plan that included many new rules and regulations. Moreover, when this plan failed, he discarded it for yet another plan. But this belief is very far from the truth.

Before humans were created, the potential of humans was well understood. The Supreme Sovereign God (God the Father) and the Creator God (Jesus Christ) knew that humans had the potential to become rebellious.

They also knew that some people would want to have a good relationship with them and accept the awesome opportunity for immortality and eternal life that would be offered to them.

Therefore, before the creation of humans, the Sovereign God and the Creator God had already formulated a complete plan for the salvation of humanity. From what is revealed about this plan, it is obvious that all factors were considered and all contingency plans were well thought out and in place before the creation of the earth and humanity. See Heb.4:3; 1.Pet.1:18-20; Rev.13:8; 17:8.

From Genesis to Revelation

The desire of both God the Father and the Creator God to dwell with their human creation and have a close relationship with them is well documented in the biblical record.

One of the very first things that we learn from the first four chapters of the Genesis account of early humanity is that the Creator God wanted to have a close relationship with them from the very beginning. And at the end of the Book of Revelation, we see this same desire stated in the prophecy of the coming of the Father to dwell on the earth.

Revelation 21:3-7 Paraphrased

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the lodging of God is with men! And he will reside with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them, as their God" (v3).
After this announcement is made, God the Father will come to dwell on earth with his children. What follows is a prophetic promise from him to his faithful children who have shown by their lives that they love him and want with all of their being to dwell with him forever:

"And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (v4).

Only after humans have advanced beyond this physical existence and into the spirit realm can these conditions exist. Why will there no longer be tears, sorrow, pain, or death? None of these things will exist, because the things that were a part of the human experience will no longer exist.

"And the One sitting on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new... To the one thirsting, I will freely give of the fountain of the water of life. The one overcoming will inherit all things, and I will be God to him, and he will be the son to me" (vs.5-7).

This prophecy shows that the Sovereign God's desire to have an ongoing relationship with those who want to have a relationship with him has not changed from the beginning of humanity.

FROM THE BEGINNING

In the beginning, the Creator God (the God who became Jesus Christ) could walk and talk with the first two humans, because they were free from sin and lived in a state of purity within the garden that he had prepared for them. All of this changed when they disobeyed his instructions to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Because of their disobedience, God instituted the next phase of his plan that provided a way for humanity to have their violation of his law (i.e., sin) temporarily set aside and their physical impurity purged from them so that he and they could fellowship together. See Gen.4:3-4.

This basic plan that allowed people to maintain a good relationship with their Creator has not changed from the time that it was instituted with Adam and Eve. At the time of the first agreement with the nation of Israel, the Creator God required the same basic method of atonement for a violation of God's law and the purging away of physical defilement as he always had. The only difference was that the first agreement with national Israel required that atonement be administered in a formal way from a place of God's choosing and through an attending priesthood.

A change in the administration of the sacrificial system was made necessary because God was going to dwell with the nation of Israel during this next phase of his plan for the salvation of humanity:

"And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex.25:8 KJV). See also Deut.23:10-14.
The Creator wanted to dwell among the Israelites for the same reason that he wanted to have a close relationship with Adam and Eve, which was to teach them how to obtain eternal life in the Kingdom and Family of God.

From the time of the rebellion of the first humans and the institution of the sacrificial system, there has only been one method by which a person could establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with God. This method did not change with the advent of the Messiah and the cancellation of the first agreement with national Israel, it did not change with the agreement that God the Father makes with those who accept his offer of salvation during the gospel age, and it will not change after Christ returns to rule the world from Jerusalem.

The basic method by which a person establishes and maintains a harmonious relationship with God has always been the same; it is just the method of administration that has changed throughout the centuries, in order to facilitate God's plan for the salvation of different people during different times and circumstances.

**The Foundational Elements**

It is evident that both the Sovereign God and the Creator God desire to have a harmonious relationship with humans in order to accomplish their goal of expanding the God Family.

Once a person is given an opportunity for a personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ then repents, is baptized, and receives the indwelling of the holy spirit there are several things that must be done in order to maintain this personal relationship and be assured that one will successfully obtain eternal life.

Just as the question of eternal life is on the minds of people today, it was on the minds of people during Jesus' day:

"And, behold, one came and said to him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said to him, Why call you 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 man to keep the Commandments? The answer is simple—the man had a choice. He could either obey God's law and gain eternal life or he could disobey and pay the penalty for disobedience (Rom.6:23).

"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. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev.22:12-14 KJV).
A lawyer asked Jesus the following question about God's law. The answer he received shows the two primary attitudes and behaviors that a person must have in order to have and maintain a good relationship with their heavenly Father:

"Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus answered him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your life, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is similar to the first. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt.22:36-40 Para.).

The English words commandment(s) in Matthew, chapters 19 and 22, are translated from the Greek word entole which basically means an authoritative prescription (i.e., God's laws, precepts, and principles).

What Jesus said about practicing God's law and the results from its practice was nothing new. After Moses had repeated the major points of the law of the covenant to Israel he said:

"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" (Deut.30:15-16 KJV).

"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 on 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. 30:17-19 KJV).

In relation to the obedience and the practice of God's law, nothing has changed. During this gospel age of salvation, a faithful and diligent obedience and practice of God's law will result in blessings and eternal life, but disobedience will bring curses and death.

The first thing that is necessary if you desire to have a good relationship with God the Father is to love him with all your being. This kind of love will be manifested in your desire and effort to fellowship with him and to please him through the obedience and practice of his law and the pursuit of his will in your life.

The second thing that is necessary is to understand that the Father loves all people and wants everyone to obtain salvation and become a part of his family. Because this is his goal, anyone who loves the Father must also have love and concern for other people.
Listed below are other foundational attitudes, behaviors, and other things that have always been required of people in order for them to show that they are serious about their desire to build and maintain a close personal relationship with God:

- Acknowledge God as Sovereign over one's life.
- Seek to please God through one's thoughts and behavior.
- Learn and study God's laws and way of life in order to come into compliance with them.
- Fellowship with God through prayer, observance of his law, and one's lifestyle.
- Repent of any violation of his law.
- Ask for forgiveness of any violation of his laws, precepts, and principles.
- Apply the proper sacrifice for the atonement of sin.

**Faith In God**

In the Book of Hebrews, chapter 11, there is a long list of individuals who have received God's approval through the application of faith in his promises and way of life. See Heb.11:1-40.

> "And these all, having received a witness 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 Para.).

These people all had a good relationship with God through faith. But, how did they accomplish this?

Abel had faith that the sacrifices he offered would set his sins aside and keep him in a harmonious relationship with God. Abel understood that the sacrifices were symbolic of the Messiah and he looked forward to the time when the Messiah would come to provide the perfect sacrifice, which would forgive sin and remove its penalty.

It was Abel's faith in God's sacrificial system and his obedience to God's laws that caused him to be listed in Hebrews, chapter 11, as one of those who will be made perfect along with God the Father's elect children who are the first to live under a new and better agreement than the one made with national Israel.

When an in-depth study is made of the sacrificial system, it becomes obvious that the individuals—from Adam to Christ—who had faith in God's promises and followed his instructions pertaining to his sacrificial system and his law have secured eternal life just like the Father's elect during the gospel age of salvation.

These individuals had absolute faith that God would set their sins aside and remove them forever when the Messiah would come to present himself as the supreme sacrifice.
ANCIENT ISRAEL

Under the first agreement with national Israel, the Creator required a priesthood to administer the sacrificial system in order to accomplish the atonement for spiritual sin and purge away the people's physical defilement. This was required; so that, he could dwell among them and teach them the ways, that lead to immortal and eternal life in the Kingdom and Family of God:

"The priest was a man whose function was to build a bridge between men and God by means of the sacrificial system. If a man broke the law, his fellowship with God was interrupted and his access to God was barred. By the offering of the correct sacrifice, that breach of the law was atoned for, and so the fellowship was restored and the barrier removed" (Commentary on Hebrews, by William Barclay, page 66).

The Blood of Atonement

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you on the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes an atonement for your soul" (Lev.17:11 KJV).

At the institution of the first agreement with national Israel, the people accepted the laws of God as the condition of their special relationship with him. A sacrifice was made, and Moses took half of the blood from the sacrifice, put it in basins, and threw half of it against the altar. After the book of the law had been read and the people had signified their acceptance of it, Moses took the blood from the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the people and declared that the covenant had been sealed and ratified:

"Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words" (Ex.24:8 KJV).

No ratification of any agreement or reconciliation can occur between God and people without the shedding of blood, because life is in the blood and life is the most precious possession of any living creature. Therefore, the giving of a life emphasizes the seriousness of making and maintaining an agreement with God.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood. . ." (Lev.17:11). "For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof. . ." (Lev. 17:14).

In order for a person to atone for sin and maintain a harmonious relationship with God before the advent of Jesus Christ, the sacrificial law required that, when a person violated God's law, a specific offering must be made for that particular violation:
"Sin offerings are required in the following cases: If someone is officially summoned to give evidence in court and does not give information about something he has seen or heard, he must suffer the consequences. When a person is guilty, he must confess the sin. In this way the priest shall offer the sacrifice for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven . . ." (Lev.5:1,5,13 GNB).

When a person was guilty of sin, a confession must be made and the proper sacrifice brought to the place of sacrifice. Then, the priest would offer the sacrifice and the sin would be atoned for, but not forgiven.

The Setting Aside of Sin

Under the first agreement with national Israel, a sinner could have sin atoned for through the sacrificial system. When a person acknowledged and repented of sin and offered the proper sacrifice, the sin was set aside and temporarily hidden from God's sight, and the person was placed back into right-standing with God.

Total Forgiveness

1. Before the advent of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, was there a method or process whereby individuals could have their sins forgiven?
2. Could sins be forgiven through animal sacrifices?

The answer to both questions is No. Before the advent of Jesus Christ, there was no method or process by which sin could be totally forgiven. No amount of animal sacrifices could bring the forgiveness of sin or remove its penalty. However, the sacrifices did provide for the setting aside of sins, which allowed people to maintain a good relationship with God.

Sins Set Aside, Not Forgiven

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb.10:1-4 KJV).

The sins of Israel were brought to remembrance every year on the Day of Atonement because these sins were neither forgiven nor forgotten. The reason they could not be forgiven or forgotten was that the sacrifices were not perfect; they had no power to forgive sins. Therefore, the record of sins still existed, and the people were still guilty of their sins.
Once a year on the Day of Atonement, all accumulated sin (physical/ceremonial defilement and spiritual/moral sin) of every individual was atoned for; it was either purged away or set aside. However, the sins were not forgiven. The punishment for these sins had not been exacted. The penalty had not been paid, and each individual was still guilty before God. Therefore, the next year on the Day of Atonement these same sins and any sins committed during the previous year would be remembered and would have to be atoned for by the blood of bulls and goats. And these sins would again be symbolically sent away from the nation of Israel for another year.

The atonement process had to be repeated over and over in order for the Israelites to maintain a harmonious relationship with God under the terms and conditions of the first agreement with ancient Israel. Only the life of the lawbreaker could pay the penalty for personal sin. Animal life was only a substitute payment for sin until payment could be made by the lawbreaker.

The sacrificial animals only provided a temporary substitute for the life of those guilty of sin; so that, they could continue to fellowship with God, learn his way of life, and receive the other benefits of having his presence dwell among them.

The sacrifices for sin under the sacrificial system did accomplish the purpose of placing individuals and the nation into harmony with the Creator God; so, that he could dwell among them and commune with them. However, there was no forgiveness for the violation of God's law or its penalty through the sacrifice of animals.

**THE GOSPEL AGE**

During the gospel age of salvation, God the Father has provided a much simpler and easier method by which his people can maintain a good relationship with him.

- Individuals who have an agreement with God the Father can have their sins totally forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- Individuals can communicate with their heavenly Father through the authority of Jesus Christ who is their High Priest and who sits at the Father's right hand and intercedes on their behalf.

"And every priest stands daily ministering and offering many times the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb.10:11-12 KJV). See Matt.26:27-28; Acts 2:38; Rom.3:23-25.

It is through Jesus Christ's perfect sacrifice and priesthood that the elect have access to the Father and are able to establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with him. And it is because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ that the elect are able to stand before the Father in a pure and sinless condition.
Under the agreement with the Patriarchs and ancient Israel, sins were only set aside and covered from God's view after repentance and the offering of the proper sacrifice. However, under the new agreement, the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ has the power to forgive sin and remove its record and penalty forever. Never again will it be necessary for anyone to offer an animal sacrifice for the purpose of having a violation of God's law set aside and covered from the Father's view. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, all sin can be forgiven and forgotten forever.

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col.2:14-15).

"Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom.3:25 KJV).

Notice Paul's statement: "for the remission of sins that are past." Some references define this statement as "passing over of sins done in the past" (i.e., sins committed since the time of Adam).

The following explanation of Paul's statement is from William Barclay's "Commentary on Hebrews":

"It is through him [Christ] that there emerges a new covenant between God and man; and the purpose behind this new covenant is that those who have been called might receive the eternal inheritance which has been promised to them; but this could happen only after a death had taken place, the purpose of which was to rescue them from the consequence of the transgressions which had been committed under the conditions of the old covenant.

"For where there is a will, it is necessary that there should be evidence of the death of the testator before the will is valid. It is in the case of dead people that a will is confirmed, since surely it cannot be operative when the testator is still alive.

"That is why even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For, after every commandment which the law lays down had been announced by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, together with water and scarlet and hyssop, and sprinkled the book itself and all the people. And as he did so, he said: 'This is the blood of the covenant whose conditions God commanded you to observe.'

"In like manner he sprinkled with blood the tabernacle also and all the instruments used in its worship. Under the conditions which the law lays down, it is true to say that almost everything is cleansed by blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.
"As we have seen, the idea of the covenant is basic to the thought of the writer, by which he meant a relationship between God and man. The first covenant was dependent on man's keeping of the law; as soon as he broke the law the covenant became ineffective. . ."

"Therefore, the basic meaning of the new covenant, which Jesus inaugurated, is that men should have access to God or, to put it another way, have fellowship with him."

"So the writer to the Hebrews has a tremendous thought and says that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is retroactive. That is to say, it is effective to wipe out the sins of men committed under the old covenant and to inaugurate the fellowship promised under the new" (Commentary on Hebrews, p.105-106).

All this seems very complicated, but at its roots there are two great eternal truths:

- It is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that violations of God's law are forgiven and forgotten forever.
- It is through the sacrifice of Jesus that a person may have fellowship with God the Father.

It is because of the better terms and conditions of the new agreement, which was instituted by Jesus Christ, that a person can now maintain a good relationship with God the Father and be assured that, when they ask forgiveness for their sins, these sins and the penalties for these sins will vanish as if they had never existed.

**A Perfect High Priest**

"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. 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 spok of 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" (Heb.7:11-16 KJV).

"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 vail, that is to say, his flesh; And having a high priest over the house of God" (Heb.10:19-21 KJV).
Under the first agreement with national Israel, the High Priest was to act as a bridge between God and his people. Because the High Priest himself was under the death penalty, he was also in need of a perfect sacrifice to be offered for his sins in order to have these sins forgiven and their penalty removed. Moreover, because the High Priest of Israel was not perfect, he and those he represented could never pass beyond the Creator God and into the presence of God the Father. But why not? The reason is that the Father dwells in heaven, and anyone who is allowed to come into his presence must be totally sinless, holy, and righteous. No human qualified or had the authority to go before him prior to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, because every human was under the death penalty for the violation of God's law before the advent of Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews shows a change in the conditions of the original agreement with Israel; this change allows the elect to go directly before God the Father without going to a physical priest. Under the first agreement with Israel the physical priest would speak to God on their behalf, but today this is not necessary.

A Spiritual High Priest

Jesus Christ is now the High Priest who sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. And because of Christ's sacrifice and the new agreement, there is a new and life-giving way opened for the Father's earthly children to go into his presence:

"But now has he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant [agreement], which was established on better promises" (Heb.8:6 KJV).

Through his sacrifice, Jesus Christ has become the immortal High Priest and the mediator of a new and better agreement that is built on new and better promises from God the Father. And since Jesus Christ became the perfect sacrifice, there is no longer a need for animal sacrifices to be made to atone for violations of God's law.

HOLINESS

Physical Defilement

Before the advent of the Messiah, when people became physically defiled, the only way they could be restored to a condition of purity (holiness) was through the sacrificial system. See Lev.chps.8-16.

This same situation still exists during the gospel age of salvation; however, a person who has an eternal agreement with God the Father is in a continual state of purity (holiness) through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Moreover, this person does not need to offer an animal sacrifice to remove physical defilement.
Spiritual Defilement

Another point to be aware of is that, before the advent of the Messiah, a person who committed a spiritual sin was considered spiritually defiled (impure and unholy) before God. Again, the only way to restore a person to a condition of spiritual purity was to offer the proper animal sacrifice. Today, anyone who has an eternal agreement with the Father is in a continual state of spiritual purity (holiness) through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and they do not need to offer an animal sacrifice to remove spiritual defilement.

The Perfect Sacrifice

Although a person could obtain a state of physical and spiritual purity (holiness) before the advent of the Messiah, this condition could not be maintained because there was no perfect sacrifice that could totally eliminate physical and spiritual defilement.

Then and today, the sacrifice of one's personal life in order to become holy is not possible because no human is without sin; however, a substitute sacrifice that is holy and perfect in every way (sinless) may atone for the life of the sinner. Through this kind of substitution, a person's life can be redeemed and given back to them. Although animal life is without sin, animals are neither perfect spiritually or of the same value as human life. Therefore, it is only God himself who can be this substitute sacrifice, which is what the Creator God actually became as the Messiah.

It is only through the sacrificial blood of the Creator God (Jesus Christ) that any human can be placed back into or maintain a good relationship with God the Father. The sins of a person who is under the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ are considered to be non-existent as long as one's attitude is correct in seeking to please God. When sin is brought to the consciousness of a person under the blood of Christ, the only thing that this person must do in order to eliminate this record of sin is to repent of the sin, acknowledge it to the Father, and ask for his forgiveness through the authority of Jesus Christ. When this is done the sin is wiped from the person's record and vanishes as if it had never existed:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things become new. And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their Tres-passes to them; and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2.Cor.5:17-19 KJV).
It is obvious from the Bible that God the Father's earthly children are made and kept holy through the blood of Christ's perfect sacrifice, just as the people who lived before the advent of the Messiah were made and kept holy by the blood of sacrificial animals. It is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we are declared holy in the Father's eyes and can remain in a condition of holiness before the Father.

THE SACRIFICES PAST AND PRESENT

Much can be learned from the sacrificial system of the past that can be applied to the present and will surely be taught in the future when national Israel exists as a nation under Christ's rule. Therefore, it is good to review some of the sacrifices that were offered under the first agreement with ancient Israel and the sacrifices that are offered by the people of God during the gospel age of salvation.

Some of the sacrifices were acts of praise, gratitude, and homage. Others showed a person's submission to the Holy One of Israel, and others were symbolic of gratitude and devotion to him and dependence and confidence in him.

THE AGREEMENT WITH ANCIENT ISRAEL

The Burnt Offering

The burnt offering expressed one's individual surrender to God's will. It pictured the faithful Israelite giving a gift to God. In the burnt offering there is a method whereby one could come to present God with something that he desired and was pleased by. The burnt offering was not given to atone for sin; it was strictly a means by which an individual could express his love and devotion to God through an act of worship. See Lev.1:3-7.

The Meal Offering

The meal offering was also a burnt offering. It was an offering that was pleasing to God. It pictured the individual in perfect obedience to God and it had basically the same meaning as the burnt offering. Again, this offering had nothing to do with sin. It was a means by which a person could worship God by bringing something to him that he desired—something valuable to the offerer—as an act of worship. See Lev.2:1-6.

In the Burnt or Meal offering, there was an offering that was satisfying to God. This offering was consumed by his holy fire on his holy altar and its smoke ascended to him as a pleasant smell. The burnt offerings were symbolic of the perfect fulfillment of the law's requirements. God found satisfaction in these offerings, and declared them to be very good.

The Peace Offering

The Peace offering that was made by the general population of Israel was also called the Fellowship Offering and it was offered for the following reasons:
It showed an individual's gratitude to God for his bounteous blessings and mercies.

It was symbolic of God, man, and the High Priest eating and fellowshipping together as a family.

It pictured a family feast or a community feast where friends and neighbors got together with God to have fellowship (Lev.3:1-17).

The offerings and sacrifices that were to be made on the New Moon were considered fellowship offerings. These types of offerings were partially consumed by fire as a sweet savor to God and partially eaten by the priesthood, which signified their eating at the table of God.

The eating of the fellowship offerings had great significance, both literally and symbolically, because the priests were literally partaking of the Lord's food (i.e., partaking of the Lord's table). Remember that the High Priest and the priesthood were to be the bridge between God and the nation of Israel. When the priesthood ate the sacred food offered to God, by extension, the people were also eating at the table of God.

The Peace Offering was unique from the other offerings in that God, the priest, and the offerer, ate together. This was the only offering in which God, the priest, and the offerer had something in common; they each partook of the offering.

In the Peace Offering, the offerer feasts with God. God, the priesthood, and offerer all found satisfaction in this offering, because of the common food that was shared among them. God also found satisfaction in being honored by the one making the offering, as well as in sharing the offering with the priesthood and the one making the offering. This offering also shows that God desires and enjoys fellowship with his people.

Freewill Offerings

The Burnt, Meal, and Peace offerings were all freewill offerings; they were not offerings of necessity, but they were brought to God because an individual wanted to please God. These offerings were a way of showing gratitude toward God.

The Sin Offering

The sin offering was made for sins that were done in ignorance. It was given to show God that one recognized one's sinful condition and the inability to perfectly practice his law. It pictured asking God to purge away all sins that were done in ignorance and to be made pure and holy before him (Lev.4:1-35).

This was not an offering during which an individual came and confessed his known sins, which was done in the trespass offering.
The Trespass Offering

The trespass offering was to be given when a person was conscious of personal sin that was knowingly committed. It pictured one who was truly sorry for having sinned and was willing to confess this violation of the law of God and make restitution. If a person did this, God would set the sin aside and cover it from his view:

"And he shall make amends for the harm that he has done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it to the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him" (Lev.5:16 Para.).

ATONEMENT PAST AND PRESENT

Under the agreement with ancient Israel, a person who violated God's law knowingly or in ignorance became separated from God and the benefits of a relationship with him were withheld. When the violator offered the proper sacrifice to atone for the sin, their sin was set aside and their relationship with God was repaired.

Since Jesus Christ offered his life as the final and supreme sacrifice for the sins of humanity, there is no longer a need to make an animal sacrifice in order to set sins aside. But, there is a need for the forgiveness of sin when it is committed, because sin is the violation of God's laws, precepts, and principles according to the apostles John, Paul, and James:

"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.).

"Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Blessed is the one not condemning himself in what he approves. But the one doubting, if he eats, he has been condemned, because it is not of faith—and all that is not of faith is sin" (Rom.14:22-23 Para.).

"Therefore, to anyone knowing to do good, and not doing it, it is sin to him" (Jms.4:17 Para.).

Sin is any deviation from God's 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 ask forgiveness. According to the apostle Paul the penalty for the violation of God's law is death:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

When one of the Father's earthly children becomes aware of sin in their life, they must stop sinning and ask for forgiveness in order to continue to maintain right-standing with their heavenly Father and their Savior. If a child of God refuses to stop sinning, the Father cannot forgive the sin nor give the person the gift of salvation.
Sacrifices During the Gospel Age

During the gospel age of salvation the people of God are still required to give sacrifices of thanksgiving in order to please God; however, the sacrifices are of a different nature from those given under the agreement with ancient Israel:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, for this is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of God" (Rom.12:1-2 Para.).

Today, under the new agreement, the Father's earthly children must be living sacrifices through being subject to the Father's law and way of life. Thereby, they offer their life as a living sacrifice to him. The offering of one's life in service to the Father is a thing that is most pleasing to him, because it shows the attitude of love for him and his way of life.

"Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live a life of love, even as Christ loved us, and gave himself a fragrant offering and sacrifice to the Father. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or greed, because these things are improper for the elect of God. Nor obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (Eph.5:1-4 Para.).

Paul speaks of being an imitator of the Sovereign God's example as a father and Christ's example of sacrificial love in the context of being a living sacrifice.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul shows that sacrifice goes beyond one's attitude and behavior and into the giving of one's physical substance to those of the elect who are in need. Paul also shows that this is acceptable to God and that there is a reward to be gained by such an attitude and behavior.

"For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Phil.4:16-18 NIV).

The writer to the Hebrews shows that, if one is to dedicate one's life to the Father, one must be willing to do the things that are necessary in order to maintain a harmonious relationship with him. To maintain this sort of relationship one must set one's heart and mind on living a life that pleases him:
"The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifice God is pleased" (Heb.13:11-16 NIV). See also 2 Pet.1:1-12; 1 Jn.3:16-22.

This is how we maintain a harmonious relationship with God the Father and his son Jesus Christ. It is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we can be justified before the Father and are allowed to bring the sacrifice of our life before him.

SUMMARY

There is obviously much more that could be said about how to live in harmony with God the Father and Christ; nevertheless, the information presented documents that an ongoing effort to please the Father through obedience to his laws, precepts, and principles and through a sincere and diligent effort to practice them will result in a harmonious relationship between God the Father and the one chosen to be one of his children.

By B.L. Cocherell and V.O. Jones
The Book of Genesis contains the record of humanity’s beginning and the foundation and basis of all subsequent biblical revelation.

As with all studies of the Bible, there is truth for those who search for it. Likewise, a thorough study of chapters two and three of the Book of Genesis reveals truth that has been hidden for centuries. Specifically, this chapter reveals what the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil symbolized, why God forbid Adam and Eve to touch it or eat its fruit, and why Satan was so intent on deceiving Adam and Eve into disobeying God’s instructions.

Additionally, this chapter shows the following:

• The laws of God were made available to the first humans (including the law that God gave to Moses).
• After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, he provided a sacrificial system to cover their sins, which put them back in right-standing with him.
• God revealed that a Savior would come to remove the sins of humanity.

THE GARDEN EXPERIENCE

"And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil" (Gen.2:8-9 KJV).

After finishing the creation process, the Lord God planted a garden for the benefit of Adam and Eve that must have been truly awesome in beauty and design. Moreover, Genesis chapters two and three describe this garden as a place with plenty of good food and a perfect climate. All of this was designed for Adam and Eve’s maximum comfort and enjoyment. In the middle of the garden there were two magnificent trees that were the focal point and central theme of the entire garden. The fruit of each of these trees held the destiny of humanity.

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him in 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).
Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but they could eat of the Tree of Life. What was God's reason for forbidding them to eat the fruit of this tree and having the knowledge it would impart?

"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 understanding that would 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 that was highly desirable was more than Eve could resist:

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to look at, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took some of its fruit, and ate it, and also gave some of its fruit to her husband who was with her, and he also ate it" (Gen.3:6 Para.).

The English word wise in verse 6 is translated from the Hebrew word sakal, which means insight or comprehension.

Many people believe that, after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they gained wisdom along with knowledge; however, this was not so, because wisdom is the ability to make the right choices. Obviously Eve did not have prior wisdom or she would have never touched this forbidden tree, and if she had gained wisdom from partaking of its fruit, she would not have given it to her husband. Moreover, after Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they still did not have wisdom; they only had knowledge.
Adam and Eve were wise in that they gained the knowledge of good and evil. Whether they had the wisdom to follow the instructions God gave them after their disobedience until their death is not known. However, if they did follow God's way until their death, they would be considered to have possessed true wisdom.

When a wise person is confronted with a decision about whether or not to obey God, they will make their decision based on God's law.

Verse 6 shows Eve being overcome with the desire to have this forbidden knowledge which she thought would allow her to know things which she could not otherwise understand.

"And their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and covered themselves. (Gen.3: 7 Para.)."

WHY WERE THEY ASHAMED OF THEIR NAKEDNESS?

Why were Adam and Eve ashamed of being naked? They were man and wife and there was nothing wrong with being naked in front of each other. They were not ashamed of this nakedness before eating the fruit from the forbidden tree (Gen.2:25). What caused them to be ashamed after they had touched the tree and ate its fruit?

Apparently, the immediate result of their disobedience was instant knowledge; they understood what was right and what was wrong. Their eyes were opened to know good and evil, just as the serpent had said. And this knowledge showed them that they had become sinners and were naked before God.

The obvious implication of verse 7 is that the opening of Adam's and Eve's eyes was linked to their newfound knowledge of good and evil. Before they disobeyed God, they had no knowledge of good nor evil, because one cannot recognize evil without having the knowledge of good by which to measure evil. There is no short without tall, no black without white, and no evil without good. Likewise, one cannot recognize good without the knowledge of evil by which to make a comparison.

Therefore, when Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, their eyes were opened to know both good and evil. Touching the tree and eating its fruit was an act of disobedience. As a result of this act, their eyes were opened to know both good and evil. They then understood and recognized that they were in a condition of sin, which was in contrast to the condition of God who could not sin.

This seems to be why Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness in front of each other, and why they attempted to hide themselves from God. They were ashamed because they knew they had disobeyed their Creator's instructions and he would know what they had done. Moreover, they now knew they were condemned to die as sinners under the law, and that they stood naked both physically and spiritually before God:
"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).

Eating the fruit brought the realization that they had become evil; they had disobeyed their Creator and realized they were completely naked before him, so they hid themselves, knowing that what they had done was evil.

WHAT GIVES HUMANS THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL?

There is only one idea in the entire Bible that symbolically mirrors the description of the two trees which is given in Genesis 3:5-6. The Tree of Knowledge is not symbolic of Satan nor is it symbolic of sex, as some people believe. Moreover, the Bible does not teach that either Satan or sex are the source of wisdom or the knowledge of good and evil. Actually, this tree represents the law of God!

One of the simplest scriptural proofs that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents God's law is Moses's explanation of what God's law is and what it would do (Deut.30:15-19). In this account, Moses repeats the basic laws God had given, including the 10 commandments. When one studies the Book of Deuteronomy it becomes clear that Moses gave his discourse in one day and that he repeats God's laws which reveal what constitutes good and evil.

After eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve knew what was good and what was evil. But what is good and what is evil? According to the Bible, to be good is to obey God's law, and to be evil is to disobey his law. So the fruit must have opened their minds to understand God's law, which includes the law the Creator gave to Moses to give to national Israel. It is apparent that, after Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the law of God which defines good and evil was revealed to them.

GOD'S LAW REVEALS THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

For centuries people have tried to understand and define what is good behavior and what is evil behavior in accordance with their personal philosophy, religious belief, or contemporary ethics. However, what does the Bible say is good or evil and how to understand and define what is good or evil?

After he had repeated the major points of the law of the covenant to Israel Moses said:

"See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil" (Deut.30:15 KJV).

24
Blessings for Obedience

"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" (Deut.30:16 KJV).

Curses for Disobedience

"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 on 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. 30:17-19 KJV).

Moses clearly told Israel that obedience to God's law would bring them tremendous blessings (good) and that disobedience would bring horrible curses and death (evil).

THE LAW DEFINES WHAT SIN IS

For centuries there has been much debate and confusion as to what constitutes sin. The apostles Paul and John give a 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.).

Clearly, God's law is the standard of good in the eyes of God and evil is the result of opposition to his law. Sin is any deviation from God's righteous laws, precepts, and principles that define how a person should live their life and worship God.
EATING THE WORD OF GOD

The physical act of eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil did not make Adam and Eve sinners; eating the fruit revealed to them what sin was. This same process is applied as an analogy in reference to eating the law and word of God as food.

"Your words were found, and I did eat them; and your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart . . ." (Jer.15:16 KJV Para.).

Before Ezekiel was sent to preach to the rebellious House of Israel, he was told to 'eat' God's Word, which was said to be like honey in his mouth (Ezk.3:1-3).

The Book of Hebrews calls God's teachings 'meat':

"But strong meat [solid food] belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of its use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb.5:14 KJV Para.).

Symbolically eating the teaching of God gives one the ability to discern between good and evil (i.e., have the knowledge of good and evil).

Pleasant to the Eyes

Not only is God's law good for food but also it is pleasant to the eyes. It is God's wisdom that enlightens the eyes:

"Open my eyes, that I may behold the wondrous things of your law" (Psa.119:18 Para.).

"The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psa.19:8 Para.).

WHAT WAS THE FRUIT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL?

The literal meaning of the Hebrew word periy which is translated into the English word fruit in Genesis 1:29 is fruit or that which is produced to propagate its species. Although the tree and its fruit were actually in the garden of Eden, the tree and fruit also have a symbolic meaning.

The scriptures show that the tree and fruit are symbolic of the end result of deeds, thoughts, or teachings:

"Therefore shall they eat of the fruit [result or end result] of their own way, and be filled with their own devices" (Pro.1:31 KJV). See also Hos.10:13.

"The fruit [end result] of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that wins souls is wise" (Pro.11:30 KJV).

"Say to the righteous, that all shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit [end result] of their doings" (Isa.3:10 Para.).
"A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompense of a man's hands shall be rendered to him" (Pro.12:14 KJV).

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof" (Pro.18:21 KJV).

In the New Testament, the word fruit (Greek: karpos) is also symbolic of an end result:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance..." (Gal.5:22-23 KJV).

Therefore, the symbolic meaning of fruit always refers to the end result or the climax of some thought or effort.

Was wisdom the 'fruit' of eating of the tree of good and evil?

God's law is our source of all wisdom. Wisdom is, therefore, the fruit or end result of obedience to God's law. Righteous wisdom is not derived from knowledge, but it is the result of making the right decisions based on the knowledge of God's truth. The apostle James wrote:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him" (Jms.1:5 KJV).

Although God gives the knowledge of his truth and the ability to know what to do with it (wisdom) to those who diligently pursue knowledge and truth, he will not force a person to make a wise choice.

Eve was not wise, she decided to eat the fruit of the tree which contained the knowledge of good and evil.

After Moses led Israel out of Egypt and presented them with God's law and his statutes and judgments, he tells them:

"Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut.4:6 KJV).

Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived, showed the connection between God's law and true wisdom: "My son, if you will receive my words, and hide my commandments with you: So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding" (Pro.2:1-2 KJV).
Wisdom

Biblically speaking, wisdom generally implies an ability to conform to the law of God: The choice to do good instead of evil. To have such wisdom requires a knowledge of God's law. Wisdom is having knowledge, understanding, and the discernment to make a right choice in a given circumstance. The fruit eaten by Adam and Eve contained the knowledge (wisdom) of God's law outside of the sacrificial law, which came after God discovered that they had eaten the forbidden fruit.

DID THE TREE CAUSE DEATH?

Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree under penalty of death. But why? Was there death in the tree itself or was death in its fruit? No. The tree did not cause their death; their death was the end result of what they had learned by eating the fruit. By eating the fruit, two things happened that would cause them to die:

1. They became responsible to be wise (make righteous decisions) and keep and apply the law perfectly.
2. They were found in violation of that law, because the law demands perfect obedience to God.

In eating the fruit, Adam and Eve violated the law and, at the same time, they became responsible to keep it. There was absolutely nothing inherently evil in either the tree or its fruit. However, they were guilty of stealing something which did not belong to them; therefore, there was no possible way that they could avoid the death sentence for their transgression: "The wages of sin is death. . ." (Rom.6:23).

Adam and Eve were commanded to abstain from eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Once they had disobeyed, they and their descendants were responsible to conform to the knowledge which they gained by eating the fruit of the tree and follow the standard of good or be put to death. Adam and Eve were made responsible to the law in the same way that the nation of Israel was many years later at Mount Sinai where the people vowed: "All that the Lord has spoken, we will do. . ." (Ex.19:8).

Therefore, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represented the law of God, and the act of eating its fruit placed Adam, Eve, and their descendants under an obligation to comply with the law. If they perfectly obeyed the law, God would bless and save them, because the law demands perfection and it promises blessings and life only to those who keep its precepts perfectly.

THE STANDARD FOR SINLESS PERFECTION

Because God's law is the standard for sinless perfection and righteousness, the law itself is unable to make anyone innocent before God:

"By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom.3:20 KJV).
The perfect justice of the law demands the death of all law-breakers. Because no human has ever remained sinless, except Christ, the law cannot proclaim any other person to be innocent and worthy of life.

The law was not given to be the basis for salvation. It was given to convict the world of sin and pass the sentence of death on all sinners. Its righteous standard was placed far above our reach, so that we would not be able to attain eternal life by our own works, but that we would instead receive life by the grace and mercy of God. See Gal.3:22.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden passed the sentence of death on humanity, but Christ took that sentence on himself and nailed it to the tree on which he was crucified.

THE TREE OF LIFE

"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).

Remember, both trees were in the garden and Adam and Eve had been given permission to eat fruit from the Tree of Life. But this permission was denied after they ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Before eating from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve could have eaten of the Tree of Life and lived forever. However, when they disobeyed God, they and their descendants lost access to the Tree of Life:

"Therefore, the Lord God sent Adam from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from where he was taken" (Gen.3:23 Para.).

CHRIST—THE TREE OF LIFE

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is symbolic of the perfect law of God, and eating from it brought the sentence of a final and eternal death on all humanity. However, the Tree of Life which was also in the garden held the remedy for the death sentence. It is clear from the Bible that both forgiveness for sin and eternal life are free gifts from God; therefore, it can be assumed that the Tree of Life symbolizes God's grace through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

THE CANCELLATION OF THE DEATH PENALTY

In the Book of Romans, Paul speaks of two laws that are at constant war within the Christian: Obedience to God's law and obedience to the law of sin (transgression of God's law).

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who can deliver me from the body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom.7:22-25 KJV Para.).
Paul goes on to explain that to walk in the spirit is to be in obedience to God's law, and to walk after the flesh is to be in disobedience to God's law. Paul explains that Jesus did not come to free us from the obligation to obey God's law, but to free us from the penalty of disobedience, which is death.

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [obedience to God's law] has made me free from the law of sin [violation of the law] and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh [life as a human], God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom.8:2-4 KJV).

"For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom.8:6-8 KJV).

The grace Christ brought to humanity did not cancel God's law; instead, the law's death sentence was carried out against Christ—our substitute.

The Tree of Life (grace through Christ) and the Tree of Knowledge (the law) were both in the garden. The law provided the righteous standard, and grace through Jesus Christ provided the means by which one could be redeemed from the curse of the law, which is death.

The sons of the Father's new creation live in obedience to the law of God, because the law is written in their hearts and minds:

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them: And their sins and lawlessness will I remember no more" (Heb.10:16-17 KJV).

THE COVERING SACRIFICE

"For Adam and his wife the Lord God made coats of skins, and clothed them" (Gen.3:21 Para.).

God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins in order to initiate the sacrificial system: "Without the shedding of blood there is no pardon" (Heb.9:22 Para.).

God's law provided for an animal life to be given as a temporary substitute for the life of the violator of the law. God clothed Adam and Eve with skins, which signified atonement for sin. Their nakedness (sin) was covered by the sacrificial blood (life) of an animal. The sacrificial animal foreshadowed the eventual sacrifice of Christ who would take our sin (our nakedness) on himself. Christ's sacrifice is not a temporary covering for sin like the sacrifice of animals were; Christ has redeemed humanity from sin and his sacrifice removes sin altogether:
"Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1:29 KJV).

Adam and Eve's nakedness had nothing to do with sexual sin as some people believe; it was symbolic of the state of being guilty of sin.

NO LAW, NO SIN!

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed on all men, so that all have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression..." (Rom.5:12-14 KJV).

Two facts are stated by the apostle Paul. First, through Adam's act of disobedience, the law of God, which brought the death penalty on all of humanity, was revealed to humanity. Second, before Adam's disobedience, humanity had no understanding of the law; therefore, there could be no violation of law or a penalty for breaking it. With these two facts in mind, it should be obvious that the eating of the forbidden fruit transferred the understanding of the law of God and the penalty for its violation to Adam and Eve.

Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we can now stand before God clothed in righteousness.

THE PROMISE OF A SAVIOR

After God provided Adam and Eve with the sacrifice of an animal that covered their sins and placed them back in right-standing with him, he promised that someday a savior would come and allow himself to die for them and remove their sins, and through this savior they could have eternal life. In order for Adam and Eve and their descendants to have the promise of forgiveness of sin and eternal life fulfilled, all they had to do was diligently practice the system of worship the Creator God had shown to them.

The Promised Seed

After God had questioned Adam and Eve about what they had done, God made the prophetic promise of a savior and the conflict between Satan's and Eve's seed:

"And I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed [Satan's seed] and her seed: it [the woman's seed] shall bruise your head, and you [Satan] shall bruise his [Christ] heel" (Gen.3:15 Para.).
The English word *seed* is a translation of a Hebrew word that is a collective noun which can be taken either in the singular or the plural sense. Studying the context in which the word *seed* is used is the only way to know if its usage is singular or plural. In Genesis 3:15 the word *seed* is obviously to be taken as both singular and masculine, because its modifying pronouns are he and his.

Contrast the context of this verse with Genesis 17:7, which uses the word *seed* in the plural: "And I will establish my covenant between me and you [Abraham] and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you, and to your seed after you.”

Here, God speaks of Abraham's *seed* and *their generations* (plural), this is definitely not the case with Genesis 3:15, which defines the *seed* of the woman in the singular (he and his) and the *seed* of the serpent as plural. Who was prophesied to bruise the head of the serpent? "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. . ." (Rom. 16:20).

Although God the Father and Jesus Christ are both referred to as Gods of peace, it is Jesus Christ—the seed of the woman—who is referred to by Paul. Women do not have *seed*, which is something that only men have. Therefore, this prophecy could only be fulfilled in Christ who was not fathered by a descendant of Adam but was born of a virgin after being impregnated with the Creator God (devoid of his divinity and immortality) through the power of God the Father's holy spirit. Therefore, Christ alone fulfills the qualification included in the phrase "*seed of the woman.*” Moreover, Satan will be bruised under the feet of Christ's brothers and sisters because they are a part of his body—the church (Rom.12:4-5; 1.Cor.12:12-27).

The following are four important things to keep in mind when studying the Genesis record about the first humans and God's law:

**Important Understanding**

- The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden are symbolic of God's law and grace.
- After their disobedience, Adam and Eve understood the Ten Commandments and God's other laws which were to govern their attitude and behavior.
- God provided Adam and Eve with a sacrificial system of worship, which if practiced, would place them back in right-standing with him.
- God promised to provide a savior, through whom Adam and Eve and their descendants could have their sins forgiven and obtain eternal life.
THE THREE CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE

People who are called to salvation fall into three distinct categories: Those who are called, but there is uncertainty as to whether or not they will obtain salvation, those who are called, but reject God and his worship system, and those who are called and accept God and his worship system. A close examination of Genesis, chapter 3, will reveal all three of these categories of people in the examples of Adam and Eve, Abel, and Cain.

ADAM AND EVE

Many professing Christian churches teach that the reward of the saved will be a state similar to the state Adam and Eve were in before they disobeyed God by eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This belief states that Adam and Eve were created as immortal beings, and if they had not sinned, they would have lived forever in the same state in which they were created. In order to determine if this popular belief is true or not, it is important to look at what Adam and Eve's physical and spiritual condition was before they sinned.

Before Disobedience

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may 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).

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Gen.3:6-7 KJV).

These scriptures show that Adam and Eve were created without the knowledge of what was good and what was evil, and that they were without wisdom. Moreover, after they ate of the tree, they became like God in that they knew the difference between good and evil.

After their disobedience, Adam and Eve knew that they stood naked before God as sinners, which is why they tried to hide themselves from him. They knew that they had become cut off from him because of their disobedience to him. Moreover, they knew they were under the law and that any violation of the law would result in the death of the violator.
ADAM AND EVE CALLED TO SALVATION

We do not know whether Adam and Eve will receive salvation, because it is not revealed in the Bible; however, we do know that they had their opportunity for salvation. The choice was theirs to make. If they continued to worship God through the sacrificial system and practiced his law to the best of their ability, they will be in the first resurrection along with their son Abel (Gen.4:4).

THE CALL TO SALVATION

The call of Adam and Eve to salvation, can be seen as an example of the process the Father uses to call people to salvation.

• Before the call to salvation, a person is without true knowledge of good or evil (God's law).
• Before the call to salvation, a person's standards of moral and spiritual behavior are different from God's.
• Before the call to salvation a person is without the wisdom of God.

This is the condition that all individuals are in before the Father calls them to salvation and reveals his truth to them. This condition is very similar to that of Adam and Eve before they ate the forbidden fruit.

Upon calling a person to salvation, the Father reveals enough of his law to them in order to show them that they are in violation of it and need to change from disobedience to obedience. Thereby, each person who is called stands naked before God, because they know they are a sinner:

"Well then, am I suggesting that these laws of God are evil? Of course not! No, the law is not sinful but it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known the sin in my heart—the evil desires that are hidden there—if the law had not said "You must not have evil desires in your heart." But sin used this law against evil desire by reminding me that such desires are wrong and arousing all kinds of forbidden desires within me! Only if there were no laws to break would there be no sinning. That is why I felt fine so long as I did not understand what the law really demanded. But when I learned the truth, I realized that I had broken the law and was a sinner, doomed to die. So as far as I was concerned, the good law which was supposed to show me the way to life resulted instead in my being given the death penalty. Sin fooled me by taking the good laws of God and using them to make me guilty of death. But still, you see, the law itself was wholly right and good. But how can that be? Didn't the law cause my doom? How then can it be good? No, it was sin, devilish stuff that it is, that used what was good [the law] to bring about my condemnation. So you can see how cunning and deadly and damnable it [sin] is. For it [sin] uses God's good law for its own evil purposes. The law is good, then, and the trouble is not there but with me, because I am sold into slavery with Sin as my owner" (Rom.7:7-14 LBP).
Each individual is right in his own eyes before the Father's call. But after this call, the Father uses the law to show what sin is. Then, the person who is called comes to the realization that they are a sinner and will die forever unless God forgives them for violating his law.

**ABEL, THE RIGHTEOUS**

From the very beginning, the message to mankind was to love one another. Cain rebelled against this message, but Abel did not. Because Abel was willing to follow God's instructions concerning how he wanted to be worshiped, Abel was called righteous:

"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, is consistent with the sacrificial system recorded elsewhere in the Bible:

"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.

**How Did Abel Receive Salvation?**

"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 did he kill him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1.Jn.3:11-12 KJV Para.).

We can conclude from what John records about Able that he lived a righteous life according to God's standards and is an example of all who are called of God and remain faithful to the end of their life.

**CAIN, THE WICKED**

Cain seems to be the first incorrigibly wicked person sentenced to the Lake of Fire which is the second and final death. Although Cain acknowledged God as the source of all good, he rejected God's worship system:

"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).
Notice that 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 that proclaims, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (Heb.9:22).

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 rebellion against God's system of worship and the beginning of all false religious systems that 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 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 this scripture, 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 (Gen 4:7) 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?" (vs.4-6).

God tells Cain that 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" (v7).
God 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 and reject that calling. Cain refused to worship God in the manner in which God wanted to be worshiped. Cain decided to worship God in his own way, which was the wrong way; therefore, Cain will die the second death in the Lake of Fire.

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

The Father reveals the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ to each person he calls to salvation and shows that, through his sacrificial blood, a person's sins are forgiven and removed forever. After Jesus Christ's sacrificial blood is applied to a person, that person is clothed in righteousness and placed in right-standing with the Father.

A person can remain in harmony with the Father forever through Christ's sacrificial blood and his position as our High Priest. The decision to remain righteous belongs only to the one who has been made righteous. A person can either use the tools that God gives through his holy spirit and have eternal life, or reject God's way that leads to eternal life and choose the way that leads to eternal death. This is exactly the same decision Adam, Eve, Abel, and Cain had to make.

WHAT IS SALVATION?

It is very clear that Adam and Eve were offered salvation. Moreover, the Bible records many individuals who have been offered salvation since that time, and it is God's plan to offer salvation to all of humanity. But, exactly what is salvation?

Although there are many scriptures that tell us that salvation is the saving of one from the penalty of eternal death, which comes as a result of breaking the law of God, the crowning achievement and end result of God's plan for the salvation of humanity is expressed by the apostle John:

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name" (Jn.1:12 KJV).

If a person will avail themselves of the opportunity the Father offers through the sacrificial blood of his son and diligently practice God's worship system, that person is promised to be saved from eternal death and have eternal life in the Family and Kingdom of God.
JESUS CHRIST, THE FIRST TO RECEIVE SALVATION

Christ The God

"Your attitude should be the kind that was shown by Jesus Christ, who, though he was God, did not demand and cling to his rights as God but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming like a man. And he humbled himself even further, going so far as actually to die a criminal's death on the cross" (Phil.2:5-8 LBP).

Jesus Christ who was the Creator God gave up his position in the God family to become a man for the purpose of dying for all who would accept his sacrifice in their stead.

Christ Today

Before his death, Jesus asked his heavenly Father to return him to the position and glory that he had before he came to earth as a human:

"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).

After his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ returned to his Father's spirit-realm, and he now sits on a throne at his Father's right hand and has the same glory and power that he once had as the Creator God:

"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom.1:4 KJV).

God and High Priest

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 into 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 vail, 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 on better promises" (Heb.8:6 KJV).

Jesus Christ now holds the position as our high priest, which is vital to our salvation. 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.

CHRIST’S SACRIFICE IS RETROACTIVE

The scriptures plainly show that Able will be in the first resurrection, which is possible because Christ's sacrifice is retroactive and reaches back to the beginning of humanity to forgive Abel’s sins.

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom.3:20 KJV).

Paul says that no one can be justified by the performance of the law. He also says that it is through the law that we learn what sin is:

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets" (Rom.3:21 KJV).

Now there is a way to be declared righteous and maintain a harmonious relationship with God that does not require the perfect keeping of the law.

"Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ to all and on all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God: Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom.3:22-24 KJV).

Because the way of justification under the law failed for all but Jesus Christ, justification now comes through true belief in the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. Because all humans except Christ have missed the mark of perfection set forth in God's law, the price to deliver humanity from the death penalty and to justify them before the Father was the righteous life of Jesus Christ who died for our sins.

"Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation [offered for reconciliation] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom.3:25 KJV).

The prophetic symbolism of the sacrifices for sin was fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ completely satisfied the demands of the law through his life and death. In anticipation of the sacrifice of Christ, God the Father declared everyone who diligently practiced his sacrificial system from the time of Adam until his Sons sacrifice righteous individuals. Moreover, those who now accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and diligently practice God's ways are declared righteous as well.
Because of Abel's faith in the system of worship that God had provided for him to follow (i.e., the sacrificial system, which pictured the ultimate sacrifice of Christ), he is an example of all those who are called by God the Father throughout the ages and remain faithful and willing to follow his way of worship. These are the ones who will participate in the first resurrection.

SUMMARY

- Adam and Eve disobeyed the Creator and ate the forbidden fruit; thereby, they set in motion an irreversible chain of events that will culminate in the salvation of some people who will be rewarded with eternal life and the eternal punishment of others.
- The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil contained the law of God, which included the commandments, statutes, and judgments.
- God established the sacrificial system in order for Adam, Eve, and their descendants to be placed back into right-standing with God.
- God promised Adam and Eve that a savior would someday come to forgive the sins of humanity and remove its penalty.
- Cain and Able are examples of the two categories of people who are called to salvation: people who are incorrigibly wicked who refuse to do what God expects of them and people who do what God expects of them and seek to please him.

By B.L. Cocherell and V. O. Jones
CHAPTER THREE

THE LAW OF MOSES

It is commonly believed that the law described in the Bible as the Law of Moses consists of the Ten Commandments and the sacrificial system, and that these laws were canceled when Jesus Christ was crucified.

Is there a scripture in the Books of the Law, which validate the belief that Moses gave the Israelites his law? No! No such record exists in the Books of the Law or in the rest of the biblical record. However, there are many scriptures, which show the Creator God telling Moses to inform the Israelites of laws that he expected them to obey and practice. Therefore, the law that Moses revealed to the Israelites is actually God's law.

In this chapter you will find proof that God gave his laws as a complete set of interdependent and interrelated laws, and that what is spoken of in the biblical record as the Law of Moses is in reality God's Law.

Deuteronomy 4:1-8

"Now pay attention, Israel, to the statutes and judgments, that I teach you, do them, that you may live and possess the land that the Lord God of your ancestors gives you. You shall not add to the words that I command you, neither shall you take from it, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do so in the land that you go to possess it. Keep them and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, that shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who has God so near to them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call on him for?" (vs.1-7 Para.).

"And what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day" (v.8 KJV).

When Moses recited God's words to the nation of Israel, he showed them the will of God concerning how they were to live their lives individually and as a nation. Moreover, the statutes and judgments that many people today believe were done away with are called righteous by Moses.
DID GOD MISJUDGE THE ISRAELITES?

Many believe that God misjudged the character of the Israelites so badly that, after he gave them the Ten Commandments, he had to add the sacrifices nine months later because of the people's sins. But, is this true?

We know that God had over two thousand years to deal with humanity before he presented the Ten Commandments to Israel at mount Sinai. By this time, God had already discovered how wicked humanity is capable of being. After all, at the end of nearly two thousand years of human history, he could only find one righteous man—Noah.

The Father knew "from the foundation of the world" (Rev.5:6-12; 13:8) that the Creator God would have to offer his life for the salvation of humanity, Therefore it makes sense that he would have designed the sacrificial system to point to the coming of the Messiah to redeem humanity.

FROM THE BEGINNING

The first chapter of the Book of Genesis shows that one reason God created and arranged the stars and planets the way he did was to give humanity a means to calculate when to observe his sacred festivals and observances:

"Then God commanded, Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from night and show the time when days, years, and religious festivals begin..." (Gen.1:14 GNB).

This record clearly shows that, from the time of his creation of humanity, God intended to have them observe his sacred festivals, observances, and convocations. Remember that the Bible was written for our admonition and instruction in God's way of life. If God had not intended for humanity to observe these special days, why would he have inspired this to be recorded in the Book of Genesis?

ADAM AND THE LAW

Adam and his family understood God's law, which included the sacrificial system:

"In process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect to Abel and to his offering: But for Cain and to his offering he had no respect. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said to Cain, Why are you angry and why is your countenance fallen? If you had done well, shall you not be accepted? and if you do not well, sin lies at the door" (Gen.4:3-7 Para.).
God did not accept Cain's sacrifice, because only a blood sacrifice could be offered as a sin offering. Cain was disobeysing God by not offering the correct offering. Abel offered one of his animals and God accepted it, because it was the correct offering. See Gen.4:7; Lev.chp.4.

The writer to the Hebrews also confirms the Genesis record:

"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 he being dead yet speaks" (Heb.11:4 KJV).

In the first four chapters of the Bible, there is a very clear record showing that God intended his festivals and sacred observances to be practiced. The inspired record also shows that the breaking of God's law constitutes sin (1.Jn.3:4). Moreover, this record shows God's sacrificial system being practiced.

NOAH AND THE LAW

The apostle Peter tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2.Pet.2:5). In Genesis 6:9, Noah is said to be a righteous person before God. Noah could not have been righteous before God if he had not understood what God expected of him or what constituted righteousness. For the inspired record to show that Noah was righteous, it would have been necessary for him to understand and obey God's laws, which define righteousness. See Psa.119:138,172; Rom.7:12.

In the account of the great flood, God gave Noah instructions regarding clean and unclean animals:

"Of every clean beast you shall take to you by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female" (Gen.7:2 Para.).

Clean beasts could be eaten by Noah and his family as dictated by God's dietary laws regarding what is fit and what is unfit for human consumption. See Lev.chp.11.

Clean beasts were also the only ones that could be offered in sacrifice to God, which is why more clean beasts than unclean ones were needed. See Lev.chps.1-9.

The biblical record shows that one of the first things Noah did after leaving the ark was build an altar and offer a sacrifice to God (Gen.8:20). Notice that God was very pleased with these sacrifices and blessed Noah for his obedience (Gen.8:21; 9:1-2).

Noah must have been sacrificing before the flood, because he knew which animal to sacrifice and how to sacrifice it. Adam's family understood God's law and Noah was righteous; therefore, it should be apparent that God's law was in effect and understood very early in human history. It is very possible that God's law was transmitted to Noah by Adam himself, because Adam was still alive fifty-eight years before the flood.
ABRAHAM AND THE LAW

Abraham is called a righteous man by the apostle James (Jms.2:21-24), but what did Abraham do to merit this recognition by James?

In Genesis 17:1, God commanded Abraham to be perfect (upright) before him. For one to be perfect (upright) before God, one must obey his laws.

Abraham's test of obedience to God in Genesis 22 shows that he understood and practiced the sacrificial system of God. Otherwise, what God had asked him to do would not have made any sense. Abraham's son Isaac also understood this, which is indicated by his question in verse 7: "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" God did not allow Isaac to be sacrificed; instead, he provided a clean animal for the sacrifice.

It is evident that Abraham understood and kept all of God's laws. In fact, God promised to bless all nations because of his obedience:

"And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because you [Abraham] obeyed my voice" (Gen.22:18 Para.).

There are so many biblical references to people keeping God's law before the time when it was given to the Israelites that there can be no doubt that God's law existed before he revealed it through Moses to the Israelites who had forgotten most of it during their time of captivity in Egypt.

THE LAW GIVEN AS A WHOLE

Some people believe that the law Moses gave at Mont Sinai, was his law and they use the following scripture to substantiate this belief:

"Only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them" (2.Kgs.21:8 Para.).

In this record about the giving of the law, God is the authority behind the law that Moses commanded the people to keep. A careful study of the scriptures reveal that Moses was only acting as God's representative through whom his laws were made known to the Israelites and that all of these laws were backed up by God's authority. See Lev.11:1-2; 16:1-2; 23:1-2.

ISRAEL GIVEN THE LAW AT MOUNT SINAI

The account of God transmitting his law to the Israelites begins in Exodus 20:1. The Israelites were camped at the base of Mount Sinai where God spoke to them out of the cloud and fire and gave them the Ten Commandments; however, the people were so afraid that they asked Moses to relay the words of God to them:

"And they said to Moses, Speak you to us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Ex.20:19 Para.).
Deuteronomy 5:4-5, 22-28

The Creator spoke to the people first, not Moses. However, because the people were afraid, Moses' job was to relay God's words, not his own thoughts or words, but God's words. God proceeded to give the Ten Commandments, which are recorded in Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

"The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire. I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to show you the word of the Lord: for you were afraid by reason of the fire, and did not go up into the mount" (vs.4-5 Para.).

"These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice; and it went on no more" (v.22 Jewish Translation).

Verse 22 indicates that God quit talking after he had given them his foundational laws. In other words, there was a break or a pause in what he wanted them to hear. And during this break, the events took place that are described in verses 23-28.

"And it came to pass, when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain burned with fire,) that you came near to me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders. And you said, Behold, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God does talk with man, and he lives" (vs.23-24 Para.).

"Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, who has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?" (vs.25-26 Para.).

"Go you near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak you to us all that the Lord our God shall speak to you; and we will hear it, and do it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when you spoke to me; and the Lord said to me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken to you: they have well said all that they have spoken" (vs.27-28 KJV).

MOSES—THE INTERMEDIARY

The people who heard the voice of God from Mount Sinai were afraid for their lives. So, they asked Moses to be the intermediary between them and God. Moses' task was to listen to what God had to say and report it to the people. Moreover, they agreed to obey whatever God told them to do through Moses (Deut.5:27).

God accepted the request of the people: "They have well spoken" (Deut.5:28). Then he told Moses to tell them to return to their tents.
In Deuteronomy 5:31, God commands Moses to come to him and he would speak to him and give him the commandments, statutes, and judgments that he was to teach the people. Moses followed God's instructions. Exodus 21 and 22 record that Moses received the judgments; he received the statutes in chapter 23. In Deuteronomy 5:32, God instructs Moses to tell the people to do everything that he instructed them to do, and to not deviate from what they were told to do.

BACK UP THE MOUNTAIN

Moses went back up the mountain and, while he was there, God gave him what is contained in Exodus 21 through 23. Then, Moses returned from the mountain and relayed all the things that God had told him to the Israelites. He wrote these words in a book (Ex.24:4). Then, he used the blood of a sacrificial animal to seal the agreement with the people for God. Exodus 20 through 23 contains the terms and conditions of the first agreement with national Israel. At this point the Israelites had been given the Ten Commandments, Judgments, and Statutes through Moses.

"And the Lord said to Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give you tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that you may teach them" (Ex.24:12).

The Creator tells Moses to come back up the mountain to receive tables of stone, a law and commandments so he could teach the people. Exodus 24:18 shows that Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. See also Deut.chp.5.

While Moses was on the mountain this time, God began to tell him more of what he wanted the people to do in relation to their worship of him.

In Exodus, chapters 26 through 28, God instructs Moses on how to build the tabernacle and the various things that were to be contained in it.

In Exodus, chapter 29, God tells Moses who the priesthood would be, how they were to be set apart and consecrated to serve him in the tabernacle, how to cleanse the altar of impurity, and how to offer the daily sacrifices.

In Exodus, chapter 30, are the instructions about building the altar of incense and its placement in front of the curtain which separated the place of meeting from the rest on the sanctuary.

An important point to remember is that, while Moses was on the mountain receiving the tablets of stone, God also gave him instructions on how and what to offer on the altar. This proves that God was giving the law as a whole, and none of it was an afterthought. The instructions on the sacrifices were given right after God spoke the Ten Commandments, during this forty day period on the mountain.
DOWN AND UP AGAIN

Exodus 32:15 shows that God gave Moses the two tables of stone containing the Ten Commandments and instructions on how to build the tabernacle and conduct the daily services, during his first forty days on the mountain.

Exodus 32:1-6 shows that the people had made a golden calf and were worshiping it. In verses 15-19, Moses sees the people worshiping the calf, he becomes angry and he breaks the tablets containing the law. Moses then returns to the mountain to make an atonement for the people's sin (perhaps by a sacrifice). See vs.30-31. In Deuteronomy 9:9-25, we see that, on this second trip up the mountain, Moses stayed for another forty days and nights.

While on the mountain the second time, Moses receives a second set of tablets of stone that contain the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God (Ex.34:1; Deut.10:1). After this, Moses went up the mountain a third time and stayed another forty days and nights (Ex.34:28).

After coming down from his third trip up the mountain, Moses gave the Israelites the instructions that he had received from God. These instructions included the Ten Commandments on two tables of stone, the instructions on how to finance and build the tabernacle that God would dwell in during their journey through the wilderness, and the instructions on the daily tabernacle service, which included the morning and evening sacrifices and the consecration of Aaron and his sons to perform these services. See Ex.chp.35.

THE TABERNACLE AND THE SACRIFICES

In Exodus 36, we find the Israelites following the instructions of God, which were given to them through Moses. Collections were made to build the tabernacle and the things received were more than enough to build the tabernacle (Ex.chps.36-39). In chapter 40, we find that the tabernacle and all the various things contained in it were finished and ready to be erected.

After the tabernacle was erected as God had instructed, God began to dwell in the tabernacle (Lev.1:1).

The tabernacle services began after the priests and all the garments and all of the articles to be used in the tabernacle service had been purified and consecrated. After all of this, the tabernacle sacrifices began on a regular basis. See Lev.chp.9.

God showed that he was pleased with the first service in the tabernacle, because he filled the tabernacle with his glory and consumed the burnt offering (Lev.9:23-24).

Throughout the rest of the Book of Leviticus, God continues to give his law to Israel.
All the things spoken of in the Book of Leviticus are the commandments that the Lord gave to Moses for the children of Israel:

"These are the commandments, that the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel on mount Sinai" (Lev.27:34 Para.).

Again, God gave these commandments (laws); they are God's laws, not Moses'. Leviticus 27:34 shows, beyond doubt, that all of the commands spoken by God from the tabernacle in the Book of Leviticus are indeed his commands, not Moses'.

THE LAW

The biblical record has established that the law Moses gave to the people was the complete law of God; however, why was it necessary for God to give his law to the Israelites in the first place?

The Sacrifices

The following are two reasons that God gave the sacrifices to Israel:

• To atone for the sins of the people so that God could continue to dwell among them and deal with them on an individual and national basis.
• To show that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin so that when the Messiah came to die for the sins of humanity, we would know why he gave his life.

GOD'S SPIRITUAL LAW

It is important to understand the difference between God's physical and spiritual law. Obedience or disobedience to his physical law will bring physical rewards or punishments. Obedience or disobedience to his spiritual law will bring spiritual rewards or punishments. The Ten Commandments are both physical and spiritual laws (Deut.5:29; 30:15-19; Matt.19:16-17). Note that the penalty for breaking God's spiritual law is the second death (Rom.6:23; Rev.21:8).

In Romans, chapter 7, the apostle Paul writes that he wouldn't have known what sin was except that the commandment says, "You shall not covet." This shows that, when someone breaks the Ten Commandments, that person is a sinner. Therefore, the law reveals what sin is. Paul goes on to say that the law is holy and spiritual. It is spiritual because it applies to things that are spiritual. In fact, the Ten Commandments illustrate the character of God and they are the standard of love that he has set for all of humanity to live by. See Rom.7:7,12,14; 1.Jn.3:4; 5:3.
No Fault with the Covenant

Anyone who makes an honest study of the Bible will discover the first agreement with national Israel included the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17), the Judgments (Ex.21-23), and the Statutes. In Hebrews 8:8, the writer tells us that God found no fault with his agreement with Israel, but the fault was with the people. Moreover, God found no fault with the conditions of the agreement with national Israel; the people were at fault, not the agreement.

Another key to understanding the relationship between God's law and the Israelites is the fact that everything God wanted them to know after the event noted in Deuteronomy 5:1-29, he spoke through Moses. The things that Moses relayed to the people were God's will regarding his law. These things were not of Moses, they were of God. It is obvious that, if the Israelites had not been so afraid of God when he spoke the Ten Commandments, God would have spoken directly to them instead of through Moses.

SUMMARY

God intended his law to be given as a whole and he intended the sacrifices to be a part of his law from the beginning. Moreover, as soon as the tabernacle was built, the sacrifices were offered according to the instructions that Moses received from God. It is evident that God's laws are inseparable, and that they were given as a whole for the purpose of creating a pure people, to reveal what sin is, and to show that humanity would someday have a Savior who would sacrifice his life in order to forgive the violation of the Law of God.

By B.L. Cocherell and V.O. Jones

b4w3
The Added Law of Galatians 3:19

Galatians 3:19 is the verse which is probably quoted more often than any other in an attempt to prove the sacrificial laws were not a part of God's original law:

"What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator" (NIV).

It has been taught for a long time that the added law of Galatians is the sacrificial system, and encompasses all of the other laws God instructed Moses to give to the people. Jeremiah 7:21-22 is often quoted as additional proof of this teaching. But, do these scriptures actually say the sacrificial system was an addition to the original law?

Both the New International Version and the King James Version of the Bible have translated the Greek word *prostithemi* as added. However, is this the meaning God inspired the apostle Paul to communicate? This chapter will show that the important meaning of Galatians 3:19 has little to do with the exact translation of the Greek word *prostithemi*, but it has much to do with the promises and the covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants. A closer look at Galatians 3:19 will show that the apostle Paul intended something quite different from what most translations of the Bible communicate through their use of the word added.

OTHER TRANSLATIONS

The Good News Bible:

"What, then, was the purpose of the Law? It was added in order to show what wrongdoing is, and it was meant to last until the coming of Abraham's descendant, to whom the promise was made. The Law was handed down by angels, with a man acting as a go-between."

Williams Translation:

"Then what about the law? It was added later on to increase transgressions, until the descendant to whom the promise was made should come, enacted through the agency of angels in the person of an intermediary."
Beck translation:

"Why, then, was the Law given? It was added to arouse transgriessions until the Descendant would come to whom the promise was made. And it was given through angels in the hands of a mediator."

The Living Bible:

"Well then, why were the laws given? They were added after the promise was given, to show men how guilty they are of breaking God's laws. But this system of law was to last only until the coming of Christ, the Child to whom God's promise was made. (And there is this further difference. God gave his laws to angels to give to Moses, who then gave them to the people."

After reading the various translations of this verse, it is apparent that these laws were given to make people aware that they were sinners, to show them what sin is, and to convict them of their sins. As the Beck translation shows, the law was like a stick with which a trainer stirs up a sleeping wild animal to show how uncontrollable and dangerous the animal really is.

JEREMIAH'S TESTIMONY

"The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. . .. Therefore this says the Lord God; Behold, my anger and my fury shall 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 shall burn, and shall not be quenched" (Jer.7:18,20 KJV).

Verses 18-20 show that when the people worshiped the queen of heaven and offered sacrifices to her, God became very angry with them and instructed Jeremiah to warn them that if they would not repent and change their ways, he would destroy their land.

Jeremiah 7:21 and 30

To fully understand the message Paul tries to convey in Galatians 3:19, we must first understand what God says in Jeremiah 7:21 and 30:

"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!" (Jer.7:21 NIV).

The context of Jeremiah chapter seven is one of condemnation of the Israelites for their departure from worshiping the true God and their pollution of his altar with sacrifices to false gods. God tells the Israelites that the sacrifices they offered were not the ones he had sanctioned; these offerings to false gods were theirs—not his—because he had no part in them.
"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" (Jer.7:30 KJV).

Jeremiah 7:22

Because Jeremiah 7:22 is used to support the teaching that the sacrificial law was added after God became aware of the Israelite's proclivity to disobey him, it is important to carefully analyze this verse to see if this teaching has any merit:

"For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices" (Jer.7:22 KJV).

Although God spoke to the Israelites "in the day" he brought them out of Egypt, he did not speak to them about sacrifices at that time.

The key to understanding this verse is the Hebrew word for day in verse 22 which is yom. It can mean a day, a year or some indeterminate period of time.

The biblical record of the Israelite's exodus from Egypt clearly shows that the day (i.e., period of time) that is referred to in verse 22 cannot refer to the exact day that the children of Israel left Egypt, the day they camped near the Red Sea, or the day they camped at Succoth after crossing the Red Sea.

If a specific day is being referred to in verse 22, it is most likely that the time the Israelites camped at the waters of Marah, which was three days after the crossing of the Red Sea, or the time they arrived at Mount Sinai three months later (Ex.19:1). It is during these times that God offered the Israelites an agreement that contained the Ten Commandments and the condition of obedience to his voice (i.e., obedience to whatever he asked them to do):

"But I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen..." (Jer.7:23-24 NIV).

"If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and will do that which is right in his sight, and will give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases on you, which I have brought on the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that heals you" (Ex.15:26 KJV). See also Ex.chps.19-20.

This chapter has already shown that during Moses' first forty days and nights on Mount Sinai, he received the sacrificial system of worship. From what God said from Mount Sinai, it should be very clear that he has an overall plan for humanity that includes his whole law—the commandments, judgments, statutes and the sacrificial system. See Lev.chps.1-7.
God's law does not consist of independent parts; God's law is a system of interdependent laws. Within these laws the way to secure salvation and eternal life is revealed (2 Tim. 3:15). It is this whole body of law that will again be instituted after the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth. See Ezek. chps. 42-46 about the commanded observances, festivals, and sacrifices after Christ returns.

GALATIANS 3:19 EXPLAINED

It is important to remember that one reason an erroneous belief about Galatians 3:19 came about is that most theologians and Bible scholars understood that the Ten Commandments were not canceled when Christ was crucified. However, they did not clearly understand the eternal nature of God's law and its prophetic relationship to the Messiah. Moreover, they did not know which law was to last until the Seed (the Son of God) came; therefore, they put forth the theory that the added law must have been the sacrificial system and the other laws that God spoke to Moses.

In order get a better understanding of Galatians 3:19 it is necessary to establish the context in which Paul makes the statement about the law that some feel was added:

"Now the promises were made to Abraham and his descendants... What I mean is this: the covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was introduced four hundred and thirty years after this, cannot set aside this covenant. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham" (Gal. 3:16-18 Para.).

These verses show that the context of Galatians 3:19 is within a review of the promises and covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants.

While studying the writings of Paul, notice that he emphatically states that the Ten Commandments are holy, just, and good, and that they are the spiritual part of God's law. See Rom.chp.7.

It is also evident from the scriptures that Christ, Paul, and the rest of the apostles kept the Ten Commandments and other laws of God.

Another important thing to keep in mind is that the breaking of the Ten Commandments constitutes sin (1 Jn. 3:4), and that the Commandments are not in question in the Book of Galatians. What is in question is the method by which a person becomes justified or declared righteous in God's eyes—through grace or the law?
The following are two translations of what Galatians 3:19 states regarding the reason God gave the law:

- Beck translation: "It was added to arouse transgression;"
- Good News translation: "It was added in order to show what wrongdoing is."

Both of these translations show that the purpose of the law spoken of here is to show people their sins. Moreover, Paul brings out this point when he says, "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom.3:20).

The most important question to be answered surrounding Galatians chapter three does not concern the exact translation of the Greek word *prostithemi*, which means added or repeated in verse 3; it concerns the reason that the law was added or repeated. However, if the word added is replaced with repeated, a huge difference in meaning is revealed.

We know that God gave Adam and Eve the Ten Commandments and other laws after they disobeyed him and ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, because both Abel and Cain offered sacrifices (Gen.4:4-7). Moreover, Cain sinned (Gen.4:7-8), and sin is the violation of any law of God (1.Jn.3:4). Additionally Abraham obeyed God's law (Gen.26:5).

It is important to understand that Israel's descendants forgot most of God's laws while they sojourned in Egypt. They had even forgotten which day was the Sabbath. Therefore, God had to show them which day it was by a special miracle (Ex.16). The laws they forgot included laws that dictated how to establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with God through the sacrificial system. Therefore, at Mount Sinai, God repeated his laws to them for the purpose of showing them what sin is. Moreover, he explained how to perform the sacrificial system in order to remove physical defilement and atone for their sins so that these sins could be set aside and hidden from his view.

Another important point is that, in Galatians chapter three, Paul refers to the law that was a part of the first covenant with national Israel, which would last until Christ came and offered his life as the perfect sacrifice for those who would accept it as having the power to remove their sins and erase the death penalty that hung over their heads as a result of the many times they had violated God laws.

In Galatians 3:19, Paul says something which is understood by very few people. He says that the law would last until Christ came. The question is what law would only last until Christ came?

The Ten Commandments are holy and spiritual (Rom.7:12-14) and cannot be done away with. Moreover, they were never in question and they were being practiced by the apostles and the early church; therefore, logic should tell us that whatever law would only last until Christ came must have been something other than the Ten Commandments.
It can only be assumed that, because Paul referred to the first agreement God made with national Israel, whatever law was to last until Christ came concerns the terms and conditions of this first agreement.

When the first agreement with ancient Israel and the prophecies about its cancellation are examined, it can be found that the only thing canceled and changed has to do with the method by which a person establishes and maintains a harmonious relationship with God (i.e., how one obtains justification).

"Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that 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 that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer.31:31-33 KJV).

A new agreement was necessary, because the Israelites broke the first one; moreover, the new agreement would become a part of each of God's children.

CHRIST CANCELS THE FIRST AGREEMENT

"Wherefore when he comes into the world, he says, Sacrifice and offering you would not [don't want], but a body have you prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have had no pleasure.'

"Then I said, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do your will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin you don't want, neither had pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;'

"Then he said, Lo, I come to do your will, O God. He takes away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb.10:5-10 KJV Para., quoted from Psalm 40:6-8).

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Christ was the perfect sacrifice and that, through him, the first agreement was canceled in favor of a far better one. And under this new agreement, a person can be set apart for a holy purpose through his sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin:

"For by one offering he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb.10:14 KJV).

By Jesus Christ's perfect sacrifice a person is now able to stand before God the Father as a righteous, sinless individual.
The major difference between the terms and conditions of the old and the new agreements with national Israel has to do with the method by which a person becomes justified before God the Father.

Why did the first agreement with national Israel have to end? The first agreement had to end because, in order to be declared righteous in God's eyes under the first agreement, a person had to do all of the things contained in the law:

"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.6:25 Para.).

Speaking of everyone, except Jesus Christ, Paul said that all have sinned and found to be unworthy of the glory of being able to perfectly keep the Law of God on their own. See Rom.3:23.

As we know, the sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins (Heb.10:4). So, the sacrifices that were offered before the advent of Christ could not take away sins; they were inadequate.

TWO NECESSARY CHANGES

There were two necessary changes that had to be made in the agreement with national Israel in order to fulfill the promises God had made with the Patriarchs and to accomplish the salvation of humanity.

First, in order for a person to remain sinless before God, there needed to be a perfect sacrifice to atone for sins and to remove the record of these sins forever.

Second, there needed to be a change made in the hearts, minds, and spirits of people so that they would have the desire to keep God's law.

Both of the conditions for these necessary changes were met by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through his sacrifice, he paid the penalty for the sins of humanity and provided a way for a person to become totally sinless. Because God's spirit-presence can only dwell where there is sinlessness, a person could only become sinless after the sacrifice of Christ, which made it possible for the power of God to transform the sinless person into a new creation, and place God's law into a person's very being, which causes a change in the heart, mind, and spirit.

This is why a new agreement was necessary. The old method of justification by works was only to last until Christ came, when everyone could be justified (declared righteous) by belief in the perfect atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
The events of the Passover and the Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. canceled the first agreement with national Israel and ushered in a new agreement with all of humanity. This new agreement is a part of God's plan for the salvation of humanity, which was conceived long before the foundation of the earth and the creation of humanity. See Matt.26:27-28; 1.Cor.11:25.

The method by which people were to be able to establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with God (justification, through the performance of physical works) was only to last until the Creator God himself could come to make the necessary change in the agreement with the Patriarchs, Israel, and the rest of humanity.

In Galatians 3:21-22, Paul says that the law is righteous (Ps.119:137-144), but the people failed in their attempt to keep the law, because they were weak:

"Is the law against the promises that God gave to Abraham that we could be justified by our belief in him [Jesus Christ]? Paul answers: God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Gal.3:21-22 Para.).

Paul explains that the scriptures say that all have failed in their own attempts to keep God's law and to be righteous in his eyes. And the reason for this failure is that God made humans subject to sin so that no one could ever be justified by their own effort; therefore, they would have to look to the promise of becoming righteous through faith in Christ.

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up to the faith which should afterwards be revealed" (Gal.3:23 Para.).

Paul said that, before Christ came, we were all held prisoner by the law and were all awaiting death. We were in prison, because the law requires death for the breaking of God's law. Because all people have broken the law, all come under the death penalty. But Christ came and revealed a way to be set free. All a person has to do is believe in the atoning power of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and one can be set free from the penalty of eternal death, because Christ paid the penalty by standing in the place of humanity and accepting their punishment.

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal.3:24 Para.).

The law taught what was right and wrong. But, it also held humanity captive until Christ came so that we could be justified by his blood; thus, we could be justified by faith.

"But after faith came, we are no longer under the schoolmaster" (Gal.3:25 Para.).
After Christ came and revealed how we could be justified by faith in him, we were no longer under the death penalty that the law (the school-master) had invoked. We were acquitted of our crimes and set free, through the redeeming blood of Christ.

"For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal.3:26-27 Para.).

After baptism into the Family of God, a person is given the spirit of Christ, which dwells within them; therefore, that person has also been clothed with the life of Christ himself.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, . . . bond nor free, . . . male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise [the promises that God gave to Abraham]" (Gal.3:28-29 Para.).

SUMMARY

The law and the sacrificial system, which the Creator God gave to Moses to instruct the Israelites to obey and practice were God’s laws, these laws did not originate from Moses. Moreover, they are not an added law, as the King James Version and several other modern versions of Galatians 3:19 seem to indicate. However, these laws were all given as a whole, each one is dependent on the other, and each one has its place in the plan that God has for the benefit and salvation of mankind.

By B.L. Cocherell and V.O. Jones

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ARE CHRISTIANS REQUIRED TO KEEP THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

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 keep the Ten Commandments. Few seem to realize that the problems of the world are a direct result of not keeping these laws. This chapter will prove that Christians today are still required to keep all of the Ten Commandments.

The question of commandment keeping has caused many heated arguments since the days of Christ. Some theologians have proclaimed that Christians no longer need to keep the commandments. Many claim that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the end of the law and has released Christians from any obligation to keep the commandments. Is this true? Did the laws of God cease to exist with the death and resurrection of Christ?

What does the Bible say about this subject? If a person professes to follow Jesus Christ and believes the Bible is the inspired Word of God, they should look to the Bible for the correct answer to this important question.

WHO GAVE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

The first chapter of the Gospel of John contains evidence that the one who actually gave the Ten Commandments to Israel was the one who became Jesus Christ. As the Creator God, he was the one who created Adam and Eve and had mercy on Noah and his family. Abraham walked and talked with him on a personal basis and knew him as God Almighty:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn.1:1-3 NIV).

The truth is that the Word was the Creator God who became Jesus Christ.

TO WHOM DID GOD GIVE THE COMMANDMENTS?

Exodus 20:1-17 contains the Ten Commandments as they were given to the tribes of Israel. These ten laws are the foundation of all law in the Bible. The first four pertain to love toward God, and the last six pertain to love toward our fellow humans.
A Review of the Commandments

Because the Ten Commandments instruct people to express love toward God and mankind, it is important to ask ourselves the following questions about these laws in order to see if they are truly a hardship from which humanity needed to be released:

• Is it unbearable to worship, honor, and praise the one who created the universe and set in motion the laws that allow us to exist?
• Is it a hardship to acknowledge the true God as the only giver of all life?
• Is it a hardship to have no idols and not to take God's name in vain?
• Is it cruel of God to expect us to observe the seventh day as a memorial of his awesome and wondrous creation?
• Is it a hardship to honor our fathers and mothers?
• Is it a hardship to not murder another human being?
• Is it a hardship to not commit adultery?
• Is it a hardship to not steal?
• Is it a hardship to not bear false witness?
• Is it a hardship to not be envious of your neighbor or lust after another man's wife or another person's possessions?

The answer to all of these questions is no, because all of God's laws are very good! There is nothing bad, evil, or wrong about these laws. They do not cause pain or suffering. Instead, they are designed to bring love and understanding.

For every effect there is a cause. All of the evil, pain, and suffering in this world is the effect of people breaking the Ten Commandments and other laws of God.

Given For the Good of Mankind

The reason God gave the Ten Commandments was for the good of mankind. After bringing the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, God tells them that he gave them the Ten Commandments because he loves them:

"From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire [this is when the Lord God who later became Jesus Christ spoke the Ten Commandments]. Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today. Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other" (Deut.4: 36-39 NIV).
God created the law for our benefit. It was designed to bring us happiness, joy, and prosperity during our lifetime. The Israelites were not willing to accept these laws as an expression of his love; instead, they rebelled in their hearts, minds, and attitudes:

"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).

THE LAW IS PERFECT

Psalm 19 shows the full extent of the blessings of God's law:

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving 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).

In our modern age of science, we have learned that there are laws which always function automatically: the laws of physics, chemistry, mathematics and all of the laws necessary to keep the solar system functioning and life continuing. If there is not conformity to these laws, disaster, death, and destruction will occur.

In exactly the same way, all of the laws of God are a point of reference to which all people should look as a standard of behavior toward God and their fellow humans. The Ten Commandments are empirical laws that result in benefits for obedience and penalties for disobedience (Deut.30:15-19).

Disobedience to these laws is sin: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1.Jn.3:4 NIV).

The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament makes the meaning of 1.John 3:4 very easy to understand:

"Everyone that practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness."

In Romans 7:7, Paul states that he would not have known what sin was if the law were not there to show him. Moreover, he indicates that he is talking about the Law that is contained in the Ten Commandments, by citing the tenth commandment, "you shall not covet." Because this law is a part of the Ten Commandments, Paul must be inferring that sin is the transgression of these ten foundational laws. Paul also writes the following about God's law:
"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Rom.7:12 NIV). In verse 14 Paul states, "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin."

The apostle James also says the same thing: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (Jms.2:10). What he points out here is that the Ten Commandments are a part of a larger body of law and if just one part of the law is broken, the entire law has been violated.

These scriptures leave no doubt as to what God says is sin! Sin is the violation of these spiritual laws, and these laws are summed up in the Ten Commandments. From the beginning, the penalty of sin has been death (Rom.6:23). But, through the blood of Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sin is possible.

DID CHRIST DO AWAY WITH THE COMMANDMENTS?

We realize that human life and relationships between people must be based on love and directed by laws that govern these relationships. However, because God has offered the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, is it true that he did away with the Ten Commandments? Is it true that Christians should no longer 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 destroy in verse 17, is translated from the Greek word kataluoo, 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 elaruo, 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).

FULFILLING THE LAW AND COMMANDMENTS

We know that Jesus Christ came to fulfill (bring to pass) all the prophecies in the biblical record about 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 [Jesus Christ] is well pleased for his righteousness sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable" (Isa.42:21 KJV).

The English word magnify in verse 21, is translated from a Hebrew word which 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.

As the God of Israel (Jesus Christ) he gave the law of God (the Sovereign God), which includes the Ten Commandments. When he gave these laws, he fully intended for Israel to keep the 'letter of the law.' In return, they would be blessed with tremendous physical blessings. See Deut.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 the laws and commandments of God.

A part of the plan of God for the salvation of humanity called for Jesus Christ to come 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 about God's commandments bring their full spiritual meaning and intent into focus!

**CHRIST AND THE COMMANDMENTS**

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? 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 the 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 the law of God and claim to worship him!

**Do You Love God?**

**How Do You Know That He 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. . . 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 KJV Para.).

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).

If we keep the commandments, we show our love for the Father and Jesus Christ, and they will love us. However, if we do not keep the commandments by transgressing God's law, we show that we hate God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ!

Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command" (Jn.15:14 NIV). You are a friend of Jesus Christ if you do the things that he has commanded. But, you are his enemy if you do not keep his commandments: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior" (Col.1:21 NIV).
This is what every human mind is truly like:

"For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'") (Mk.7:21-23 NIV).

Sin begins in the mind as Jesus says, which is why we have to change our way of thinking and the way we live our lives. This change must come from within us—within our minds and hearts. Repentance must come from the heart. One must also accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins. Only then can we love and obey God from our hearts.

God’s solution to removing sin is not the removal or destruction of the commandments that show us what sin is, but a change of heart from within! Once a person has repented, been baptized, and received the Father's holy spirit, God's purpose is to truly establish his law within the minds and hearts of men and women. Through the holy spirit, Christ in us motivates and leads us, which enables us to truly keep the commandments.

The New Covenant

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Heb.8:10 NIV).

This is how we are truly reconciled to God the Father. There is a change of mind, which is called conversion. One is converted from a hostile, sinning, evil-minded person into a loving, commandment-keeping person who does the will of God. After conversion, a person is no longer an enemy of God!

THE FATE OF GOD'S ENEMIES

What will happen to the enemies of God?

What is their ultimate fate?

Jesus says that just professing his name does not make one his friend:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt.7:21-23 NIV).

If you are not doing the will of the Father, you are not a friend of Jesus Christ and God the Father. If you are not a friend of Jesus and God the Father, you are an enemy and will be destroyed instead of being saved:
"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them [through his holy spirit and the keeping of his commandments]—bring them here and kill them in front of me" (Lk.19:27 NIV).

The apostle John wrote a stinging rebuke to those who say that they know Jesus Christ and claim to follow him, but do not keep the commandments: "The man who says, I know him [Jesus Christ] but does not do what he commands [does not practice God's law] is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1.Jn.2:4 NIV). The Book of Revelation shows that liars will not be in the Kingdom of God, but they will be burned up in the Lake of Fire! (Rev.21:8, 27; 22:15).

"But if anyone obeys [Greek: is keeping] his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how [that is, by this] we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1.Jn.2:5-6 NIV).

If we say that we are Christians, we should follow Christ's example of how to live our lives. If we refuse to do this, we are liars and hypocrites.

Will you believe the teachings of men or the teachings of God's Word through Jesus Christ? There is no salvation unless you believe God! The Bible clearly teaches that if we truly love God, we will keep his commandments:

"This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out [practicing and living by] his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1.Jn.5:2-3 NIV).

IT TAKES FAITH TO KEEP GOD'S LAW

Think about it for a minute! Does it require any faith not to obey God's laws? The truth is, it requires absolutely no faith to violate God's law. On the other hand, it takes faith, belief, and works to love God and keep his commandments. In the Book of Revelation there is an astonishing statement, which shows that those who have the faith of Jesus Christ also keep his commandments:

"And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev.14:9-12 KJV).
This type of faith calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

If a person truly believes God the Father and Jesus Christ, that person will be obedient to them. Anyone who argues with God and against his commandments by claiming it is not necessary to obey his law does not truly believe in God and does not have the true faith of Jesus Christ.

Abraham is an excellent example of someone who had true faith. The Bible shows that he believed God! But how much? To what degree and how did Abraham act on that belief and faith in God?

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Heb.11:8 NIV).

This shows that a person can only obey God through faith. However, most professing Christians have been led to believe that it takes faith not to obey!

What else is recorded about Abraham's obedience? How much did he believe and how far did he go in his obedience? He was called to take his only son and use him as a sacrifice to God. Abraham faithfully obeyed, without question. He did this because of his faith and obedience toward God. The Creator God intervened before Abraham was able to sacrifice his son and he provided a ram to be used as the sacrifice instead (Gen.22:1-19).

We are told that Abraham's faith was made perfect through his works of obedience (Jms.2:21-24). But this was not the only thing that God recorded for us about Abraham's faith and obedience. The promise given to Abraham was passed on to Isaac and Jacob because of how Abraham lived his life:

"Because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws" (Gen.26:5 NIV).

Abraham exhibited his faith and belief in God as he obeyed God's voice, kept God's charge, and kept God's commandments, statutes and laws, which define righteousness:

"Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true . . .. Yet you are near, O Lord, and all your commands are true . . .. May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous" (Psa.119:142, 151, 172 NIV).

BE HONEST

An honest look at the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles leaves no doubt that, if we want to follow God's way of life, we must keep his commandments!
The reason most people, which includes most professing Christians, do not want to keep the commandments 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 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).

If we say the commandments are no longer in effect, we disagree with God the Father and Jesus Christ, which means that we do not want them in our lives.

Should a Christian keep the commandments of God? The answer found in the Bible is that a person cannot be a true follower of Christ unless obey and practice all of the commandments.

HOLINESS AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

God is extremely interested in the holiness of his people. When God created mankind, he created them in his image. More than that, God intends for mankind be patterned after himself in character and in holiness, which is why God developed a system that would make it possible for him to be with his people and to establish a pattern of holiness so that mankind could duplicate his character. This ultimately led to the new covenant with which God is dealing with spiritual Israel (the elect of God). He called the elect to become examples of his holiness, which is accomplished through placing his spirit within individuals. And he maintains the elect in that state of holiness through his spirit and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Deut.5:6-10 NIV). See also Ex.20:1-6.

The Creator God states that he is the Deliverer who has proven himself to be far superior to all Egyptian God's by virtue of the great miracles he performed in delivering the Israelites out of Egypt. Moreover, God wants to bless mankind beyond their wildest dreams. But in order to do this, mankind must accept God as the only true God.
Have No Other Gods

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Deut.5:7).

People can make gods out of almost anything, including the quest for material goods and family relationships. Anything that becomes more important in one's life than one's relationship and love for God is one's God. Without the commandment to have no other gods, the other nine have no meaning—God is the true God.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Ex.20:4-5 NIV).

What does God mean by a graven image? Are all carved objects forbidden? Are rugs and drapes that have images of flowers, birds, and trees woven into the fabric forbidden? Is it forbidden to make or own statues?

God does not want mankind to make any idol, sculpture, or carved image for the purpose of worshiping it. Mankind is forbidden to create anything to be used as a substitute for the one true God. An idol can be anything that one puts in place of or in a more prominent place in their life than the true God. The expression "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" means that the Eternal God alone should be worshiped because he is the only righteous and loving God.

Note:

Under the first covenant with national Israel, Exodus 20:4-5 referred to the Creator God who latter became Jesus Christ the Savior of humanity. Under the new covenant this commandment now refers to God the Father who is the Supreme Sovereign God.

"So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Cor.8:4-9 NIV).
Idols are empty gods or nothingness; they do not have inherent life. An idol can be in virtually any form—animate or inanimate—including mental images or concepts. It is anything man esteems as more important than obedience to the true God.

Paul writes the following to the Colossians about idolatry:

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry" (Col.3:5 NIV).

From the very beginning, idolatry has been a problem. Adam and Eve trusted their own minds and desires and obeyed Satan. Adam and Eve put knowledge before God; thus, knowledge became their idol! Idolatry was prevalent in the days of Abraham. Israel worshiped and served the idols of Egypt:

"And I said to them, "Each of you, get rid of the vile images you have set your eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in Egypt. But for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations they lived among and in whose sight I had revealed myself to the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt. Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert" (Ezk.20:7-10 NIV).

Some claim that Numbers 21:4-9 is an example of God altering part of the second commandment:

"The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived" (Num.21:8-9 Para.).

Did God modify the second commandment by telling Moses to make an image of a serpent and place it on a pole? No! The bronze serpent was only a copy of a real serpent but not an idol. It was not a substitute God. Israel was commanded to look at the serpent, not to worship it. It was a reminder of their sin and that they had to obey God in order to have the penalty of their sin removed.

The second commandment does not forbid making copies of created things, but it forbids making them into idols to be worshiped. God offered Israel redemption from death when they obeyed and looked at the bronze serpent on the pole. Why did the people have to look on the bronze serpent to live? One reason was that God was establishing a symbolic picture of a greater future redemption. Christ said:
"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn.3:14-16 NIV).

Another reason for having the people look at the bronze snake was to prove their obedience through faith and works, just as when Naaman, the Syrian leper, dipped himself in the river Jordan seven times. He obeyed the instructions of God's prophet through faith and works. This bronze serpent later became an idol to Israel because, in their minds, they turned this replica of a snake into a god and worshiped it (2.Kgs.18:4).

The last part of the second commandment indicates that God will punish children for the idolatrous sins of their parents? But is this what it says? Absolutely not. The curse of idolatry comes on the children who hate God and worship idols as their fathers did. To hate God means to esteem idols above the true God and to show hostility towards his law.

God is fair! He does not punish the innocent for the sins of the guilty. God reminded the Israelites of this principle: "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin" (Deut.24:16 NIV). This principle carried over to all of mankind as they came in contact with God's covenant people and his laws.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

This is God's instruction to people regarding the use of his name:

"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Ex.20:7 NIV).

Before the new covenant was ratified, God allowed people to swear by his name. To Israel God said:

"Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name" (Deut.6:13 NIV).

But Jesus instructed his disciples to discontinue swearing:

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord. . . .' Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No': anything beyond this comes from the evil one " (Matt.5:33, 37 NIV).

To swear falsely by Jesus' name is obviously taking God's name in vain. But, Christ clarified the intent of the law by stating that any kind of swearing is breaking the intent and spirit of the third commandment. But how is this so?

This issue can be more fully understood, by examining comments in the Book of Hebrews:
"When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one
greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will
surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after
waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Men
swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms
what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted
to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs
of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so
that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God
to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be
greatly encouraged " (Heb.6:13-18 NIV).

To swear is to commit God as a witness in confirmation of a person's
desire and capability to perform what is promised. Human beings, unlike
God, are unable to remain perfectly constant in purpose and they have
great difficulty keeping their word due to their weaknesses and the
influence of Satan. Thus, if God allowed men to swear by his name,
every time man failed to perform his oath, God's name would be mis-
represented.

This is why Jesus said, "Anything beyond these [yes or no] is of [the] evil [one]." James also supported this: "Above all, my brothers, do not
swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be
yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned" (Jms.5:12 NIV).

Under the covenant that God had made with national Israel, he
allowed them to swear because he had invoked his name on them. He
wanted them to have help in avoiding sin. He was willing to bear with
them in their weaknesses for a time, but there came a time for them to
grasp that the name of God is above all names, including the name of any
mortal man. Thus, they were told to no longer swear by his name.

Taking God's name in vain can involve more than misusing the names
by which he is called. Taking God's name in vain is claiming to represent
God, but in reality denying his existence and power.

Jesus' Name

Salvation comes only through Jesus' name: "Salvation is found in no
one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which
we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NIV). Because it is through the authority of
Jesus (Jesus' name) that salvation is made available to humanity, his is
the only name besides the Father's name that is considered holy. See
Lk.1:49.

After grasping the reality of the greatness and glory of Jesus, one can
begin to understand the importance of using his name with respect, awe,
praise, truth, and thanksgiving.

"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of
the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"
(Col.3:17 NIV).
Paul told the Colossians that every word spoken and every action taken should be done as Jesus would do it. Anyone who says Christ is living in him and then lies is taking God's name in vain. All false prophets and false brethren are taking God's name in vain. Moreover, the penalty for breaking the third commandment is still in effect today:

"The Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes his name in vain" (Ex.20:7 NASU).

**THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT**

The Book of Genesis records that, after God had prepared the earth for his human creation and placed Adam and Eve in the garden, he set apart the seventh day as holy time:

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground ... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. . .." (Gen.1:26, 31NIV).

"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 2:1-3KJV).

God established the weekly cycle with the first six days designated as work days and the seventh day designated as a day on which no work was done.

There are two Hebrew words in verses 2-3 that should be understood because they hold an important key to understanding how God the Father and Jesus Christ view the Sabbath.

The English word blessed is translated from the Hebrew word *barak*, which means to kneel, to praise or to salute. This word seems to be used to indicate abundant and effective life and longevity. As used in Genesis 2:2-3, it means to bless, to imbue with power for prosperity, success, fecundity, and longevity.

The English word sanctified is translated from the Hebrew word *quadash*, which is a denominative verb which means to be hallowed or holy, to consecrate, to prepare, to dedicate. The verb *quadash* designates the state of something that is sacred. Therefore, the Sabbath is different and set apart from anything that is common or profane.

The Creator God's act of blessing and sanctifying the seventh day was not just a pronouncement, but also the actual creating of a specific period of time for a divine and holy purpose. This day has God's attribute of holiness as a part of its existence.
Made for Man

The Creator God intended the Sabbath to be one of the fundamental aspects of his worship system, from the beginning of creation:

"Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk.2:27 NIV).

The seventh day of the week is very different from the other six because it is a period of time created and set apart (sanctified) from regular time. Moreover, it has a spiritual dimension within its existence. It is obvious from the enormous amount of information that God has had recorded about this particular day that the seventh day has a very special meaning to God the Father and Jesus Christ and they intend for all of mankind to eventually observe the Sabbath as holy time.

The Calendar and the Sabbath

The calendar today is not the same calendar that the ancient Israelites used nor is it the one that was used during Jesus' lifetime. In the 16th Century, ten days were dropped from the calendar that is in common usage today. However, a detailed study of all of the changes to the calendar used today reveals that the seven-day weekly cycle has never been altered.

Furthermore, the Jews today and throughout history adamantly maintain that they have not lost track of the weekly Sabbath. They claim that they have been worshiping God on the correct day since their exodus from Egypt. To state that the Sabbath day has been lost is without foundation and discounts the written records of the Jewish people, religious and secular history, and archeological evidence. All of these records provide ample evidence, which shows that time has not been lost and that the Sabbath day is still the day we call Saturday in the weekly cycle.

The seven-day weekly cycle has never been altered from Creation. Since the Sabbath was again revealed to the nation of Israel, the awareness of this holy time has remained with the people of God and is still a part of the world's calendars.

IS THE SABBATH JEWISH?

Some insist that the Sabbath observance is only a part of the Jewish faith and it is not for any other race of people. The Bible, however, clearly states that the Sabbath was created by God on the day after he created mankind and that it was created and sanctified to benefit all of humanity (Gen.1:31; 2:2-3).

Notice what Jesus Christ who was the Creator God said to the legalistic Scribes and Pharisees when he explained the nature of the Sabbath:

"Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk.2:27 NIV).
The seventh day was created thousands of years before the descendants of Judah were called Jews. During that entire time period, it was never called the Jewish Sabbath. Because the Sabbath was created for the benefit of all mankind, it is incorrect to call the Sabbath 'the Jewish Sabbath.' It is God's Sabbath!

**Keeping of the Sabbath is Important**

The Book of Hebrews was written about thirty years after Christ's resurrection and contains the following statement:

"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9 NIV).

Most Bible commentaries and even the Bible marginal references contain the correct Greek translation of the word 'rest' as 'keeping of the Sabbath.' The English word 'rest' is translated from the Greek word 'sabbatismos,' which means 'Sabbath'; therefore, verse 9 should read,

"There remains therefore a keeping of the Sabbath to the people of God."

To draw near to God in worship and fellowship on the day he set apart at creation for this purpose, he wants his followers to cease from their normal activities on the Sabbath.

It is without question that both the Bible and secular history record undeniable evidence that the apostles and the early church observed the seventh-day Sabbath. Therefore, it must be concluded that those who want to follow God today must also observe this seventh day as instructed by God's word.

**THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT**

The Creator God (the one who became Jesus Christ) told the Israelites at Mount Sinai: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3 NIV). God intends this commandment to be applied to both minor and adult children.

Adam, the first son of God, dishonored his father (the Creator God) who created him, by eating the forbidden fruit. the Creator who was a perfect example as a father, instructed Adam in love and warned him about the death penalty for disobedience. However, Satan, an enemy of God and man, sowed the seeds of doubt and rebellion in Adam who became God's first disobedient son.

Jesus and the apostle Paul said the following about obedience to God's law:

"For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death' " (Matt. 15:4 NIV).
"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.' Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph.6:1-4 NIV).

The expression: "Obey your parents in the Lord" means that children, even adult ones, must obey their parents as Christ obeyed his. This statement also restricts the obedience to those acts which are in harmony with God's will, including a child's conduct with unbelieving and overbearing parents.

There are many examples in the Bible of how to properly honor and obey one's parents. The way Jesus interacted with his Father gives us the perfect example of how to honor our own parents, as well as our heavenly Father.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Terminating the life of an individual is perhaps the greatest offense that can be committed against a person. If someone steals, it is possible to have the stolen goods returned or provide compensation in place of the item that was taken, but no man can restore a stolen life. According to Jesus, the greatest gift a man has to give is his life; therefore, the greatest thing anyone can lose is eternal life. Only God has the authority to kill human beings: "See now that I myself am He. There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life. I have wounded and I will heal . . ." (Deut.32:39 NIV). Because of this, when God spoke to Israel from Mount Sinai, he said: "You shall not murder" (Ex.20:13 NIV).

God's intention in the sixth commandment is to forbid the taking of life unlawfully. God did not forbid men from killing humans under all circumstances in ancient Israel; he authorized representatives to act as his executioners and take the lives of criminals that he had sentenced to death. God is very clear regarding the difference between 'killing' and 'murdering.'

The sixth commandment has been in effect since creation: "You [Jews] belong to your father, the devil, . . . He [Satan] was a murderer from the beginning . . ." (Jn.8:44 NIV). It clearly was a sin to murder, long before Moses was even born.

Immediately after the great flood, God inspired a reminder not to murder: "And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man'" (Gen.9:5-6 NIV). When a person is guilty of killing another person unlawfully, the murderer is to be put to death for his crime.
Paul confirms this God-given authorization in men and governments:

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. ... For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Rom.13:1-4 NIV).

After Cain murdered Abel, he feared that he was going to be killed: "And whoever finds me will kill me" (Gen.4:14 NIV). His fear was based in the knowledge that Abel's family had, by law, the right to execute him. God's patience and purpose allowed Cain the opportunity to live. Therefore, God forbade anyone to kill Cain by promising a sevenfold punishment on anyone who did.

The Israelites were God's avengers who carried out the execution of heathen nations:

"However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites ... as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God" (Deut.20:16-18 NIV).

Because God says "It is I who put to death and give life," it is apparent that Israel had the God-given authority to destroy the pagan nations that he had sentenced to death, as well as other nations who became enemies of Israel.

When Jesus came, he expanded the definition of murder past the letter of the law and into the spirit of the law:

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell" (Matt.5:21-22 NIV).

The Greek word raca and the English word fool in Matthew 5:22 show that murder reaches past the physical act and is a part of a mental process.

The Greek word raca corresponds to a very derogatory Aramaic insult which, in essence, means you blockhead or you idiot. The use of the word raca expressed great displeasure, disregard, anger, or contempt for another person. The English word fool is translated from the Greek word moros, which means dull or stupid. Both of these words are meant to insult another person and to show one's utter contempt for the life of another person.
It is clear from the context of what Jesus says that, if a person has or expresses feelings toward another person that are inconsistent with a godly attitude, that person is guilty of a crime against the other person. In the extreme case that person is guilty of murder and worthy of death in the Lake of Fire.

As with every action, the actions leading to murder have a beginning. Anger and disrespect for another person are steps toward murder. When God did not accept Cain's offering, he became very angry and he transferred this anger to Abel when he murdered him.

Notice what Paul wrote to the Ephesians about anger:

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Eph.4:26-27 NIV).

Jesus Christ came to save mankind, to soften the hardness of hearts, and to change attitudes. God's holy spirit is the spirit of love in which there is no room for uncontrolled anger.

"My dear brothers take not of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (Jms.1: 19-20 NIV).

"But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips… put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col.3:8-10 NIV).

More is required of one than simply to not murder just because of fear of the penalty. God requires people to control their anger toward each other. In most cases, there is more than one step from anger to murder. Anger leads to judging another as worthless (raca) so that he is held in contempt. When someone judges his brother in this manner, he is judging the law, according to James 4:11. People who do this are squelching love; thereby, they allow hatred to enter into their heart and mind.

The final step toward murder is to think of a fellow human as a worthless fool, which is the same as judging someone as being a sinner and unworthy of life. John said, "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him" (1.Jn. 3:15 NIV).

A person who hates someone is a murderer even if they do not commit the physical act of murder. According to Jesus, the way to keep from being a murderer is to practice forgiveness and reconciliation (Matt.6:14-15). All those who have God's holy spirit have the power and ability to love both their brother and their enemy.
At Jesus’ second coming, all those who want to obey God’s way of life will practice the law of love toward other people:

"The Lord said to Moses, . . . . Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord. Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord" (Lev.19:1, 16-18 NIV).

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

God designed marriage to be a permanent relationship. When God brought Eve to Adam and joined them together in marriage he said:

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen.2:24 NIV).

In marriage, each partner has a role designed to function in harmony with the other. God forbids the destruction of this union when he said, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex.20:14 NIV). But when men and women rejected God and his law, they began to live by their own rules regarding marriage.

Beginning with Adam, it was a sin to commit adultery. Hundreds of years before the time of Moses, Joseph said it was a sin against God for him to have Potiphar's wife (Gen.39:9).

After God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he revealed his law forbidding adultery, which if practiced will protect the covenant relationship of marriage.

Later, in Christ's time, John the Baptist told Herod Antipas that it was unlawful for him to have Herodius, his brother Philip's wife (Matt.14:4). The lust that Herod and Herodius shared for each other resulted in Herodius leaving her husband to marry Herod.

Because of the hardness of people's hearts, God allowed the Israelites to dissolve a marriage agreement without condemnation by the letter of the law. The reason John the Baptist condemned Herod for marrying Herodius was that, according to the law of God, it was forbidden for a man to marry the divorced wife of his living brother. Such a marriage was "uncovering your brother's nakedness" (Lev.18:16). "If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity [an impure deed]; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless" (Lev.20:21 NIV).

Adultery and other sexual immorality are forbidden by God because marriage is to be a permanent, private, pure, and an intimate relationship between a man and a woman. Jesus says, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded. . . .” (Lk.12:47-48 NIV). God required more of Israel than the heathen; furthermore, even more is required of those who have his holy spirit.
God commands, upon the penalty of death, that a man cannot have sexual relations with someone else's wife (Deut.22:22). But due to hard-heartedness and unconverted minds, God allowed a man to divorce a wife under certain conditions. These conditions of divorce did not sanction divorce or modify the marriage relationship, but did protect the divorced spouse (See Deut.24:1-4; 21:10-14; Ex.21:7-11).

Jesus explains why Moses instructed a man to give his wife a bill of divorce:

"Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Matt.19:8 NIV).

Jesus Christ as the Creator God set the perfect example in marriage by marrying only one nation, Israel. When he divorced Israel he did so because of her spiritual adultery (idolatry), but he did not remarry any other nation. Death frees a person from marriage vows; thus, when Jesus died, it ended his marriage to ancient Israel. After his resurrection, he was free to marry spiritual Israel. All who will be saved must become spiritual Israelites (Rom.7:1-6; Gal.3:29; Eph.2:11-19).

Today's Attitude Toward Sex and Marriage

The New Testament teachings do not forbid multiple wives for one man if a valid marriage agreement is in place with each partner, except in the case of a man who is in the office of an elder (an overseer).

Paul's instructions to Timothy are for believers today: "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, . . ." (1.Tim.3:2 NIV).

Today, the prevailing attitude toward marriage is very similar to the time before the Great Flood. Most people, including many professing Christians, approach marriage for selfish reasons, especially regarding sexual relations. This attitude places children and family needs secondary to a person's own sexual desires.

Many psychologists and sociologists who agree with this attitude write books and articles promoting extra-marital affairs as a healthy part of marriage. Such authors emphasize that society is moving away from a traditional commitment in marriage as a bond involving commitment, and towards marriage as only a good or bad relationship. These individuals falsely believe that sexual fidelity should be removed from the marriage commitment because it unnecessary and unnatural.

It is clear that people do not want to feel guilty for any of their illicit practices; thus, they cast aside God's laws as being out of date and they substitute their own. Many people blatantly deny God's existence, and others proclaim that the commandments are no longer in effect and they are free to live as they please:
"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Tim. 3:1-5 NIV).

Jesus Christ makes it clear how a believer should view the seventh commandment: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28 NIV).

Lust begins in the mind. Acts forbidden by God that are lived out in one's mind are sin, even though no overt physical act is committed (Jms. 1:13-15). Anyone who lusts after someone else's mate is committing adultery. The best defense against adultery is loyalty to one's own spouse and love and respect for one's neighbor.

**Premarital Sex**

God considers premarital sex to be the same as adultery, because everyone has the potential of becoming someone's mate (Deut. 22:13-14, 20-21). Those who know and obey God also know he made their bodies for his holy use: "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh'" (1 Cor. 6:16 NIV). God intends a person's body to be the temple of God; therefore, it is a defilement of God's holy place to join in such a sexual union. See 1 Cor. 3:16-17.

**Incest, Homosexuality, and Bestiality**

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife . . . Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexuals offenders" (1 Cor. 5:1; 6:9 NIV).

It is strange that some can see the harm and evil in incest but not in homosexuality? Inordinate lust blinds people to the penalties of their evil practices. Terrible sexually transmitted diseases that cause blindness, insanity, and death are rampant among those who practice promiscuity and the spread of disease is an indication that something is drastically wrong with this type of behavior.

**Polygamy**

The practice of polygamy has ancient origins and is not condemned by God. According to God's law, polygamy is not adultery because there is a marriage agreement in place with each partner. See Chapter 16 for details about the practice of Polygamy.
Jesus' Instructions Regarding Divorce

Jesus gives clear instructions to his disciples about divorce:

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt. 5:31-32 NIV).

"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery" (Mk. 10:11-12 NIV).

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:4-6 NIV).

Marriage is more than a sexual union; it involves a commitment in which both parties agree to belong to each other and to share their lives in a loving relationship.

Ephesians 5:22-25 teaches that, in order for God to bless a marriage, the husband must love his wife as much as he loves himself and the wife must recognize that it is God's will that her husband is to lead the family.

Jesus made only one exception in allowing divorce. The Greek word he used for that exception is porneia, which is translated into English as immorality, whoredom, harlotry, unchastity, fornication, adultery, lewdness, and uncleanness. Porneia includes all unlawful sexual acts, such as extramarital sex, premarital sex, homosexuality, and incest. By extension, it can refer to any act that demonstrates that one partner willfully abandons the precepts of the marriage agreement. Spouse abuse and desertion are two examples of attitudes and behaviors which violate God's law pertaining to a marriage.

The purpose here is to protect the victim whose mate has committed an immoral act. There are very real dangers and penalties that the victim may not be able to face, such as physical danger, unwanted pregnancy, serious diseases, and mental or emotional damage.

A person who divorces for porneia is not causing the guilty partner to be an adulterer or an adulteress, because the offending mate has already become one. Divorce for porneia is just reflecting the fact that the marriage contract has already been broken (See Deut. 22:13-27; Matt. 19:9).

Although divorce was allowed for porneia, it was not required. The person who repents can be forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice:
"The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (Jn.8:3-11 NIV).

Ideally, the sins of porneia should be solved through repentance and forgiveness whenever possible.

PAST SINS CAN BE FORGIVEN

God forgives past sins of ignorance:

"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30 NIV).

People who have been divorced and remarried before conversion begin their new life in Christ in their present married condition. God blots out all their past errors, including adultery:

"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" (Isa.1:18 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).

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

In today’s society we must use locks, safes, alarms, fences, guards, and electronic devices to protect private and public property from being stolen. This system of protection is a sad reminder that the eighth commandment is not universally being observed. God said from Mount Sinai, "You shall not steal" (Ex.20:15 NIV), but the world today is not heeding this command of God.

There are many reasons why people steal. Some steal because of hunger, but others steal because they are too lazy to work. And some simply steal as a method of getting something for nothing. Some feel they do not receive enough pay from their employer, so they justify stealing as payment that is due them; however, most steal because of greed.
Jesus plainly states that it is the evil man that covets the property of others:

"He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, . . ." (Mk.7:20-21 NIV).

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexual immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexuals nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1.Cor.6:9-10 NIV).

In his letter to the Ephesian Church, Paul declares:

"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Eph.4:28 NIV).

God places a higher value on human life than on material goods. Kidnapping (stealing a person) carried the death penalty, but the penalty for stealing property was restitution of the goods plus a specific fine depending on the value of the property and other factors:

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep" (Ex.22:1 NIV).

If the original property had been sold or destroyed and cannot be returned; therefore, restitution was more costly.

"If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—he must pay back double" (Ex.22:4 NIV).

Borrowing something with the intention of not returning it is stealing:

"The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously" (Psa.37:21 NIV).

Included in the letter and the spirit of the eighth commandment are extortion, fraud, and deceit for the purpose of illegally taking something from another person. See Lev.6:1-5; 19:11-13; Deut.19:14; 25:13-16; 27:17.

The biblical record shows it is the spirit of the law that is important. Desiring the things that belong to someone else is committing theft in the heart. Stealing is the taking of something that is not rightfully yours to take, no matter what it is.
THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Ex.20:16 NIV).

The violation of this commandment has been the root of much doubt, suspicion, and feelings of insecurity for mankind throughout the ages. People are not capable of telling the whole truth all the time because they lack perfect perception and recall. Therefore, God initiated a safety factor: "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (2.Cor.13:1 NIV). (See also 1.Tim.5:19).

God gave this law to protect the innocent from the inability of people to recall all of the truth and liars with malicious intent (Deut.17:6-7). Protection through this system depends on the character of the witnesses. With people who are trying to be honest, this law gives some measure of protection. However, because so many are not consistently truthful this law is virtually ineffectual in today's world:

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt.15:19 NIV).

The primary reason for the ninth commandment is to instruct people that they are not to knowingly lie. To tell untruths knowingly with the intent to deceive is a sin punishable by death. Even falsehoods told unknowingly can cause serious problems.

The English word false in Exodus 20:16 is translated from the Hebrew word sheqer, which can be translated as untruth, deceitful, deception by lying, and corruption of truth. Thus, a lie is a statement known to be untrue, that is made with the intent to deceive.

Satan introduced lying and deception to man and is actively promoting it today (Jn.8:44):

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph.6:12 NIV).

Satan doesn't want the laws of God written in the hearts and minds of mankind. He hates truth, which includes God's word. The parable of the wheat and tares is an example of how Satan creates complex situations to destroy God the Father's children (Matt.13:37-43). Although Satan's servants appear as righteous individuals, the Father knows his children and will eventually separate them from Satan's servants.

Satan is very effective at deception, because he mixes truth into his lies. God always tells the truth (Heb.6:18); thus, if Satan always lied, there would be no difficulty in discerning truth. However, Satan's goal is to confuse mankind by telling a mixture of truths, half-truths, and outright lies. Most of humanity follow this same pattern of deception by mixing truth with untruth to serve their own needs.
THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

When God created Adam and Eve, they were given free access to their needs, such as food, water, and shelter. Moreover, they were guaranteed equal access to the Creator yet they lacked the character to be content with what they had been given.

Humans have the ability to reason and the free will to choose and act but most are not satisfied with their share of life, which leads to looking at others and coveting what others have. Remember, Eve began coveting (unlawfully desired) the fruit of a tree that was not hers to have.

The tenth commandment expresses God's will concerning wrongful desires: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Ex.20:17 NIV). This commandment clearly defines unlawful desire and its violation as a root of other wrong feelings, attitudes, and actions, which lead to the breaking of other commandments. Covetousness is an unlawful desire to possess things that belong to others.

Covetousness is a root cause in this world of the 'have' and 'have-nots.' Because of covetousness, opportunity to succeed is controlled in almost every nation in the world. Selfish legislation, influence, customs, traditions, and manipulations have been used to control freedom and equality.

The key to godliness is contentment, which is the opposite of covetousness:

"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Eph.4:28 NIV).

"Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed [unlawful desire]; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk.12:15 NIV).

God shows that sharing is a way of life and love. Most people measure success by wealth, whereas God measures success by love.

Coveting involves more than things or power. Excessive desire of anything can be covetous: "Treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2.Tim.3:4 NIV). Faithful believers should have every reason not to serve desires of the flesh, because God is their source of help and balance.

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming" (Col.3:5-6 NIV).
Love overcomes covetousness. Love that comes from God's spirit is the most important gift a person can give to another:

"Do to others as you would have them do to you . . .. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked . . .. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Lk.6:31, 35, 37 NIV).

Indeed, the commandments are a tremendous blessing toward living a life that God blesses. They develop harmony in families, society, and life, which is what God wants for all the world to eventually have. But today, the elect represent a very small portion of humanity. They are the vanguard who are supposed to be living this way, upholding this way, and teaching this way. And they will have a part in teaching this way to the entire world.

THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS

In Matthew 22 Jesus Christ says that the whole law was held together by just two commandments:

"And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine. But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And second is like to it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt.22:33-40 KJV). See also Deut.6:5.

THE FIRST GREAT COMMANDMENT

"Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt.22:37-38 KJV).

The first part of this commandment says to "love God with all your heart." What does it mean to love God with your heart?

The Heart

The Bible indicates that the heart is the director of one's house or body. The heart is the place where thoughts are formulated, directed, and multiplied. And it is a place where ideas of various kinds direct the actions of the body. The heart is the center of an individual, where thoughts enter, grow, and expand.
Throughout the scriptures we see that the heart needs to be cleansed:

"The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done" (Gen.8:21 NIV).

Because the human heart is evil from its youth, how can we have a pure heart? The answer is that humans need a change of heart. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of God's promise to change the human heart as a part of God's new covenant with national Israel and the rest of humanity:

"For this is the covenant [agreement] that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb.8:10 KJV).

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Heb.10:16-18 KJV).

The Mind

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt.22:37-38).

Just as the temple was cleansed with blood by the priesthood, one's mind must be cleansed by the blood of Christ, because it is the present dwelling place of God's holy spirit. When this is done, the mind becomes pure and clean—a place where God, through his spirit, can dwell.

Because we are human, have free will, and a proclivity to sin, our hearts can be evil or good according to what we do with what enters into them. If teachings of evil or falsehood are internalized, they can bring forth the fruits of evil and death. Teachings of truth and good will bring forth fruits that result in eternal life. Whatever we see and hear enters into our mind. And if we do not put those things that are evil out of our minds, we will bring the death penalty on ourselves.

In Matthew 22:37, the English word mind is translated from the Greek word dianoia, which means wholly or with all your being. The scripture that Jesus quoted from says to love God with all one's might (i.e., with one's whole being). See Deut.6:5. To love God with one's whole being includes all that one is, as well as one's physical wealth. When one worships God with their whole being, God and his ways take priority over everything else in one's life.
The Soul

"And you shall love the Lord your God . . . with all your soul."

What is a soul? A human being is a soul. When "Christ poured out his soul to death," he poured out the part of his body that sustains life—the blood. Every part of our body depends on the blood, and the condition of our blood determines our health. When the blood no longer meets the necessities of the body, the body dies, just as Christ's body died after he poured out his soul (his blood).

"Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he [Christ] poured out his life to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa.53:12 NIV).

If the body is the soul, the essential part of soul is the blood. Moreover, the body takes direction from the heart and mind. If one has complete control of their mind, they can control their soul, body, or flesh, which makes it possible to overcome evil and love God. However, this is very difficult as we can see by looking at what the apostle Paul had to say about keeping the flesh under control and in subjection to the mind:

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.' (Rom.7:14-20 NIV).

"So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (Rom.7:21-25 NIV).

The Heart, Mind, and Body Connection

The heart and mind of a person directs the life of that person; therefore, it is very important to watch what we allow to enter into our hearts and minds. If we allow lies and hatred into our hearts and minds our minds will naturally direct our body to sin. In order to love God with "all your heart" you must strive to keep your mind full of the things of God and eliminate the things that oppose God and his way of life.
Matthew 22:37 could easily be translated as follows:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your life, and with all your thoughts."

How do you worship (i.e., show your love to God) with your whole existence? One way is to bring him gifts or offerings from your labors. Another and more important way is to keep your mind (God's holy place) free from all sin. One should replace all sin with the ways of God. But if you do not worship God with your abundance (physical substance), you are neglecting the first and Great Commandment.

If we love God with all of our being, we will share the fruits of our labor with him, our fellow Christians, and our fellow man in the form of gifts and offerings. More importantly, we will give of ourselves to help others who are in need. When we do this, we also obey the second Great Commandment to love our neighbors.

What is the one thing that causes your mind to be strong and able to control the rest of your body so that you can fulfill the first Great Commandment?

Strength comes from the spirit from heaven that washes away the past and endues us with the holy spirit that elevates us above the will of the flesh and the darkness that once engulfed us. If we are in submission to the holy spirit, we put the deeds of the flesh to death. Then, our souls can act in accordance with life:

"Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" (Rom.8:12-13 NIV).

The holy spirit is the governing power of mercy and justice that sees beyond the physical realm and establishes us as a holy person. The holy spirit enables us to obey the holy, righteous law of God:

**Romans 7:7-25 NIV**

"What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (vs.7-12).
"Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful' (v13).

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it' (vs.14-20).

"So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (vs.21-25).

THE EXAMPLE OF PETER

In order to love God with all our might and heart, we must first allow the holy spirit to direct our lives. Moreover, we must be in subjection and harmony with God through obedience to the truth. Thereby, our lives become perfect. This concept is conveyed in the following scripture:

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart" (1.Pet.1:22 NIV).

The only way humans can have control over the lust of the flesh (the physical body) is with the help of the holy spirit. With this help, one can establish a heart, mind, and power center that will have the power to direct one's life. Then, one's life will be in subjection to and in harmony with the things pertaining to gaining eternal life.

The key to eternal life is the first Great Commandment:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your life, and with all your thoughts."

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT

"And the second is like it [the first]: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt.22:39 NIV).
The second Great Commandment also commands us to love. It instructs us to love our neighbor as ourselves. The whole law is performed by loving God and loving one's neighbor. All the other commandments and laws of God that are meant to govern the behavior of humanity toward God and fellow humans are built on the foundation of these two Great Commandments.

When one is able to perform these two Great Commandments, one has performed all of the things God desires one to do, and the rest of the commandments and laws of God will become easy to perform. Moreover, one will have met all of the righteous demands contained in the Law and the Prophets.

If one truly understands these two Great Commandments, one will have no trouble understanding that it is necessary to obey the Ten Commandments and that they have not been done away with by Jesus Christ.

**EXAMINE YOURSELF**

To what extent do you personally love God? Remember that to love God with all your heart means to have a mind that has been cleansed from all sin, purged of false teachings and evil behaviors that lead to darkness and death, and filled with the goodness of God that will bring everlasting life.

To love God one must be striving to have one's entire life subject to the will of God. Moreover, one must love God with all of one's being and be a good steward of whatever things that God has given them.

**WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

Now that you know the biblical truth about the Ten Commandments of God and the law of God, what will you do? James, the brother of Jesus Christ, writes:

"Therefore to the one who knows to do good, and does not do it, to that one it is sin" (Jms.4:17).

Will you continue in sin or will you repent and turn from sin? 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 and C. E. Barrett
Today, most people who profess to follow the God of the Bible know virtually nothing about the hundreds of statutes, judgements, and commandments codified in the Bible or the oral law that explains them. This condition exists because most have been taught to dismiss these laws as ancient Jewish laws that have no relevance to Christians and even less to do with one's salvation because of the sacrifice of Christ.

Many people who seek to practice God's law have great difficulty in understanding not only the basic concepts and principles of specific laws but also how to apply them. Compounding the problem of understanding and applying God's law is the fact that it was written concisely with little or no explanation as to its application. Also, it was written in the ancient Hebrew language without sentences, punctuation, or vowels, which brings into question the meaning of many words and phrases when attempting to decipher the original text. Add to this that many centuries have passed since the law was recorded and that there is very little recorded history about the application of the law during the early centuries after its codification.

How can a person understand God's law and apply it today? In order to answer this question one must first understand some history surrounding the giving of the law and its application after it was given. This information is necessary not only to know how the law was understood and applied in ancient Israel, but also for the law to be understood and applied within the Sovereign Father's holy nation of kings and priests today.

ANCIENT ISRAEL

The Creator God gave Moses a set of ten foundational laws that he wrote on stone tablets. Moses was also given another set of laws which were based on the first ten and told to record them and teach them to the Israelites. It is these laws which form the written law of God:

"And the Lord said to Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give you tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that you may teach them" (Ex.24:12 KJV) See also Ex.31:18; Deut.4.12-14.

"And he said to Moses, Come up to the Lord, you, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship you afar off. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord: but they shall not come near; neither shall the people go up with him. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and
said, All the words which the Lord has said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord has said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words" (Ex.24:1-8 KJV).

"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, to take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you" (Deut.31:24-26 KJV).

The Creator gave Moses the task of explaining, implementing, and applying his law to the nation of Israel and Moses recorded the law of God exactly as it was dictated to him in a very concise manner without great detail or explanation.

In addition to his role as a prophet to Israel, he was given the role of its law-giver and administrator of the law. Because the nation of Israel was very large and the problems many, Moses soon found himself consumed with the administration of the law:

"And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. And it came to pass on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning to the evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that you do to the people? why do you sit alone, and all the people stand before you from morning to evening? And Moses said to his father-in-law, Because the people come to me to inquire of God: When they have a matter, they come to me; and I judge between one and another, and I make known the statutes of God, and his laws" (Ex.18:12-16 KJV Para.).

Although Moses was diligent in his pursuit of obedience to God in every detail, he had not learned to delegate authority to others:

"And Moses' father-in-law said to him, The thing that you do is not good. You will surely wear away, both you, and the people with you: because this is to big a task for you; you cannot do it alone. Listen to me, I will give you some advice, and God shall be with you: You stand before God for these people, so that you can bring their problems to him: And you make them aware of the ordinances and laws,
and show them the way in which they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover, you should search for men of ability from among the people, that fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all times: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they shall judge: And you shall make it easy on yourself, and let these men bear the burden with you. If you shall do this thing, and God command you, you will be able to endure, and so will the people and they will go in peace to their place” (Ex.18:17-23 Para).

Moses father-in-law put forth a very simple solution to his problem. He advised Moses on the institution of an efficient system of judges which would deal with the minor, day-to-day problems that would occur in Israel, leaving only the more difficult problems for Moses to deal with.

Moses took Jethro's advice and chose men who were ethical and moral, and who had the proper fear and respect for God. Moses set these men as judges for the people to appeal to in all matters concerning the application and explanation of God's law. If a problem was too difficult for the judges to render a decision, these men would bring the matter to Moses. If Moses could not resolve the issue, he would ask God for a decision.

Today, most nation's civil and criminal laws are interpreted and applied to specific situations through a system of judges. If a lower court cannot determine how to apply the law the case is passed upward through the court system until a ruling is made about how to apply the law in that particular situation. In similar fashion, the priests and judges of Israel interpreted God's law and applied it to specific situations. However, if those in authority could not make a determination and resolve an issue after reviewing the written and the oral law, the Creator God was asked to give a ruling.

A Difficult Issue

As the Israelites camped in the wilderness, a difficult issue arose about the Sabbath and how to apply the written law in a specific circumstance:

"And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks on the Sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said to Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp" (Num.15:32-35 KJV).
The written law regulating Sabbath observance states that it must be kept holy and performing certain physical activities during this day are prohibited. But, simply refraining from certain activities on the Sabbath does not totally fulfill the command to keep it holy. If one is to keep the Sabbath holy a further explanation of how to observe it is needed. Therefore, an authority must exist in order to define and explain Sabbath observance.

Judicial Authority and Power

The Creator sanctioned the system of judges that Moses set up to resolve problems about the application of the law within national Israel. These were the first men to sit in Moses' seat of authority and they were delegated authority directly under Moses. Therefore, their judgments had the same legal weight as if their judgments had come directly from Moses himself who derived his authority directly from the Creator God. This system of judges also included a court of last resort for matters too difficult to be decided at a lower level:

"If cases come before your courts that are too difficult for you to judge—whether bloodshed, lawsuits or assaults—take them to the place the Lord your God will choose. Go to the priests, who are Levites, and to the judge who is in office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict. You must act according to the decisions they give you at the place the Lord will choose. Be careful to do everything they direct you to do. Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left. The man who shows contempt for the judge or for the priest who stands ministering there to the Lord your God must be put to death. You must purge the evil from Israel. All the people will hear and be afraid, and will not be contemptuous again" (Deut.17:8-13 NIV). See also Ex.18:13-26.

The decisions that came from these men or from God through these men were binding on the specific matter in question, as well as binding on all other cases throughout national Israel that fit these particular circumstances. These decisions became law and any Israelite who failed to follow these rulings was to be put to death for showing disrespect for the judges and contempt for God and his law.

THE ORAL LAW

The foundational law that Moses received from God and then codified is called the written law. The decisions and judgements made and authorized by God through Moses, the judges, and the priesthood is called the oral law. It is clear from many scriptures that the oral law had just as much weight in national Israel as the written law.

Because much is not explained in the written law, it makes sense that some sort of commentary was always needed to accompany it. The oral law is a legal commentary on the written law and explains how it is to be applied.
The written law gives the foundational guiding principles and concepts, while the oral law reveals the practical application of the written law. The following are some foundational written laws which the oral law either explains or is used for determining implementation or application:

**Meat with Milk**

Three times the written law says, "You shall not boil a kid in his mother's milk" (Ex.23:19). See also Ex.34:26; Deut.14:21.

The English word *kid* is translated from the Hebrew word *gediy*, which means *a young goat*. Although the word *gediy* clearly identifies the animal to which this law applies, this law is not as simple to understand as it seems. The English word *milk* is translated from the Hebrew word *chalab*, which can be pronounced halab (i.e., milk) or haleb (i.e., fat) depending on whether or not vowel marks are used with the Hebrew letters. Whether the meaning of the Hebrew word is milk or fat makes a huge difference in the law's application. The oral law defines the word *chalab* as milk, hence the Jewish tradition of keeping milk and milk products separate from meat.

**The Beard Law**

"You shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shall you mar the corners of your beard" (Lev.19:27 KJV).

"And the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the priests the sons of Aaron. . . A leader shall not defile himself among his people to pollute himself; they shall not make baldness on their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh" (Lev.21:1, 4-5).

The beard law has two applications: one for men of the general population, and one for the priesthood. The scriptures say that the reason for wearing a full beard has to do with being holy. Although there is much said about the beard in the scriptures, there are many questions about the wearing and shaving off of the beard and the trimming of the mustache that go unanswered. Although the oral law does speak to many issues concerning the wearing of a full beard, there are many differing rabbinical opinions about this subject which obscure the true meaning of this law. Even though this is the case, the oral law still guides orthodox Jewish men in this matter.

**Tassels on Garments**

"The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the Israelites and say to them: Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes."
Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God” (Num.15:37-40 NIV).

The law says to put tassels/fringes on one's garments and also gives the reason they are to be put there. However, no instruction is given as to how many are to be applied, their length, or the material out of which they are to be made.

Within the Talmud and the Mishnah are many differing opinions as to the application this law. What is clear from the biblical record is that this law does not apply to the Sovereign Father's new creation, because they have his law written in their mind; therefore, this physical reminder does not apply to them. See 2.Cor.3:1-3; Heb.10:15-16; Rom.2:10-16; Jer.31:33-36.

A KEY

Without the oral law, most of God's laws which were codified by Moses could not have been implemented, applied, or practiced by national Israel with any degree of continuity. Moreover, without the stability of the oral law to guide the nation through the centuries, the interpretation and application of the written law would have fluctuated over time as each new generation attempted to interpret each law to fit their particular circumstances. Although some of the original oral law has been adapted through the centuries to fit new circumstances, the oral law as originally handed down is basically intact.

The oral law is a key to understanding the written law and the key to understanding much of what Jesus and the apostles taught. Without understanding that the oral law which existed during Jesus' time was the basis for the teachings and decisions of Jesus and the apostles, much of what they said seems to be independent thought that stands alone in concept and principle. However, when what they said is understood in the light of the written and oral law, each subject's true intent and the richness of concepts and principles blossoms forth in full beauty for all who have God's spirit to see.

How important is the oral law? Without understanding that the oral law was the basis for much of the teachings and decisions of Jesus and the apostle's, it is virtually impossible to know why they said many of the things they did. Without taking into account the oral law, the awesome truths put forth by Jesus and the apostles can only be partially understood.

JESUS AND THE LAW

Before Jesus' human existence, he was the Creator God who presented God's law to Moses in order for him to give it to the Israelites who were to be his holy nation of priests. When the Creator God came to earth as the Messiah, he clarified and magnified God's law and instructed those who would become his heavenly Father's holy nation of kings and priest in the spiritual concepts, principles, and application of the law:
"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt.5:17 KJV).

Many 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?

The English word *destroy* is translated from the Greek word *kataluoo*, 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 he did?

The English word *fulfill* 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.

"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 Para.).

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!

"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.).

Foretelling the advent of Christ, Isaiah was inspired to write:

"The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable" (Isa.42:21 KJV).

The English word *magnify* is translated from a Hebrew word which 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.

The God of Israel (who became Jesus Christ) gave the law of God (the Sovereign God), which includes the Ten Commandments. When he gave these laws, he fully intended for Israel to keep the letter of the law. In return, they would be given tremendous physical blessings. See Deut. chp.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).
Throughout Jesus' ministry, he expounded the precepts and principles of his Father's laws and explained that these laws must become a part of a person's attitude and behavior if one is to be a true follower of God and expects to enter the Family and Kingdom of God as a spirit-being.

When trying to understand what Jesus taught about the law, one must understand that he was explaining the law and its application to a people who were well versed in the written and the oral law as it applied to their generation.

The following are a few examples of what Jesus taught as new law and what he taught as an expanded understanding of existing law.

A New Judicial System

Just as Moses set forth a judicial system within Israel, Jesus set forth a judicial system to adjudicate problems concerning the law and its application within his Father's earthly family. Matthew, chapter 18, records the judicial system set in place by Jesus. When reading this chapter, it becomes evident that all who are of the Sovereign Father's household must participate in this judicial system at one level or another. None are exempt from service, because all are kings and priests in the Father's holy nation. Chapter 18 also shows that, if one willfully circumvents this legal system or does not pay attention to the tribunal's verdict, that person must be punished as dictated by the law that governs the elect. The judicial system set forth for the Father's household is new law and only applies, at this time, to those who are the Father's earthly children.

A New Commandment

"A new commandment I give to you, That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another" (Jn.13:34-35 KJV).

This new commandment of love goes beyond the love that normal humans have for each other and enters in to the realm of godly love, which Jesus Christ exhibited when he came to earth and sacrificed his life in order to free people from the penalty of sin.

Just Compensation

Under the laws of retribution given to ancient Israel, a person who wronged another person was to give just compensation for the damage that he caused:

"If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband willlay on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. And if
a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake. And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake" (Ex.21:22-28 KJV). See also Ex.21:29-31; Lev.24:18-22; Deut.1:16;16:18.

Jesus expands on this law to show its true moral and spiritual intent and therefore makes what he says oral law that is binding on the Father's elect:

"You have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say to you, That you resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also... That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:38-40, 45 KJV).

Because the scriptures do not contradict themselves we know that those who follow the teachings of Christ and the apostles must resist evil (Lk.6:43-46; Jn.5:28-29; Eph.4:27); therefore, there must be a logical explanation of Jesus' instructions, "But I say to you, That you resist not evil." The understanding of what Jesus said is found in the Greek language.

The English word evil is translated from the Greek word poneros, which is an adjective meaning hurtful, ethically evil, bad, or malicious. Moreover, poneros is used in the context of being compensated for a loss.

Jesus is explaining that, if a person has caused a loss to another individual and that person is seeking unjust compensation, the person at fault should not resist the injustice that is being perpetrated against them, but be willing to go beyond what is reasonable in order to fulfill their obligation to make restitution.

**Adultery**

"You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery: But I say to you, That whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt.5:27-28 KJV).

Jesus explains that the violation of the law concerning adultery is not only a physical act but can also be performed in one's mind through unrighteous desires (i.e., lust). Therefore, the act of adultery can be accomplished in one's mind whether or not the overt act is performed.
MOSES' SEAT

During Christ's time, the Scribes, Pharisees, and other educated men sat in Moses' seat. These men made judgements about a wide variety of subjects including the applications and violations of God's law and the establishment and maintenance of a Calendar Court to calculate and set the dates when the New Moons and the festivals were to be observed.

Remember that these men were scholars of the law and would not have knowingly misapplied the law, because they knew that the penalty for doing so was death. However, their interpretation of the written law was sometimes very harsh and lacked the true spiritual intent of the law, as evidenced by what Jesus said about them:

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not you after their works: for they say, and do not. Because, they impose on you harsh rules that they themselves do not even try to keep" (Matt.23:2-3 Para.).

Why did Jesus admonish the people to listen to the Scribes and Pharisees and submit to their authority? Jesus was just confirming what everyone already knew. No one in Judah contested the fact that the priesthood, the authorized elders, and the Scribes and Pharisees of the Sanhedrin were the absolute authority in such matters as worship and covenant law. They had the authority to set up and administer a court, calculate, and sanctify the New Moon and annual observances, and make other decisions concerning the application of God's law.

Jesus spoke of the authority of the Scribes and Pharisees in regard to "Moses' seat," which is an authority separate from the authority of Aaron's descendants (i.e., the Levitical Priesthood). However, it is important to understand that Jesus' instruction about Moses' seat of authority was given before his death and resurrection and before the establishment of the Sovereign Father's holy nation of earthly children who are subject to both the letter and the spirit of his law, which is superior to the oral interpretation of the written law as set forth by those who sat in Moses' seat.

What was Moses' function and responsibility? Moses was the nation's civil leader, lawgiver, judge, prophet, and teacher. History shows that many of the Scribes and Pharisees were not a part of the priesthood but were among the nation's civil leaders and teachers of the law (e.g., the apostle Paul who was a Pharisee prior to his conversion was not a Levite; he was a Benjamite).

Although the Israelites understood much about how to apply the written law in a physical sense through the oral law, most Israelites had little understanding of the written law's spiritual intent and meaning.

Much of what Jesus taught is an explanation of the spiritual intent and application of the law given to national Israel.
THE EARLY CHURCH

Where did the apostles get the authority to make decisions regarding doctrine, the conduct of the elect, and the administration of the church? They received their authority from Jesus Christ who is the chief administrator and high priest of the church. See Eph.5:23; Heb.3:1.

The scriptures clearly show that Jesus Christ delegated much authority and responsibility for the care and protection of his Father's chosen people to his apostles who then 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 any thing 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). See also Matt.16:18-19.

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, he said, All authority is given to me in heaven and in earth. 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 I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt.28:18-20 Para.).

The Apostles Judgements and Decisions

Jesus gave his apostles the responsibility to teach what he had taught them about the true intent of the written law. Therefore, much of what is written in the apostle's letters concerns explaining the written law and making judgements about attitudes and behavior in relation to spiritual character building as it applies to the Father's elect. Moreover, the apostles explanations and judgements are considered oral law and are just as binding on the elect as the written law, because the apostles were sitting in Christ's seat of authority over the Father's holy nation during their lifetime, just like those who sat in Moses' seat of authority over national Israel.

The Apostle Paul

The Book of Acts records that the apostle Paul was a pharisee who was taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers (Acts 22:3); therefore, Paul clearly understood both the written and the oral law as it applied during his time. Moreover, Paul used his authority as an apostle to make decisions about the written law, as well as to make law that is binding on the elect. The following are a few examples of Paul's decisions about various aspects of the written law as it applies to the Father's elect today.
Sexual Sins

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that has so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1.Cor.5:1-5 KJV).

Separation for Cause

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God has called us to peace " (1.Cor.7:14-15 KJV).

Avoid the Errant Brethren

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2.Thes.3:6 KJV).

LOTS

The use lots was a method through which those authorized to use it were allowed to ask questions of the Creator God and receive answers from him. This authorization is a major proof that the apostles were sanctioned by God the Father as the legal authority over his earthly children.

Decisions About Life and Death

There are two accounts that show the use of lots to determine the identity of a person responsible for a sin or a life threatening situation in which a person was either put to death or sent to his death. The first account shows the use of lots to determine who had violated God's instructions about the taking of spoils of war. When the responsible person was discovered, he was put to death (Jos.7:1-26). The second account concerns Jonah and his attempt to escape from a responsibility that God had given him. When the sailors (through the casting of lots) found that it was Jonah who was responsible for their life threatening situation, he was cast into the sea to die (Jonah 1:1-15). In both of these accounts, it was the Creator God who revealed truth through the use of lots.
The Proverbs and Lots

"One casts the lot into the lap; but all its decision comes from the Lord" (Pro.16:33 Para.).

This proverb clearly shows the use of lots to seek a decision from God in matters that could not be determined from the use of the facts at hand. Although it is not stated in this proverb, it can be assumed that those who sought a decision from God through the use of lots were in conformity to his ways, were authorized to access him through this method, and would abide by the decision he gave them.

"The lot causes arguments to cease, and divides between the mighty" (Pro.18:18 Para.).

For those who brought a matter before the Lord and sought insight, knowledge, or his decision in a matter and abided by what was revealed, the matter was settled and ceased to be a problem. Again, those involved in the matter were most likely righteous in their intention to discover truth and a righteous judgement.

King David and the Priesthood

In the first book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel, there are several accounts of King David and others seeking to understand the will of God regarding the division of the priesthood into their various functions. These accounts show that the method used to determine God's will in these matters was the use of lots, and that it was considered prudent to seek the will of God by this method concerning people and things which would impact how people would serve and worship God. See 1.Chron.24:31; 25:8; 26:14.

Choosing a Replacement for Judas

Shortly before the Festival of Pentecost in 30 A.D. and the bestowing of the holy spirit on those who were worthy of receiving it, the apostles selected a replacement for Judas who had killed himself:

"And they [the eleven apostles] selected Joseph who was called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And when they had prayed, and said, You Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, show which of these two men you have chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas through transgression fell. . . And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:23-26 Para).

The following are four very important things which are revealed in Acts 1:23-26:

1. The apostles were authorized to use lots in order to ascertain God's will in matters of importance.
2. The apostles selected two men whom they thought were qualified to fulfill the responsibilities of an apostle.

3. They asked God the Father to make the choice between these two men.

4. The method they used to have God's will revealed to them was the use of lots.

   It is logical that they would have used this method, because it had been used for centuries by the authorized civil and spiritual leaders of Israel to gain certain kinds of knowledge from God and to determine his will in certain matters. See also Lev.16:7-10; Num.34:13.

**THE EDICT OF ACTS 15**

"Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, You must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the holy spirit, and to us, to lay on you no greater burden than these necessary things; That you abstain from meats offered to idols and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if you keep yourselves, you shall do well. Fare you well" (Acts 15:24-29 Para.).

The edict of Acts, chapter 15 is undeniable proof that the apostles and elders had the authority to make decisions about the application of the written law as it applied to the early church and to all who would be called to salvation before Christ's return.

Whatever these men determined to be lawful and whatever they instructed to be observed was itself law and is to be followed by the elect. Therefore, the apostle's instructions and reprimands given to the early church set forth either oral law, written law, or guidelines which govern certain activities, attitudes, and behaviors of the elect. These must be followed if one is to be in harmony with the Father and Christ. See Matt.18:18-19.

Notice that all four of the items in the list of things that the Gentiles were to avoid concern the application of God's written law about the defilement of the body. The apostle Paul said the following to the Corinthians about the issue of defilement:

"Don't you know that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1.Cor.3:16-17 KJV Para.).
"What? know you not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, says he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is without the body; but he that commits fornication sins against his own body. What? know you not that your body is the temple of the holy spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1.Cor.6:16-20 KJV).

From the decision of Acts 15 and what the apostle Paul said to the Corinthians about the bodily temple, we can know that certain of the laws regarding the defilement of the body are still in effect for all who are considered the Father's holy children and that these laws have a spiritual and a physical meaning. See Ex.12:49; Num.15:16, 29.

A FAMINE OF THE WORD

Today, there is much confusion within both the Jewish and Christian religions as to the exact meaning and intent of much of the Bible, and there are countless opinions on any given topic found within the Bible. This situation makes it extremely difficult for those who are attempting to truly understand God's laws, precepts, and principles to do so. Where does one find a book, a teacher, or a group of people who truly understand God and his teachings? Are we living in the times spoken of by the prophet Amos?:

"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 for water, but of hearing 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. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst" (Amos 8:11-13 KJV).

Many professing Christians believe that Amos' prophecy about a famine of hearing God's word is speaking of the time during the great tribulation just prior to Christ's return. However, this assumption does not take into consideration the fact that the Two Witnesses noted in the Book of Revelation will be proclaiming God's truth and a warning message to the world with great power for three and a half years before Christ's return. See Rev.11:3-12.

The English word hearing in Amos 8, verse 11 is translated from the Hebrew word shama, a primitive root, which means to hear intelligently (often with implication of attention and obedience). Knowing that the Hebrew word shamar means more than just hearing sounds is the key to understanding the prophecy of Amos. The scriptures clearly show that God's word will continue to be proclaimed during the great tribulation by the Two Witnesses and God's people; therefore, the lack of hearing God's word in the context of this prophecy connotes a barrier which will not allow an understanding of God's word.
Although it is true that the time frame of Amos' prophecy covers the end of this age, this prophecy also covers many centuries prior to the end of the age. In fact, Amos' prophecy is also being fulfilled in this present generation.

It is true that, since the advent of the printing press, the Bible has remained the most published and read book in the world. The Bible has been translated into almost every language and distributed to billions of people. There is virtually no populated place on this planet where one cannot find a copy of the Bible. However, few people understand this book and practice the laws, precepts, and principles contained within its pages. If this were not true there would only be one church teaching one truth.

The simple fact is that we are living in a time when there is very little true understanding of God's word. Although there is not a famine of God's word on the printed page, there is a famine of understanding his word. During this age, hundreds of millions of people hear the Bible taught every day, but with virtually no explanation as to what the biblical text truly says and means.

Today, Conservative, Reform, and Orthodox Judaism and professing Christians claim conservatorship of the biblical text and each claims that the Creator 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 the biblical text says.

Although all factions of Judaism believe that some kind of oral law is necessary to make the Torah understandable and workable, many reject the belief that most of the Talmud dates back to Moses' time and seem to see the Talmud and the oral law as an evolving system in which successive generations of rabbis have the authority to alter the application of the written law as needed to fit current circumstances. But, Orthodox Judaism feels less free to ignore, modify, or change the oral law.

On the other hand, the vast majority of professing Christians believe that neither the written law nor the oral law applies to them and that they are free to worship God as they please and live their lives without any biblical constraints or fear of punishment.

A quandary of gigantic proportions faces everyone who truly seeks to understand the Bible in this age, because there seems to be no totally trustworthy human authority from which to gain infallible biblical knowledge. Given the fact that there is much confusion and divergent opinion about the biblical text among the various biblically based religions, the logical conclusion is that we are living in the times of Amos' prophecy—there is a famine of hearing (i.e., understanding) God's word. If this were not true it would be an easy task to find a trustworthy source of biblical understanding wherein there is no contraction or divergent opinion as to the meaning of biblical text.
An End to the Prophecy of Amos

The promise to bring an end to Amos' prophecy about the lack of understanding of God's word and the circumstances surrounding the ending of this prophecy are mentioned many times in the biblical record. The following two prophecies about the third Elijah show when Amos' prophecy will begin to end:

"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.).

Within these two prophecies are the keys to understanding the ministry of Elijah during the end of the age, the end of Amos' prophecy, and exactly what will be restored.

Why do the hearts of the fathers need to be turned to the sons and the sons to the fathers? What is it that needs to be restored? Both questions are answered by understanding why something needs to be restored. Restoration is only necessary when something has not been maintained in its original form. God's written law has not changed since it was given to Moses and recorded in the books of the law—God's law does not need to be restored because it is eternal. What has changed and in need of restoration is the understanding, teaching, and application of God's laws, precepts, and principles, which have either been lost or perverted through the centuries.

The biblical record is replete with God's admonitions for Israel to return to his law and way of life. During the time of Jesus, the understanding, teaching, and application of many of God's original laws, precepts, and principles had been so perverted that they were almost unrecognizable (See Matt.23:1-4). Understanding that the perversion of God's laws, precepts, and principles would continue until his return, Jesus asks if he will find the faith on the earth when he returns? See Lk.18:8.

After the death of the apostle John and the disappearance of the early church as an organized entity with a central governing authority, the teachings of Jesus and the apostles about God's laws, precepts, and principles were perverted to the point that very little is truly understood today about the written law and its physical and spiritual intent and meaning. Therefore, in order remove the confusion about what the Sovereign Father and Jesus Christ expect of each individual, a true understanding of God's law and his worship system must be restored.
The prophetic reference by Jesus to the restoration of all things surely includes a restoration of God's worship system which has been perverted since it was given at Mount Sinai many centuries ago. The restoration of God's worship system also includes a restoration of God's law, precepts, and principles which are necessary for a person to live a totally righteous lifestyle. Only the restoration of God's laws, precepts, and principles to their original physical and spiritual meaning and intent will bring an end to Amos' prophecy about the serious lack in people's understanding of God's word.

The message of the third Elijah is centered around the restoration of the truth of God. Therefore, we should expect the third Elijah to restore an understanding of how the worship system instituted at Mount Sinai and the one instituted by Jesus Christ work together for the salvation of anyone who will believe and worship God the Father in truth.

When these two aspects of the Father's worship system are restored and understood in the light of his plan for the salvation of humanity and are believed by those whom he calls to salvation, it can truly be said that the hearts of the fathers are turned to the sons and the sons to the fathers. Belief in and adherence to God's true worship system results in a return to a harmonious relationship between the fathers who taught righteousness (i.e., the Patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, the Apostles, and others) and the sons (i.e., those who are taught righteousness and believe).

**NO CENTRAL AUTHORITY**

Today, no one central authority on earth governs and guides either the followers of Judaism or the Sovereign Father's elect children in doctrinal unity. If this statement were not true, no organizational disunity or division over doctrine would exist within Judaism or among the various Sabbath observing individuals and congregations who claim to follow the teachings of Christ and the apostles. What we see today within both Judaism and the Sovereign Father's earthly family and holy nation of kings and priests is organizational disunity and doctrinal chaos.

After the death of Samson, the system of judges that Moses established seems to have fallen into disuse. At this point in the history of Israel, it is unclear what happened to the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the system of worship over which the priesthood were to officiate. However, biblical history shows that the northern tribes began to practice worship systems which were in opposition to God. This was a time when no central authority ruled in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes (Jdg.17:6).

Similar circumstances exist today while the Father's elect await the advent of the third Elijah who will restore all things. Today, no central spiritual leadership on earth guides the Father's holy nation of kings and priests in doctrinal unity like there was during the days of the early church. Jesus is in heaven, the apostles and elders of the early church are dead, and the elect of God are scattered throughout the earth as prophesied in Zachariah13:7.
The reality is that, regardless of whether these scattered elect worship the Father individually or in a congregation, all are doing what they think is right in their own eyes. So, what can we do about spiritual guidance and doctrine while working out our own salvation and waiting for the advent of the third Elijah, the Messiah's return, and our change to an immoral spirit-being in the Father's heavenly family?

**During Christ’s Ministry**

During Christ’s ministry, he explained and magnified the written law. Near the end of his ministry, he told the apostles that he would send the holy spirit to teach them all truth (Jn.14:25-26; 16:13). Much of the truth taught through the holy spirit is an understanding of the written law as it applies to the Father’s elect children.

Following Jesus’ example, the apostles taught the elect how to apply the written law in order to live in harmony with the Father, Christ, and other members of the Father’s earthly family. The decisions and judgements that the apostles and elders of the early church made were predicated on the following three important things:

1. Their knowledge of the written and oral law which had been handed down to them from the time of Moses
2. Christ’s magnification of the written and oral laws
3. Their knowledge of the new method of atonement for the total forgiveness of sin through the sacrificial blood of Christ

The decisions and judgements recorded in the New Testament are equivalent to the oral law handed down through the priests, judges, and prophets until the time of Christ. These decisions and judgements made by Christ and the apostles are just as valid and binding on the Father’s holy nation of kings and priests as the written and oral law were on national Israel.

The Creator God’s covenant with national Israel required that all Israelites imitate his attitude, behavior, and character—You shall be holy, because I am holy (Lev.19:2; 1.Pet.1:15-16). Because the Israelites were to be holy and maintain a holy state of existence in order to receive benefits, God revealed the laws that govern holiness and instructed them in the practice of these laws.

The laws of holiness given to the Israelites governed every aspect of their lives. Every circumstance was addressed either by a specific law, a concept, or a principle within the law. Therefore, when a holy state of existence was established through God’s decree, lawful ritual, or dedication to God, the holy condition was to be maintained through adherence to the laws of holiness.
If a person violated the law of holiness and if the violation was serious, the violator was to be put to death. The death of those who polluted the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant and the failure of national Israel to maintain a holy state of existence even after repeated warnings for them to be holy clearly show the importance of understanding how to become holy and maintain a holy lifestyle. See Lev.10:8-11; 11:45-47.

**Spiritual Israel**

Although those whom the Father calls to salvation during the gospel age have an agreement with him which is different from the Creator God's agreement with ancient Israel, this agreement still requires the Sovereign Father's earthly children to be holy as he is holy:

"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 to 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, priest, and ambassadors who represent his kingdom and way of life to humanity. Jesus says that the elect are the salt and light of the earth, and are the ones who are to preserve and show the way of righteousness (Matt.5:13-16). Because the elect are the salt and light of the earth, it is their duty to manifest the Father's way of life in everything they do, which includes understanding and practicing his law.

Because the elect are to understand and practice God's law as a way of life and teach it to their children and all others who are willing to be taught, it is our responsibility to learn this law and become proficient in its use. To do this we must study the available resources which record the written and oral law in order to determine what does and does not apply to the Father's elect.

**The Oral Law Today**

Today, much of the oral law that guided ancient Israel is recorded in the Babylonian Talmud, the Jewish Talmud, the Mishnah, and other Jewish writings. These records and writings are an excellent source for gaining understanding into the written and oral law. Although these records and writings contain the oral laws, they are also liberally sprinkled with man's laws and traditions which are not binding on the Father's elect.

When reading these records and writings, it is sometimes difficult to determine the difference between the oral tradition and the oral interpretation of the law, because the distinction between them has been blurred over the centuries. Therefore, when reading these resources, pay careful attention to the following warnings by Jesus and Paul:
"Some Pharisees and other Jewish leaders now arrived from Jerusalem to interview Jesus. "Why do your disciples disobey the ancient Jewish traditions?" they demanded. "For they ignore our ritual of ceremonial hand-washing before they eat." He replied, "And why do your traditions violate the direct commandments of God? For instance, God's law is 'Honor your father and mother; anyone who reviles his parents must die.' But you say, 'Even if your parents are in need, you may give their support money to the church instead.' And so, by your man-made rule, you nullify the direct command of God to honor and care for your parents. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, 'These people say they honor me, but their hearts are far away. Their worship is worthless, for they teach their man-made laws instead of those from God.'" (Matt.15:1-9 TLB). See also Mk.7:3-9.

Since the giving of the written law, many man-made traditions were invented and assigned equal weight with the written and oral laws by the spiritual leaders of the Jews. The Pharisees and other spiritual leaders of Christ's time had so perverted the application of some of God's law that, for all intents and purposes, the true intent and meaning of these laws had ceased to be understood and practiced by the people.

Paul warns that one must be extremely careful not to be swayed from God's truth through an acceptance of human philosophy and ideas which are not godly, but are worldly:

"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" (Col.2:8 KJV).

When reading the various Jewish writing about the oral law and the interpretation of the law, one must be very careful to discern between tradition and truth based on the instructions of Jesus and the apostles and through the guidance of the holy spirit.

Before the formation of the early church, those who worshiped the true God had only the written law and the oral law as explained and administered by the priest and those who sat in Moses' seat of authority to guide them in the application of God's law. Today, the Sovereign Father's holy nation has the written law and the written record of oral law as explained and administered by Jesus Christ and the apostles to guide them. Therefore, we are without excuse and must apply ourselves to learning and practicing what is holy.

One can neither understand many of the teachings of Christ and the apostles without first understanding the written and oral law as it applied to ancient Israel nor the true intent and meaning of the written law given to ancient Israel without the teachings of Christ and the apostles. This is because the teachings of Christ and the apostles and the written and oral laws are intrinsically bound together and each works together to explain the other. Therefore, in order to gain a clear understanding of any aspect of the law one must study both the biblical and the oral record of the law.
SUMMARY

Although some within the Father's holy nation of kings and priests have been given the responsibility to teach the elect (1.Cor.12:28; Eph.4:11-12). The ultimate responsibility to seek truth and to understand God's laws, precepts, and principles belongs to each individual who is a part of the Father's holy family. Therefore, our walk with the Father and Jesus Christ is an intensely personal journey that will either end in eternal and immortal life in the Kingdom of God or eternal death, depending on what each of us does during this physical life. Notice Paul and Peter's instructions about the effort required to secure salvation and be a responsible member of the body of Christ:

"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).

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" (2.Pet.3:18 KJV).

It is a fact that this generation of the Sovereign Father's earthly family of kings and priests is without a central authority on earth to guide their understanding of the written and the oral law. Today, there are many spiritual leaders and organizations teaching many conflicting opinions and doctrines about God and his law. Clearly, if any one of these opinions or doctrines is totally correct then opposing opinions or doctrines are incorrect. Because there are so many conflicting opinions and doctrines, discovering the absolute truth on any given biblical teaching is a difficult task and requires a total commitment to the study of God's word while working out our salvation.

For Conscience's Sake

Because no central authority exists on earth today to govern and guide the Father's elect children in doctrinal unity, there are areas of the written law that cannot be totally understood until such an authority is instituted either before or after Christ's return. Therefore, each individual must at some point form their own opinion and belief as to which laws do and do not apply and what constitutes proper physical and spiritual behavior before God. Moreover, after forming an opinion, each individual is then subject to their beliefs for conscience's sake:

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; 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 heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (1.Jn.3:18-21 KJV).
While speaking to the elect at Rome about fasting and food, the apostle Paul makes the point that each individual is responsible to make decisions according to the dictates of their conscience and is either condemned or justified accordingly:

"So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom.14:22-23 NIV). See also Job 27:6; 1.Cor.8:7-10; 10:27-30; 1.Tim.1:5; 3:9.

Because a major part of working out our own salvation is growing in the grace and knowledge of the Father and Christ (2.Pet.1:2-8; 3:18) in order to develop godly character in attitude and behavior, we must listen to our conscience when making a decision or taking an action that would impact our salvation. Although we are free to violate our conscience, we are not be free from the penalty imposed for violating it. Moreover, the violation of our conscience makes us guilty of sin and unless repented of will result in a death from which there is no return:

"To him one who knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jms.4:17 Para.). See Rom.6:23.

Regardless of the reason for violating our conscience, the result is a diminishing of our character and resolve to do what we believe to be correct at that moment in time. Therefore, a decision to conform to our conscience in spiritual matters is a safe decision, because we then have peace of mind in that we have remained true to our beliefs and our character and resolve are kept intact before God.

Your Future

If you are truly called to salvation during this age, your future beyond this physical life hangs in the balance; therefore, it incumbent for you to make the best decisions that you can about biblical doctrine and the way the Father expects you to live your life. The only way to gain the information on which to base sound decisions and know what is expected of you is to diligently study and meditate on the things that are written in the Bible:

We are cautioned many times in the biblical record to not trust our salvation to any other person and to be careful about what we come to believe about biblical doctrine. See Psa.118:8-9, 146:3; Jer.9:4; Matt.7:15,16:6; Phil.3:2; Col.2:8; 2.Pet.3:17. Through diligent prayer, study, and meditation on God's words and the guidance of the holy spirit, anyone who is truly one of the Father's elect can obtain the physical and spiritual knowledge contained in the law which is necessary for their salvation:
"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).

Once you have made a thorough study of a subject and are satisfied that a proper conclusion has been reached, you must then practice what you have learned. However, if you come to understand more truth about the subject or that what you believe is false, an adjustment must be made to conform to truth.

By B.L. Cocherell
How can a person determine which of the laws contained in the agreement with ancient Israel apply to the elect today? In order to determine which laws must still be observed and which laws are not to be observed, each law should be separated into its individual category and analyzed according to the guidelines given in Isaiah 28:9-13, Acts 15, and the scriptures which show the liberty the Father's children have under their agreement with him. Each of God's laws can be placed in one of the following five categories:

- Laws about the temple and the priesthood
- Laws about the sacrificial system
- Laws about justification
- Laws governing ancient Israel
- Laws about a righteous attitude and behavior

1. The Temple and the Priesthood

Without a temple and the Levitical priesthood to officiate in the temple, no law requiring the existence of the temple and the Levitical priesthood can be practiced by the elect or anyone else. Moreover, none of the laws concerning the temple or the Aaronic priesthood can be applied to the elect, because the elect are God the Father's royal priesthood and holy nation:

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into the wonderful light" (1.Pet.2:9 Para.).

2. The Sacrificial System

Without an official temple and a priesthood, none of the sacrifices can be offered to God.

3. Justification

The sacrificial system whereby justification was obtained does not exist under the new agreement instituted by Jesus Christ. The justification through the sacrificial system has been superseded by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ through which all of humanity can now be justified before God. See Heb.10:1-12; Acts 13:38-39; 15:1-41.
4. National Israel

The nation of Israel does not exist today as it was originally established at Mount Sinai, and a new agreement has been established by Jesus Christ; therefore, none of the laws about the governing of the civil nation of Israel are legally binding on the elect today. These laws include the laws about circumcision, wearing tassels, placing the ten commandments on the door post, property rights, observing the year of release and the jubilee year, and more.

5. Righteous Attitude and Behavior

All laws God gave to the Patriarchs and ancient Israel about a righteous attitude and behavior are still valid and should be obeyed by the elect. These laws are not evil or unjust; they are the laws of love for the elect and our neighbors. The only thing that would prevent us from obeying these laws would be circumstances beyond our control.

The following are some of the many laws pertaining to a righteous attitude and behavior under God’s first agreement with national Israel that are obviously a part of the new agreement:

Marriage and Sex Laws

The laws governing marital and sexual relationships are to be observed by the elect. Moreover, the importance of these laws and their physical and spiritual implications were explained by Jesus and the apostles.

Dietary and Health Laws

All laws regarding diet and health are to be observed by the elect of God because they are empirical physical laws, which must be observed to keep from defiling the temple of God—a Christian’s physical body.

The Observances and Holy Convocations

Although some of the events that the commanded observances and holy convocations picture have been partly fulfilled, the biblical record indicates that much of their symbolism is still valid for today, and some of their prophetic meaning and events are yet to be fulfilled. In addition, the historical and biblical records clearly show the early church observed these days. See Col.2:16-17.

Civil Matters

The elect are aliens, strangers, and ambassadors on this earth and are powerless to enforce God’s law outside the body of the elect until such power and authority is given at the return of Christ. See Rev.11:15; 20:4-6.

The elect are aliens, strangers, and ambassadors on this earth and are powerless to enforce God’s law outside the body of the elect until such power and authority is given to them at Christ’s return. See Rev.11:15; 20:4-6.
The elect (both Jew and Gentile) are instructed to obey the civil laws of the land in which they live. See Matt.17:24-27 and the example of the apostle Paul about civil law. The only time a person should disobey a civil law is when such a law is in direct conflict with God's law.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

There are many laws noted under the first agreement with national Israel that are not specifically mentioned in the New Testament as being a part of the new agreement established by Jesus Christ; nonetheless, they are a part of its terms and conditions. Listed below are some additional guidelines for determining whether or not a particular law must be practiced:

• Has the law been canceled or suspended by a direct "thus says the Lord", an act of God, or circumstances beyond our control?
• Has there been a change in the law and/or the method of its observance? A good example of this is the Passover and the observance of the annual festivals.
• Has the need for the particular law been eliminated? For example, the need for a Passover sacrifice has been eliminated, because the sacrifice of Christ now forgives sin and takes away its penalty?
• Has the law been changed so that the physical act or symbolism is no longer required? For example, wearing tassels is no longer required as a reminder of the commandments.
• Is the law made invalid by the new agreement? For example, animal sacrifice can no longer atone for sin.
• Is it impossible to perform the act or the law under present conditions? For example, the temple worship system cannot be performed, because a temple and its priesthood no longer exist.

Prove All Things

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1.Thes.5:21 KJV).

By B. L. Cocherell
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HOLY ONES AND GOD'S LAW

All people must make decisions about their attitude, behavior, and life, but only the Sovereign Father's earthly children must make daily decisions that affect their eternal existence. These everyday decisions concern their personal attitude and behavior toward their heavenly Father, their Savior, and other people.

Every choice, thought, and action of each child of God is being weighed against the empirical laws and standards that the Father has set in place to govern the attitudes and behaviors of those who are a part of his sacred realm.

There is no dispute among historians that the Father's elect of the first century closely followed the worship system that the Jews followed and conducted their lives in compliance with most of the laws contained in the Torah. However, as the centuries passed and the teachings of the early church faded and then disappeared, there arose many differences of opinion among those whom the Father called to worship and serve him in regard to what was expected of them in attitude, behavior, and physical and spiritual compliance to his laws, precepts, and principles.

Today, there is much controversy and confusion over how to worship and serve the Sovereign Father and his son and how to live a holy lifestyle; therefore, many of the elect resort to emotion to determine their individual beliefs on the subject.

Will the Father accept any form of worship and service to him as long as one is sincerely trying to please him or does he expect his people to worship and serve him and conduct their lives in a very specific manner?

The answers to these basic questions are easily found and are not confusing if a person is willing to search the scriptures and allow the holy spirit to guide them into all truth. See Jn.16:13.

Although the edict of Acts 15 shows us that the method for being justified is different under the gospel age agreement from what it is under the agreement with national Israel, many of the rules concerning how to live a holy lifestyle today are the same as they were in ancient Israel. Moreover, each member in the Father's holy family and nation of kings and priests is an ambassador who represents the Kingdom of God on earth.

God's law sets forth very strict guidelines for human behavior along with a promise of peace, happiness, and prosperity for those who follow it. But, exactly what God's law is and how it should be followed has been greatly argued since the days 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 practice God's law. Moreover, many theologians proclaim that Christians no longer need to practice the laws that were given to ancient Israel, because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the end of the law and has released Christians from any obligation to practice it.

Is this true? Did the laws of God cease to exist with the death and resurrection of Christ? What, if anything, do the laws that were given to ancient Israel have to do with being holy or the practice of a pious life? What does the Bible say about these vitally important subjects? This chapter shows what the Bible teaches about the importance of God's law in regard to being holy and practicing a pious life.

BECOME HOLY

While instructing the nation of Israel on how they should live their lives as his kingdom of priests and his holy nation, the Creator God told them to be holy because he was holy (Lev.11:44-45). The apostle Peter repeated this same instruction to the Sovereign Father's holy nation of kings, priests, and ambassadors (1.Pet.2:9-10). See also 1.Pet.1:13-16.

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. These definitions may be accurate but they do not give a detailed explanation of what it means to be holy or what it means to practice a holy lifestyle.

Because the instruction to be holy as God is holy is given to all who serve God, it is important to understand what it means to be holy and 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 that govern being holy.

In order to fully explain this vitally important subject, this study answers the following important questions about being holy and practicing holiness:

• What is it that defines what is holy and what is unholy?
• What is it that makes God, a thing, or person holy?
• How does a person become holy?
• How do you know if you are holy?
• How can a holy person be recognized?
• What is holiness and how does one practice holiness?
This chapter explains the reasons God gave his law to humanity and it differentiates being holy under the Creator God's covenant with national Israel from being holy under God the Father's agreement with those he calls to participate in the first resurrection under the gospel age agreement.

HEBREW AND GREEK WORDS

In order to understand exactly what it means to be holy and what the practice of holiness is and is not under the gospel age agreement, it is important to have a basic understanding of the Hebrew and Greek words used in the biblical record to define this sacred state of existence. The following are summary definitions of Hebrew and Greek words that express a state of holy existence before and after the advent of the Messiah.

The following are Hebrew words for the various states of being sanctified and being holy.

qadash:

Qadash means to be hallowed, holy, sanctified, to consecrate, sanctify, prepare, and dedicate. Qadash is a denominative verb, which connotes a state of being that belongs to the realm of the sacred. The word qadash is derived from the root qdsh, which itself is derived from qd, which means cut. Although it is difficult to support from the limited use of qdsh in its singular form, the use of the word qadash in many scriptures seems to have the sense of something being separate, divided or apart from in order to delineate the realm of the sacred from that which is common or profane. Thus, qadash is a state of being that is separate and distinct from the common or profane.

qodesh:

Qodesh means a condition of being apart or being separate from, holiness, sacredness, hallowed, or holy. The noun qodesh connotes the concept of a condition of holiness (i.e., the basic nature of that which belongs to the realm of the sacred and is distinct from the common or profane).

qadosh:

Qadosh means holy, holy one, or saint. The adjective qadosh suggests something that is intrinsically sacred or something that has been admitted to the realm of the sacred by divine decree, lawful ritual, or dedication to God. Qadosh connotes that which is distinct from the common or profane.
hasid:

Hasid means *holy one, godly or saint*. It is derived from the word *hesed*, which means *kindness, mercy, love, and loyalty*; these are all characteristic of God. The Hebrew word *hasid* connotes someone who has the characteristics of God and is loyal to God.

The following are Greek words for the various states of being sanctified and being holy.

hagios:

Hagios means *sacred, physically pure, morally blameless, consecrated, holy, or saint*. The word *hagios* suggests that which is intrinsically sacred in the same sense as the Hebrew word *qadash* connotes a state of being that belongs to the realm of the sacred (i.e., something that is separate and distinct from the common or profane).

hagiasmos:

Hagiasmos denotes a state of purity in the physical sense.

dikaiosune:

Dikaiosune in its simplest definition means *justification* and pertains to being in compliance with God's law (i.e., being blameless). However, the definition of dikaiosune is much more complex when used in combination with holiness.

hagiosune:

Hagiosune means *the quality of holiness*.

aletheia hosiates:

Aletheia hosiates means *to be living a truly pious life* (i.e., holiness, a life in compliance with God's law).

The words *holy, holy one, and holiness* as used before and after the advent of the Messiah are different ways of expressing a condition of existence that is separate from the natural world and is in harmony with the attitude, behavior, and character of God and the dimension of existence that God inhabits.

**DEGREES OF BEING HOLY**

There are many different Hebrew and Greek words used in the scriptures to describe the condition of being sanctified and being holy. The meanings of these words are tied to the context in which they are used. When these words are understood in context it is clear that there are different degrees of being holy.
All people and things set apart to serve God are considered holy. However, not all people and things are equal in their holy status (i.e., some people and things are more holy or less holy than others). Moreover, the holy status of people and things is shown throughout the Bible to fall into the two following categories:

- There is the degree to which someone or something is more holy or less holy with the spirit-power of God expressed on or within, which demands that one show reverence and respect for that which is holy (e.g., The High Priest, the Temple, the Holy of Holies, and the Ark of the Covenant).

- There is the degree to which someone or something is more holy or less holy in the cultic sense (i.e., great devotion to a person, idea, or thing, formal religious veneration, worship as a system of religious beliefs and ritual), which demands that one show reverence and respect for that which is holy (e.g., God's name, God's law, the Sabbath, and the office of the High Priest).

Without understanding that there are different degrees of being sanctified and being holy one cannot understand the instructions given in the biblical record concerning these physical and spiritual conditions or why these conditions are dependant on and inseparable from obedience to God's physical and spiritual laws. The following are examples of the varying degrees of being sanctified and being holy:

**Holy Ground**

When Moses first encountered the Creator God at the burning bush, he was told to remove his shoes because the ground he was standing on was holy and that he was not to come any closer to God's presence in the bush (Ex.3:1-6):

"And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy [qodesh] ground" (Ex.3:3-5 KJV). See also Josh. 5:13-15.

The English word *holy* in verse 5 is translated from the Hebrew word *qodesh*, which means *a condition of being apart or being separate from, holiness, sacredness, hallowed, holy*. The noun *qodesh* connotes the concept of *a condition of holiness* (i.e., the basic nature of that which belongs to the realm of the sacred and is distinct from the common or profane).
The very earth surrounding the burning bush was holy, but what was it that made this place different from any other place on earth? This place was different because it had been set aside for holy use. Although the ground where Moses stood was holy, the ground was not as holy as the burning bush where God's spirit-presence resided while he spoke to Moses.

In the account of Moses and the burning bush, there are two distinct expressions of being holy. Although both the ground and the burning bush were considered holy, one place was more holy than the other. The ground where Moses stood was holy to a lesser degree, because it could be stood on if respected as holy (Moses took off his shoes as a sign of respect). The burning bush was holy to a higher degree; Moses could not approach it because of God's spirit-presence residing there while he spoke to Moses.

Our God is Holy

"Exalt you the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy [qadosh]. Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call on his name; they called on the Lord, and he answered them. He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar; they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them. You answered them, O Lord our God: you were a God that forgave them, though you took vengeance of their inventions. Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy [qodesh]" (Psa.99:5-9 KJV).

We know that God is holy because he says he is (Lev.11:44-45) and we know that no one can look upon the face of God in his glorified form and live (Ex.33:20). We also know that Jacob wrestled with God and saw his face (Gen.32:24-30) and that Abraham not only talked with God but ate a meal with him (Gen.18:1-33), as did Moses and seventy of the elders of Israel (Ex.24:9-11). But, how could these men interact with the Creator God whose very presence in his glorified state destroys the physical existence? How can these seemingly contradictory events be reconciled?

God was still holy when he walked on earth among men; however, the degree to which his holy-presence (i.e., the spirit-power of his presence) expressed itself in the physical world was dramatically reduced in order to protect the physical existence from destruction. The degree to which something is holy and the degree of spirit-power (energy from the sacred realm) that a holy being expresses at a given time is apparently controlled to fit a particular set of circumstances.

The power of the Creator God's presence was controlled when Jacob wrestled with him, when Abraham shared a meal with him, and when Moses and the seventy elders met with him and ate with him on the mountain. These events are evidence that God who is holy can and does control the energy produced by his holy state of existence.
Holy Objects

The power of God's holy presence can be expressed to different degrees in objects depending on the object's function. The deaths of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, which was caused by their bringing an unholy thing into the tabernacle (Lev.10:1-2) and the deaths of 50,070 men of Beth-shemesh, which was caused by their looking into the ark of the covenant (1.Sam.6:19), show that these holy objects had a high degree of spirit-energy residing on and within them.

Holy objects, such as the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant must be shown a high degree of respect and honor because of their most holy condition and high degree of God's spirit-power and presence. To defile or show disrespect for these types of holy objects in a physical way results in death. See Lev.22:1-3.

The establishing of boundaries around Mount Sinai to protect the people and their animals while God's presence was there (Ex.19:23) is an example of something being set apart for a holy use without having divine energy imparted to it.

Holy Concepts and Principles

There are many scriptures that speak of holy concepts and principles; these are not tangible objects, but such concepts and principles are nonetheless holy. The scriptures contain laws that have concepts and principles that go beyond physical obedience; they speak to holy concepts and principles which must be considered along with their physical practice. These laws must be shown great respect and honor because they are a part of God's worship system.

"And he said to me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile . . ." (Ezk.43:7 KJV). See also Ex.20:7; Lev.20:3; 22:31-33.

"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.20:7 KJV).

God's name is holy because his name defines his sacred being and character and must be respected and honored. Moreover, to not respect and honor his name shows contempt for God himself.
"And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee to you; and you shall return every man to his possession, and you shall return every man to his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you: you shall not sow, neither reap that which grows of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of your vine undressed. For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat the increase thereof out of the field" (Lev.25:10-12 KJV).

This law pertains to a whole year that is holy. Not only must certain physical things be done during this year but also respect and honor must be given because this time is holy and set aside for a holy purpose.

The prophet Ezekiel recorded the following about the age after Christ's return when the Levitical priesthood would again teach God's ways:

"And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezk.44:23 KJV).

Ezekiel's prophecy about the priesthood teaching the difference between the holy and profane speaks to every aspect of the law. This includes teaching the concepts and principles about being holy.

The apostle Paul said, "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom.7:12 KJV). We know that to violate God's holy law results in the death of the violator (Rom.6:23; 1.Jn.3:4). God's law is holy in both the physical and the cultic sense and therefore must be shown reverence and respect as a sacred thing.

The apostle Paul's encounter with the High Priest and his acknowledgment of the High Priest's person and office as being holy (Acts 23:1-5) shows the respect and honor due to a holy person and his office.

Sanctified for Holy Use

The verb qadash is frequently used to describe the condition of sanctification that is caused through lawful ritual. Whether they be people, objects, or animals, all things that God directly sanctifies or allows to be sanctified (i.e., consecrated, set apart for his sacred use) are considered to be in a holy state of being and are governed by a specific law that applies to their function, responsibility, use, and degree of holiness.

Certain articles associated with the tabernacle and sacrificial system of worship were consecrated to God and were recognized as being most holy (Ex.29:21, 37; 30:29), and anything or anyone that touched these holy articles became holy through association (Ex.29:37; 30:29; Lev. 6:18, 27); however, this does not necessarily mean that all sanctified people, objects, or animals are holy in the sense of having spirit-energy present on or within them.
There were many things God considered holy in ancient Israel, such as the whole nation of Israel (Num.16:1-3), Aaron's priestly clothing (Ex.28:2-4; 29:29), the Levitical priests and their clothing (Lev.8:30), the tithe of the land (Lev.27:30), the sacrifices and offerings (Ex.29:34; Lev.6:15-18; Num.6:20), the Nazarite (Num.6:1-8), the water of jealously (Num.5:17-29), certain firstborn animals (Num.18:17), and the holy prophets (Lk.1:70; Acts 3:21; 1.Pet.1:21). All of these were holy, but not all were holy to the same degree. All did not have the same degree of divine energy as the Creator God, the tabernacle, the holy of holies, and the ark of the covenant. Many things that are holy have no inherent spirit-energy present. Such things are holy from the aspect of belonging to the sphere of the sacred in the sense that they are part of worship and obedience to God.

Being sanctified for a holy purpose and being holy are in reality two completely different things, and the power of God’s presence and his spirit-energy can be expressed to different degrees in people and in objects depending on the function, responsibility, or use of what is sanctified or holy. Being sanctified and being holy are not just a physical or just a spiritual status; both sacred conditions can be expressed to different degrees in both dimensions of existence.

THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL

The primary problem most people have in defining and understanding the sacred state of being holy and what constitutes the practice of holiness is understanding what kind of a being God is and what kind of character he has. Because the scriptures say that God created man in his own image, most people think of mankind as having personality traits similar to God; this may be true in some small sense; however, the scriptures tell us that mankind in its present state does not resemble God in attitude, behavior, or character. In a lamentation and prophecy about the tribe of Ephraim God says, “I am God, and not man; the Holy One [the qadosh] in the midst of you” (Hos.11:9).

In Hosea 11:9 God is called the qadosh. Unlike humans, God is intrinsically holy; he is a superior being who lives in a superior dimension of existence. God is distinct from mankind in that God is a spirit-being with a value system that is intrinsically holy, but mankind's value system is intrinsically unholy:

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen.6:5 KJV).

Although the natural tendency of mankind is bent toward evil attitudes, behaviors, and character, it is God's fervent desire that mankind adopt his value system and become holy as he is holy and receive the benefits of practicing his holy way of life:
"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).

The Creator God's title "The Holy One of Israel" is mentioned many times in the context of national Israel's failure to pay attention to his instructions concerning how to live a holy life. Israel's constant rebellion shows the stark contrast between holy thought, character, and behavior and the natural human condition.

"This is a rebellious people, deceitful sons, unwilling to listen to the Lord's law. They say to the seers, See no more visions! and to the prophets, Do not give us more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, turn from this path, and stop talking about the Holy One [the qadosh] of Israel! Therefore, this is what the Holy One of Israel says: Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression and perversity; this lawlessness will become like a high wall for you, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant" (Isa.30:9-13 NIV). See also 2.Kg.19:22; Isa.1:4; 17:1; 48:17.

This prophecy about the tribes of Israel shows that there is an absolute separation between the holy and unholy; the two are not comparable and are absolutely separate in action and outcome.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ANCIENT ISRAEL

Israel was the nation God chose to begin his redemptive work to the world. They were to be an example of his way of life that brings abundant happiness, prosperity, and eternal life to those who faithfully practice it. However, in order for national Israel to fulfill their purpose as God's representatives on earth, they had to become holy as he is holy and learn his way of life.

Chosen to be Holy

"For you are an holy [qadosh] people to the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be a special people to himself, above all people that are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love on you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn to your fathers, has the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut.7:6-8 KJV). See also Isa.43:1-3.

The Israelites were not offered the awesome privilege and opportunity to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation because of their numbers or physical or mental abilities. This great privilege and opportunity was bestowed on them because of a promise that God had made to the patriarch Abraham.
"Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar 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 [qadosh] nation" (Ex.19:5-6 KJV).

The English word holy in verse 6 is the Hebrew word qadosh, which means holy, holy one, or saint. This shows that the Israelites are to be admitted to the realm of the sacred and become sacred by divine decree.

The Creator God's promise to make the Israelites a kingdom of priests and a holy nation has two conditions: their obedience to whatever he tells them to do and their keeping of the agreement that he would make with them. Only then would they become his kingdom of priests and his nation of holy ones.

Be Holy, for I Am Holy

In Leviticus, chapter 11, 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 [qadash] yourselves, and you shall be holy [qadosh]; 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).

In verse 44, the Israelites are told to sanctify themselves and be holy because God is holy. The English word sanctify is translated from the Hebrew word qadash, which means to be hallowed, holy, sanctified, to consecrate, sanctify, prepare, or dedicate. Qadash is a denominative verb which connotes a state of being that belongs to the realm of the sacred.

What seems clear from the use of the Hebrew word qadash is that the Israelites were to abandon their Egyptian lifestyle and enter God's sacred realm through practicing the holy lifestyle that he set forth in his law.

In verses 44 and 45, the Hebrew word qadosh is used to express what God is and what the Israelites were to become. God is qadosh; he is intrinsically sacred and holy and is superior to mankind in quality of existence, but the Israelites were to become qadosh (i.e., that which has been admitted to the realm of the sacred by divine decree or lawful ritual or dedication). The Israelites were to become as God is, but to a lesser degree, because mankind is physical but God is spirit. The Israelites were to be holy and distinct from the common or profane.
The Creator God would make the Israelites a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex.19:5-6), and he told them that they must be holy—they were commanded to practice holiness: "you shall be holy."

"And you shall be holy [qodesh] men to me: neither shall you eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs" (Ex.22:31 KJV).

The Israelites were to be holy and refrain from eating that which was determined to be unholy (i.e., not fit for human consumption). They were to comply with this law so that their sacred nature of existence would not be contaminated, which would have caused them to be removed from the realm of the sacred.

Leviticus, chapter 11, verses 45 and 47 show that eating certain animals will defile a holy person, which is the reason that God gave the laws concerning the animals that can and cannot be eaten:

"For I am the Lord that brought you out of Egypt, to be your God; therefore, you shall be holy [qadosh], for I am holy [qadosh]. This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth: To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten" (Lev.11:45-47 KJV) See also Lev.7:19-27.

The Israelites were to be a holy people because God had separated them from among the peoples of earth in order for them to be his kingdom of priests and his holy nation, which would represent him and his way of life to all other people on earth:

"And you shall be holy [qodosh] to me: for I the Lord am holy [qadosh], and have severed you from other people, that you should be mine" (Lev.20:26 KJV).

The Sovereign God and the Creator God are revealed as the personification of all that is good. God is totally good in every aspect of being, which is the opposite of that which is evil. Just as the Creator God called national Israel to become a holy people, God the Father calls men and women today to become holy as he and his son are holy.

The Sovereign God had the Creator God make mankind appear similar in physical appearance to their own image: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . .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). Moreover, God intended for mankind to acquire a god-like attitude, behavior, and character, which is why a system of law and worship was developed for them to practice. God's law and system of worship made it possible for the Israelites to model their attitude, behavior, and character after his and to fellowship with him, learn his plan for the salvation of humanity, and practice a holy lifestyle.
The Sabbath is Holy

"And he said to them, This is that which the Lord has said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy [qodesh] Sabbath to the Lord: bake that which you will bake today, and boil that you will boil; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning" (Ex.16:23 KJV).

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy [qadash]" (Ex.20:8 KJV).

"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 [qodesh] 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. These are the feasts of the Lord, even holy [qodesh] convocations, which you shall proclaim in their seasons" (Lev.23:1-4 KJV). See also Lev. 23:5-37.

What is it that makes the Sabbath and the commanded convocations extremely holy? We are told in Genesis 2:1-3 that the Sabbath was created as holy time; therefore, it is God who makes the Sabbath and the commanded convocations holy:

"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).

Here, we see the weekly cycle being established. The first six days are noted as work days and the seventh day is defined as a day of cessation from labor (i.e., a Sabbath).

In verses 2 and 3, the words blessed and sanctified hold a vital key to understanding how God the Father and Jesus Christ view the Sabbath.

The English word blessed is the Hebrew word barak, which means to kneel, to praise, or to salute. This verb seems to connote 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 English word sanctified comes from the Hebrew word qadash, which means to be hallowed or holy, to consecrate, to prepare, or to dedicate. The verb qadash connotes the state of something belonging to the realm of the sacred. Thus, the Sabbath is different from and outside of that which is common or profane.
The divine act of blessing and sanctifying this 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 as a part of its existence—the Sabbath is holy; therefore, the Sabbath has a unique relationship with God.

Because the Sabbath is holy, God set rules for its observance. These rules not only serve as guides for Sabbath observance but also serve as reminders that the Sabbath must not be treated as an ordinary work day because it is holy time that must be respected. See Ex.16:23; 20:8-11; Isa.58:13-14.

"You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy [qodesh] to you: everyone that defiles it shall surely be put to death: for whoever does any work on the Sabbath, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of cessation, holy [qodesh] to the Lord: whoever does any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Ex.31:14-15 Para.).

Under the law, the death penalty was only administered to those who had committed a capital crime for which there was no atoning sacrifice. The defilement of things that were considered most holy fell into the category of capital crimes and required that the violator be put to death. The Sabbath is considered most holy and carries the death penalty for willful violation.

It is apparent that the seventh day of the week is very different from the other six days. It is a holy span of time created and set apart from normal time for the benefit of humanity. See Mk.2:27.

Because God is supreme in authority and power and is Sovereign over all that exists, he has the authority and the power to make something holy. Although the Sabbath is the only space of time that was created holy, all of the commanded convocations are holy by divine decree (See Lev.23:1-44). Therefore, they belong to the realm of the sacred and must be honored as something holy.

The Holy Ones

The people whom God has chosen to be his are called holy ones because they belong to him and are holy by divine decree, lawful ritual, and dedication. These holy ones are to sing praise to him as a show of gratitude and an acknowledgment of who he is. They must also acknowledge that he is the essence and reflection of all that is holy and all that being holy represents:

"Sing to the Lord, O you saints [hasid] of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (Psa.30:4 KJV). See also Psa. 97:12.
"For the Lord loves judgment, and forsakes not his saints [hasid]; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off" (Psa.37:28 KJV).

The English word saints in Psalm 30:4 and 37:28 is translated from the Hebrew word hasid, which means holy one. The Messiah is spoken of as hasid (Psa.16:10); Aaron is call a hasid (Deut.33:8); and King David spoke of himself as a hasid (Psa.89:19).

For most Israelites, being holy was purely a physical condition, but for a few individuals being holy was both physical and spiritual in that these individuals not only observed the letter of the law with a willing heart, but also studied and meditated on the law and delighted in its goodness. These individuals were considered by God to be circumcised in their heart (Deut.10:14-16; 30:1-6; Jer.4:1-4). King David was a person who was circumcised in his heart, which is indicated in a number of his Psalms that applaud the greatness of God and his law:

"Blessed are you, O Lord: teach me your statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in your precepts, and have respect to your ways. I will delight myself in your statutes: I will not forget your word" (Psa.119:12-16 KJV).

"And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in your judgments. So shall I keep your law continually for ever and ever. And I will walk at liberty: for I seek your precepts. I will speak of your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. And I will delight myself in your commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up to your commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in your statutes" (Psa.119:43-48 KJV).

The hasid is not an ordinary person. A hasid is a person who is separated from the world of the common and profane and is set aside by God to fulfill his purpose for their existence. A hasid is a person who is practicing a pious life in conformity to God's laws, precepts, and principles.

The Priests Were Holy

"And the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the priests the sons of Aaron, and say to them. . . He shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself. . . . They shall be holy to their God, and not profane the name of their God: for the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer: therefore they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife that is a whore, or profane; neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband: for he is holy to his God. You shall sanctify him therefore; for he offers the bread of your God: he shall be holy to you: for I the Lord, which sanctify you, am holy" (Lev.21:1, 4, 6-8 KJV).
The priesthood were given additional instructions concerning their lifestyle because of their contact with the most holy things of the tabernacle. Because of their office and responsibilities the degree to which the priesthood were to be holy was higher than that of the general population. This requirement for the spiritual leaders of Israel to have and maintain a higher degree of holiness than the general population of God's people is also carried over to gospel age agreement between the Father and his elect children. See 1.Cor.4:1-2; 1.Tim.3:1-7; 2.Tim.2:24-25; Tit.1:7, 2:15.

Not only were the priests holy but also were to teach the Israelites proper attitudes and behaviors so that they would know what to do in order to practice a holy lifestyle. See Lev.10:9-11; Deut.33:7-10.

The Priest's Garments Were Holy

In the Books of Exodus and Leviticus, there are several detailed instructions concerning the making, the wearing, and the care that must be given to the garments to be worn by the high priest and the rest of the priesthood. It is important to understand that these garments were sanctified as holy, were to be worn while serving God, and were not to be worn outside of the tabernacle. The following are two warnings given to Aaron and the priesthood about the wearing of these holy garments:

"Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them. The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe. Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not die" (Ex.28:33-35 NIV).

"Make tunics, sashes and headbands for Aaron's sons, to give them dignity and honor. After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. "Make linen undergarments as a covering for the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh. Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die. "This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants" (Ex.28:40-43 NIV). See also Ezk.44:18.

Notice that Aaron had to wear the garment with the bells on its hem when he entered and left the holy place. Aaron and his sons all had to wear the proper holy garments as they served in the tabernacle. If they failed to do this, they would die.

The Temple Is Holy

The temple where God's spirit resided and where he was to be worshiped were described as godesh, (i.e., a place of special sacredness where God's presence could be found):
"Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Put the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place" (Ex.26:33-34 NIV).

The inner room of the temple is called the most holy place, because it was where the Creator God's holy presence was most intense. It was also where, once a year on the Day of Atonement, the Creator God would appear in his spirit-presence to speak with the high priest of Israel. Lev.16:2; Heb.9:6-8.

Although the tabernacle was extremely holy, within the most holy place (i.e., the holy of holies) there is even a higher degree of God's spirit-presence expressed. Here again we see different degrees of the condition of being holy expressed.

King David knew that God's presence resided in his sacred temple and that this was where he could be approached and spoken to:

"But as for me, I will come into your house in the multitude of your mercy: and in your fear will I worship toward your holy temple" (Psa.5:7 KJV).

The temple and all things that were used in it or came into it were holy (i.e., they were made holy by divine decree or by lawful ritual):

"And of the blue, and purple, and scarlet, they made cloths of service, to do service in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron; as the Lord commanded Moses" (Ex.39:1 KJV).

"Seven days you shall make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever touches the altar shall be holy" (Ex.29:37 KJV).

It is important to understand that all the things in the tabernacle were very holy and had to be treated with a high degree of respect. These holy things could only be touched by other holy things or by a priest who was also holy and authorized to touch them. The only exception to this rule was the ark of the covenant which could not be touched by anyone. Any infraction of this rule was punishable by death (See Lev.10:1-10). See also Lev.6:18, 25-29.

"And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation" (Num.4:15 KJV).
The instruction concerning the moving of the tabernacle shows that, because of the holy nature of its various elements, each was to be very carefully packaged by the priesthood and then transported by people who were specifically chosen and authorized for this task. Again, we see that some holy things are more holy than others.

**The Holy Sacrifices**

"Aaron shall take a handful, of the grain offering flour, and of the oil, and the frankincense which is on the meat offering, and burn it on the altar for a sweet smell with the memorial portion to the Lord. And the remainder shall Aaron and his sons eat with unleavened bread in the holy [qadosh] place; in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation they shall eat it. It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it to them for their portion of my offerings made by fire; it is most holy [qodesh], as is the sin offering, and as the trespass offering. All the males among the children of Aaron shall eat of it. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations concerning the offerings of the Lord made by fire: every one that touches them shall be holy [qadash]." (Lev.6:15-18 KJV).

Here, we see three different words used to define different degrees of the sacred, holy state of existence (e.g., a place in the tabernacle, the offering, and the priest who may touch the offering).

**Things Dedicated to God**

In Numbers 16:6-39, the censers of the Korahites were regarded as holy because they had been devoted to God; the censers had entered the realm of the sacred through a lawful ritual (v17). The dedication of the censers created a condition of inviolable holiness that could not allow for their being treated as common. See also Lev.27:9-10.

"But nothing that a man owns and devotes to the Lord—whether man or animal or family land—may be sold or redeemed; everything so devoted is most holy to the Lord" (Lev.27:28 NIV).

Once a thing, an animal, or a person is dedicated to God through lawful ritual, the deed is done; it can never return to the common or profane, because it is holy and forever belongs to God to do with as he chooses. See Lev.27:29;33; 1.Sam.1:1-28.

**The Holy and the Common**

The deaths of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu caused by their bringing an unholy thing into the tabernacle (Lev.10:1-2), the deaths of 50,070 men of Beth-shemesh caused by their looking into the ark of the covenant (1.Sam.6:19), and the death of Uzzah, which occurred when he touched the ark of the covenant (2.Sam.6:1-7), are examples of what happens when people violate the strict laws concerning holiness.
The accounts about Nadab and Abihu and the ark of the covenant speak to the extreme danger of violating the laws of holiness and the need to recognize and maintain a difference between the holy and the common and the profane.

Aaron and his sons were prohibited from drinking any type of alcoholic beverage when they served in the temple. This prohibition was necessary so that they would not inadvertently pollute the holy nature of the temple and die. They were always to be keenly aware of the difference between the sacred, the common, and the profane. Moreover, they were to teach this difference to the Israelites:

"You [Aaron] and your sons [the priests] are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses" (Lev. 10:9-11 NIV). See also Num. 18:30-32.

**GOD’S LAW AND BEING HOLY**

Since the demise of the early church, the Father’s children and many other people 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 the holy attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics holy people must have in order to live and maintain a holy lifestyle.

Clearly, when the Creator God said to the Israelites, “You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy,” he did not expect them to become holy as he is holy in a spirit realm of existence (i.e., 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. See Ex. 19:5-6.

**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 or violation from these rules and standards is in opposition to the nature of God who is a holy spirit-being. Therefore, a thing or a person who is not in harmony with God's law cannot have an intimate interaction with God. See Lev.10:1-9; 16:1-2; Num.3:3-4; 26:61.

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 as noted in 1. Peter 1:13-16. 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.

The Law Is Perfect

"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).

When Adam and Eve were created, the original intent was for them and their descendants to live a holy life in harmony with God; however, this did not happen and humanity found themselves in opposition to God and the way that would ensure a happy productive life. With the giving of the law of sacrifice to Adam and Eve came the understanding of how to restore harmony between God and mankind, and with the giving of further understanding of God's law came the understanding of how to maintain a holy life.

King David understood that it was a combination of God's law and the presence of God's holy spirit that gave one the knowledge and strength to overcome the lusts and desires of the flesh. Moreover, David knew that it was God's holy spirit that restored him to a sacred, holy state of existence:
"Hide your face from my sins; and blot out all mine lawlessness. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation; and uphold me with your free spirit" (Psa. 51:9-12 KJV Para.).

Moses to Instruct Israel in the Law

In Leviticus, chapter 19, Moses is told to speak to the whole nation of Israel and give them a list of instructions that they must follow. Notice that the first thing they must do is to become a holy people:

"And the Lord spake to Moses, saying, Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, You shall be holy [qadosh]: for I the Lord your God am holy [qadosh]" (Lev. 19:1-2 KJV).

Here, we see the Hebrew word qadosh, which means holy, holy one, or saint, applied to both the Israelites and to the Creator God. In order for the Israelites to be holy (i.e., to be a part of the sacred realm of existence), they must have certain attitudes and characteristics and behave in a certain way.

Also in this list are the laws concerning respect for one's parents, the observance of the Sabbath, and the prohibition against worshiping idols. Clearly, it is the law that reveals what holy behavior is and it is the law that sets forth the rules and standards for being holy:

"Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:3-4 NIV).

The Great Things of The Law

In the lamentation and prophecy about the tribe of Ephraim, God says, "I will write the great things of my law for him ..." (Hos. 8:12 Para.).

What are the great things of God's law? These great things are the rules and instructions about how to enter into and maintain one's standing in God's sacred realm of existence through the practice of holiness. This is the same law that the apostle Paul was inspired to call holy, righteous, and good (Rom. 7:12) and the same law that the Israelites were to practice as a holy people.

"Sanctify [qadash] yourselves therefore, and be you holy [qadosh]: for I am the Lord your God. And you shall keep my statutes, and do them: I am the Lord which sanctify [qadash] you" (Lev. 20:7-8 KJV). See also Num. 15:40; Deut. 26:18-19.

Because God chose the Israelites for his holy purpose, they were to separate themselves from the common and profane and be a holy people who practiced his law:
"The Lord shall establish you as a holy people to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and walk in his ways" (Deut.28:9 KJV).

It is through understanding and practicing these great things of the law that the Israelites would be blessed above all nations on earth. See Deut.26:16-19; 28:1-2.

**God's Law of Holiness**

In order to understand what the Creator God meant when he said to the Israelites "You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy," one must study God's law. It is the law that shows the differences between a holy and an unholy state of existence and between holy and unholy attitudes, behaviors, and character. It is the law that sets the rules and standards for what is holy and unholy. Therefore, one must look to the law in order to know what is holy, how to become holy, and how to practice a holy lifestyle.

Clearly, God does not have to alter his attitude, behavior, or character to become holy, because he is intrinsically holy; he is perfection in every aspect of his being. God's character is perfect, his knowledge and understanding is perfect, and his love is perfect. There is nothing imperfect about God. He is the standard of perfection for everything that exists and it is to this holy standard which everything that exists is measured against. Accordingly, the Israelites were to conform their attitude, behavior, character, and lifestyle to God's holy standard which is defined and explained in the law he gave them to live by.

In this dimension of existence, there are laws that function automatically to regulate and maintain our physical existence. The willful violation of these physical laws result in death, disaster, and destruction. In exactly the same way, all of God's laws function automatically to regulate and maintain his spirit realm of existence. These laws that determine who and what is holy or unholy and whether or not one's behavior is holy or unholy are empirical and function automatically. In order for one who has been made holy to maintain their holy condition of existence, these laws must be understood and practiced.

"You [Aaron] and your sons . . . . This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses" (Lev.10:9-11 NIV). See also Num.18:30-32.

The various laws that God gave to the Israelites were given in order to teach them how to recognize the difference between the holy and unholy. Obedience to the law would teach them how to become established as a holy people through the practice of righteous concepts and principles and how to maintain their holy existence as human beings.
A Reminder of The Law

The Israelites were told to wear fringes on their clothes with a ribbon of blue in it and to affix God's law to the doorframes of their houses and gateways as a reminder that, in order to be and remain holy, they must conform to these laws and practice them in their daily lives:

"Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them to make fringes on the borders of their clothes throughout their generations, and that they put on the fringe a ribbon of blue: And it shall be for you to look at and remember all the Lord's commandments and do them; so that you will not seek after the desires of your heart and your own eyes after which you usually go astray That you remember, to do all my commandments , and be holy \[qadosh\] to your God" (Num.15: 38-40 Para.).

"And it shall come to pass, if you carefully pay attention to my law which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and serve him with all your heart and being. Then I will send rain on your land in all the proper seasons, so that you have grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Pay attention, do not be deceived and turn aside and worship and serve other gods, because my anger will burn against you, and I will shut the heavens and it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will perish quickly from the good land I will give you. Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and let them be in the foremost part of your mind that you may always keep them in view. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deut. 11:13-20 Para.).

The Law Has Benefits

"Come near me and listen to this: "From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there." And now the Sovereign Lord has sent me, with his Spirit. This is what the Lord says—your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Your descendants would have been like the sand, your children like its numberless grains; their name would never be cut off nor destroyed from before me" (Isa.48: 16-19 NIV). See also Deut.30:15-20.
There is nothing bad, evil, or wrong about God's laws. His laws do not cause pain or suffering. Instead, they are designed to bring peace, happiness, and prosperity. For every effect there is a cause. All of the evil, pain, and suffering in this world is the effect of people breaking God's laws.

God created the law for our benefit. It was designed to bring us happiness, joy, and prosperity. The Israelites were not willing to accept these laws as an expression of God's love; instead, they rebelled in their hearts, minds, and attitudes:

"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).

Most people view God's law as archaic and of little value in today's world. Few people understand that, for the short time that God's laws were diligently practiced by the nation of Israel, the Israelites were one of the world's greatest military and economic powers, possessing tremendous wealth and prosperity.

**JESUS CHRIST AND THE LAW**

Is it true that Jesus Christ's obedience to God's law did away with all the laws that were given to humanity after the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? Is it true that Christians should no longer be concerned with the laws, precepts, and principles that were specifically given to national Israel?

Matthew 5:17 is the scripture that is most quoted when attempting to prove 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).

Many theologians and professing Christian leaders believe that, in fulfilling God's law, Jesus did away with it. Does this belief make any sense? How could Jesus not destroy God's 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, or make invalid*. Jesus said that we should not even think that he would abolish or destroy the law! Yet, how many millions of professing Christians actually believe he destroyed the law?

The English word *fulfill* in verse 17 is translated from the Greek word *elaruuo*, 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. The rest of what Jesus says about the law in Matthew 5:18-19 further demonstrates that he did not destroy or do away with 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" (v18).

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!

Notice what Jesus says about breaking God's 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" (v19).

Jesus did not say that some who break the law will be in the kingdom of God in a lesser position, he said that those who break the law will be spoken of as worthless. The scriptures clearly show that no one who breaks God's law will enter God's heavenly kingdom. See Rom.6:23; Rev.21:10-27; 22:14-15.

**Jesus Magnified the Law**

What did Jesus mean when he said that he came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Matt.5:17)? The prophets spoke of the Messiah's coming to give his life for the salvation of humanity. Jesus clearly fulfilled these prophecies about the Messiah along with the prophecy concerning God's law recorded in the Book of Isaiah:

"The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable" (Isa.42:21 KJV).

The English word magnify is translated from a Hebrew word that literally means to make great or cause to be great. This is exactly what Jesus Christ did to fill the law to its fullest. He magnified the Law by showing how good and beneficial it is.

The Creator God who became the Messiah gave God's law (i.e., the Sovereign Father's law, which includes the Ten Commandments) to the patriarchs and national Israel. When he gave these laws, he fully intended for them to be kept in the letter of the law, and the spirit of the law as people came to understand the precepts and principles contained in them. In return, those who kept the law would be blessed with tremendous physical blessings. See Deut.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, few comprehend the spiritual intent and meaning of God's law because they failed to study it and meditate on it.

A part of the plan of God for the salvation of humanity called for Jesus Christ to come and explain the spiritual intent and meaning of God's law. 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 about God's law bring its full spiritual meaning and intent into focus.

**Eternal Life**

The question of eternal life is on the minds of many 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 law, why did he tell this young man to keep the law? Jesus told the young man in no uncertain terms that, if he expected to receive eternal life, he must keep the commandments.

**Vain Worship**

Jesus was neither the soft-spoken person most people have imagined nor an insipid and feeble personality, which is falsely depicted in so many artist's depictions of him (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 the 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 the law of God and claim to worship him! Jesus says that if we love him and his God (i.e., the Sovereign Father) we will keep his law:
"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 in my love [remain and live in], 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).

The apostle John wrote a stinging rebuke to those who say they know Jesus Christ and claim to follow him but do not keep the commandments: "The man who says, I know him [Jesus Christ] but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1.Jn.2:4 NIV). The Book of Revelation shows that liars will not be in the Kingdom of God, but will be burned up in the Lake of Fire. See Rev.21:8, 27; 22:15.

**Follow Christ's Example To Be Holy**

What kind of lifestyle would God follow if he came to earth to live? What kind of example would he set for us to follow? What kind of attitudes and behaviors would he exhibit? These answers are found in a review of Jesus Christ's life and his practice of God's law. Jesus practiced all of God's laws that were applicable to his life. He practiced them because these laws define what is holy and unholy, reveal how to become holy, give instruction in how to practice a holy lifestyle, and explain how to maintain one's holiness.

Jesus the Christ was the Creator God before he came to earth to save humanity. In order to save himself from the second death and become the Savior of humanity, he had to be holy and perfectly practice a life of holiness.

Notice what the Sovereign Father said about Jesus at his baptism:

"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 on him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt.3:16-17 KJV). See also Matt.12:18; Mk.1:11.

Why was God the Father pleased with Jesus? He was pleased with him because Jesus perfectly understood and practiced his law up to this point in his life.
During Christ's ministry, we again see the Sovereign Father voicing his further approval of Jesus' lifestyle and teachings:

"After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matt.17:1-5 NIV). See also 2.Pet.1:15-18.

The Father was pleased with Jesus because he was living in compliance to the law of holiness and was fulfilling the purpose for which he was sent to earth—to reveal the existence of the Sovereign God and his plan for humanity and to explain and magnify his holy law. See Isa. 42:21; Matt.5:17.

The parable of the talents clearly shows that the Father will also be very pleased with people who practice the way of holiness and do as they are instructed:

"His Lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter you into the joy of your Lord" (Matt.25:23 KJV).

The Commission

After Christ's death and resurrection, he met with his disciples and gave them the following commission:

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. 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. Amen" (Matt.28:18-20 KJV).

What did Jesus teach that must also be taught by those who follow him? Jesus taught about the Sovereign God, his plan for humanity, and his holy law, which is what those who follow Christ must also be teaching.

Jesus conformed to and practiced God's law and his way of holiness in attitude, behavior, and character under the agreement that he had made with national Israel while he was the Creator God. The reason Jesus Christ is our Savior and our Redeemer is that he was found to comply in attitude, behavior, and character to God's law which is the standard for a holy and a righteous lifestyle.
If the Sovereign Father were to come to live on earth as a physical being, he would practice all of the laws written in the Bible that define holiness in the flesh. We know that this is the lifestyle he would practice because the Creator God came to earth to live as a human being and he did obey all of the laws written in the Bible that define and govern who and what is holy and how to maintain a holy state of existence. See Heb.5:1-10.

The Savior of humanity is the perfect example of a holy person living in the flesh. Moreover, he is the perfect example of a person who practiced holiness, because he practiced the law perfectly.

Be Honest

An honest look at the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles leaves no doubt that, if we want to follow God's way of life, we must practice and teach God's law!

It is beyond the scope of this study to detail all the various ways that people reject and disobey God's laws; however, it is clear from the biblical perspective that most of humanity is either unknowingly or knowingly rejecting and disobeying God's laws:

"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). See also Jer.17:9.

If we say that God's laws are no longer in effect, we disagree with God the Father and Jesus Christ, which means that we do not want them in our lives.

Should the Father's children practice his law? The answer found in the Bible is that you cannot be a child of God or be holy unless you practice God's laws.

THE FATHER'S HOLY NATION

Because of a promise that he had made to the patriarch Abraham, the Creator God chose national Israel and called them out of spiritual darkness to be his personal representatives on earth, a nation of priests, and examples and teachers of God's holy way to the rest of humanity.

Today, it is the Sovereign Father who chooses individuals from among all nations to become his personal representatives on earth. These individuals are to become members of his holy family as firstborn sons of his new creation and participate in his holy nation as kings, priests, and ambassadors. Each of these individuals is a temple through which they worship and serve the Father under the administration of his Son Jesus Christ. These individuals are spiritual Jews and comprise the spiritual Israel of God. See Rom.2:29; Gal.6:16.
"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar 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). See also 2.Cor.5:18-20; Rev.1:6; 5:10.

The Sovereign Father's call of individuals to participate in his holy nation has similarities to the Creator God's call of national Israel, and there are many parallels that can be drawn between these two callings. However, there are major differences between them and major differences in how a person becomes holy and practices holiness during the gospel age of salvation.

**Chosen to Be Holy**

Before the foundation of the earth, the Sovereign God determined that certain individuals would exist and be called to salvation at a particular time in his plan. And these people would become holy in attitude, behavior, character, and quality of existence:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph.1:3-5 KJV).

The English word *holy* in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word *hagios*, which means *sacred*, *physically pure*, *morally blameless*, *consecrated*, *holy* or *saint*. The word *hagios* connotes someone or something that is intrinsically sacred in the same sense as the Hebrew word *qadash* connotes a state of being that belongs to the realm of the sacred (i.e., something that is separate and distinct from the common or profane).

The phrase *without blame* is translated from the Greek word *amomos*, which means *blameless*, *moral perfection* and connotes perfect piety.

Paul reveals to the Ephesians that God had predetermined and decreed that everyone who would participate in his special calling would be holy in their state of being and express perfect piety in attitude, behavior, and character. The Father's holy people are to imitate his attitude, behavior, and character just as the Israelites were to imitate the Creator God's holiness. Today, during the gospel age of salvation, it is just as important for the Sovereign Father's children to be holy as it was for national Israel to be holy under their covenant with the Creator God.

"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind [i.e., self-control]. Be not you therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be you partaker of the afflictions of the gospel
according to the power of God; Who has saved us, and called us with an holy [hagios] 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” (2.Tim.1:7-9 KJV).

Called to Purity

In his instruction to the Thessalonians, Paul stresses the point that it is the Father's will that those he calls to become his children abstain from sexual sins. They should remain physically pure because they were called to a life of purity and they are rejecting the Father who has given them his spirit if they neglect to remain physically pure:

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God has not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness. He therefore that despises, despises not man, but God, who has also given to us his holy spirit" (1.Thes.4:3-8 KJV).

The English words sanctification in verse 4 and holiness in verse 7 are both translated from the Greek word hagiasmos, which means a state of purity in the physical sense.

Under the gospel age agreement, spiritual purity replaces physical ritual and physical purity related to worship to a degree but not entirely. There are many physical rituals and laws related to worship that have been carried over from the covenant with ancient Israel. These rituals and laws either partially or totally apply to the elect. For example, the law of marriage, the dietary laws, the Sabbath, the Festivals, and the Passover are all laws that must still be honored and practiced as they apply to one's pious lifestyle.

Be Holy, Because I Am Holy

"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 to also become holy in all conduct. Because it has been written, Be holy; because I am holy" (1.Pet.1:13-16 KJV Para.). See Lev.11:45; 19:1-2; 20:26.

Here, we see that the Sovereign Father's holy nation of kings, priests, and ambassadors must also be holy, just as the Israelites were to be holy. The Father's holy nation is also to practice godly attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics and separate themselves from the common and profane.
Purchased With Blood

The nation of Israel belonged to the Creator God by right of his covenant with them and the patriarchs; however, the Sovereign Father's children are his because he has purchased them with the sacrificial blood of his firstborn son. With the advent of the Messiah, a new and superior method by which a person could be made holy and be maintained in a holy state of existence was established and introduced to humanity:

"Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers: But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1.Pet. 1:18-19 KJV).

The Process of Becoming a Holy One

The nation of Israel was made holy through decree and ritual, but the Sons of the Father's new creation are made holy through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ and the ritual of baptism and the laying on of hands to receive the holy spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter revealed that Jesus whom the Jews had crucified was indeed the Messiah and there was now a way to have one's sins forgiven and to be saved from eternal death:

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the holy spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:37-40 NIV).

A person becomes holy through the redemptive process and is transformed from the realm of the common and profane to the realm of the holy by the Sovereign Father's decree and power. This redemptive process begins with the Father's call to salvation and progresses through the following steps:

• True repentance.
• The Father's forgiveness of one's sins through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ.
• The sacred ritual of baptism.
• The sacred ritual of the laying on of hands for receiving the indwelling of the holy spirit.
• The transformation into a holy individual through the Father's spirit-power.
Notice that the first step toward being holy after the Father opens one's mind to his truth is repentance. The scriptures clearly show that repentance requires one to change one's lifestyle and begin to obey God's laws. This requirement is exactly the same today as it was for national Israel. One cannot become holy unless one is willing to obey and practice God's law.

Baptism is not only a symbolic representation of death, burial, and resurrection to a new life in Christ but also a physical and spiritual reality. Notice how Paul reminds the elect at Rome of their baptism and sinless condition before God when he exhorts them to live a sinless life:

"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?" (Rom.6:1-3 KJV).

As a person descends beneath the baptismal water which symbolizes a grave, their old life symbolically dies and is buried:

"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" (Rom.6:4 KJV).

When a person is raised out of the water, they are symbolically and in fact raised to a new life. And upon receiving the spirit of God the transition is complete; a person is 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 2.Cor.5:17; Rom.6:1-18.

The Father's Children Are Holy

Although a child of God still appears to be human, a transformation has taken place that makes a person who has received the holy spirit different from other humans. That person has been converted into a son of God with the genetic imprint of the God family. Although a child of God is not yet an immortal spirit-being, a person with God's spirit dwelling within them is certainly a member of the Father's spiritual family. Moreover, at some time in the future, all of the Father's earthly children 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.

The Father's children are not only physically holy as the Israelites were but also intrinsically holy as the Father and his firstborn son Jesus Christ. Holiness is imparted during the gospel age of salvation by the Sovereign Father to those whom he calls to be holy and obey his law of holiness. See 1.Pet.1:13-16; Eph.1:3-5; 2.Tim.1:7-9; 1.Thes.4:3-8.
God the Father is extremely interested in his children being holy. When mankind was created, they were created in God's image. Moreover, he intended that mankind be patterned after himself in attitude, behavior, and character, which is why a system of worship was developed that would make it possible for his people to be in constant contact with him in order to be taught holy attitude, behavior, and character. The Father's elect children are called to become examples of his holiness (i.e., to be holy as he is holy), which is accomplished through placing his spirit within them and instructing them in how to live and maintain a holy lifestyle.

Both the apostle Paul and the writer to the Hebrews said that people under the gospel age agreement with God the Father are indeed intrinsically holy as partakers of the heavenly calling. This calling offers the awesome privilege of being given the Father's holy spirit, being given immortal life as a spirit-being in the Father's divine family, and the opportunity to serve him as a king, priest, and ambassador on earth:

"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy (hagios) brethren" (1.Thes.5:27 KJV).

"Wherefore, holy (hagios) brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb.3:1 KJV).

Make no mistake, those who have the holy spirit dwelling within them are different from other humans, because they participate in the Father's divine realm of existence—they are holy beings.

Maintaining One's Holiness

"Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness. 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 unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness" (Rom.6:18-20 KJV). See also 1.Thes.4:2-4.

Here, Paul says that being free from sin means being free from the penalty imposed for the violation of God's law. Under the first agreement with national Israel, the only way to be free from the penalty of sin was to have the penalty temporarily set aside through an atoning sacrifice. Under the gospel age agreement, Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice that permanently removes the penalty for the violation of God's law.

The English word righteousness in Romans 6:18-20 is translated from the Greek word dikaiosune, which means justification. It pertains to being in compliance with God's law (i.e., being blameless). However, the definition of dikaiosune is much more complex when used in combination with holiness.
The condition, the pursuit, and the practice of holiness cannot be completely separated from an atonement for the violation of God's law, because the result of atonement is righteousness (i.e., being in harmony with God's law) and the pursuit and practice of holiness requires one to be in harmony with God's law. Moreover, the condition, the pursuit, and the practice of holiness for the Father's children requires the indwelling of the Father's personal spirit, his holy spirit, and Christ's spirit, as well as their application in one's life.

In a letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds them that they must not live sinful lives like people who are in spiritual darkness and separated from God, because they have been taught a different lifestyle through Christ:

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ; If so be that you have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That you put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph.4:17-24).

It is important to remember that Paul was speaking to a people who have been transformed from human beings who had only the spirit of man into a new, holy creation that had the spirit of God. The Ephesians were not human like other people; they were holy with the divine nature of God within them. Therefore, they had to totally put away their old corrupt ways and live the holy life that they were created to live. When Paul said that they were to live in true holiness (Greek: aletheia hosiotes), he meant that they were to be living a truly pious life—a life in compliance with God's law.

The Father's elect who are his holy nation of kings, priests, ambassadors and temples on earth are held to the highest standards of ethical, moral, and spiritual behavior. The elect must conform to the Father's standards which are holy, not to mankind's standards which are unholy:

"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. Be you angry, and sin not: Let not the sun go down on your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers. And grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be
put away from you, with all malice: And be you kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" (Eph.4:25-32 KJV).

Notice that all of the things Paul told the Ephesians to stop doing are violations of God's law, and all the things that they were to do are characteristics of godly behavior. Paul showed the Ephesians the difference between what is unlawful (unholy) and what is lawful (holy) in thought, attitude, and behavior. Moreover, he told them that, because they were holy creatures, they were to pursue only that which is holy.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul expresses his desire for their continued spiritual growth so that they would be firmly established in the practice of holy behavior at the day of Christ's return.

"Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness [hagiosune] before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1.Thes. 3:11-13 KJV).

The English word holiness in verse 13 is translated from the Greek word hagiosune, which means the quality of holiness.

Paul wrote to Titus about certain types of behavior as being holy or unholy, and that elder women and spiritual leaders among the elect must exhibit holy behavior:

"But speak you 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 [hagiasm], not false accusers, not given to much wine, but 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).

The English word holiness in verse 3 is translated from the Greek word hagiasm, which means the state of purity.

"For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre: But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy [hosios], temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit.1:7-9 KJV).
The English word *holy* in verse 8 is translated from the Greek word *hosios*, which means *intrinsic* or *divine character*. From this and other examples in this study, it is evident that a holy person has a state of being which is different from other humans on earth.

Just as the priesthood of Israel was held to a higher standard of holy behavior than the congregation of Israel, those who are the spiritual leaders among the Father's elect children are held to a higher standard of holy behavior. The teachers of God's law and way of life are held to the highest standard of holy behavior because they are to set the example of a pious lifestyle for others to follow.

**Garments of the Holy Ones**

The priests of ancient Israel were always to be properly clothed with holy garments when serving the Creator God in his temple. Any priest who failed to wear the proper garment when entering into the tabernacle and any priest who failed to remain properly clothed while serving in the tabernacle would die for their violation of the law regarding the holy state of existence within the tabernacle.

Why was it so important for God's priests to be properly clothed? It was important as a show of respect, reverence, and honor to God and as a continual reminder to them of who they were and whom they were serving.

The foundational elements of the law concerning being properly clothed while serving in the temple is a part of the gospel age agreement between God the Father and his royal priesthood who serve him in his temple today. His priests must always be properly clothed in the holy garments of their office which he has provided for them to wear in this life and in their lives after the resurrection to immortal life.

The major difference in the law concerning priestly clothing during the gospel age of salvation and under the covenant with national Israel is that, under the gospel age agreement, it applies in a spiritual context instead of a physical context.

Because the elect are in a spiritual battle against the forces of evil, Paul instructs the Ephesians to always wear the spiritual armor that has been given to them. A very important part of a warrior priest's armor is the breastplate of righteousness, which protects the heart:

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take to you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the
preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph.6:10-17 KJV).

In Peter's instructions to the elders, he says to be clothed with humility, which is a godly attitude and a major part of practicing holiness:

"Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves to the elder. Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1.Pet.5:5 KJV). See also 2.Cor.6:1-9.

While speaking of those who are called to participate in the first resurrection, Jesus revealed that, when someone is invited to participate in this awesome opportunity, they must heed the invitation and appear before the Sovereign God in the holy garments he provides for this occasion.

Matthew 22:2-14 NIV

"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come' (vs.2-3).

"Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchared, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' "But they paid no attention and went off, one to his field, another to his business' (vs.4-5).

"The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. 'Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen' (vs.6-14).

This parable along with the following scriptures about the garments of the saints reveal that it is extremely important to be properly dressed spiritually in holy garments in order to appear before God who is holy:
"You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy" (Rev.3:4 KJV).

"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev.16:15 KJV). See also Zech.3:3-5; 1.Pet.5:5-9.

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev.19:7-8 KJV).

The Temple is Holy

"Don't you know that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defile the temple of God, God shall destroy him; because God's temple is holy [hagios] and you are his temple" (1.Cor.3:16-17 Para.). See Lev.10:1-10.

Here, Paul reprimands the elect at Corinth for their lack of understanding about the sanctity of their bodies which are the Sovereign Father's personal temples on earth where his spirit, his holy spirit, and Christ's spirit reside. See 1.Jn.3:24; Acts 5:32; Gal.4:4-6.

Under the first agreement with national Israel, the Israelites were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation; therefore, all the people, the priesthood, the temple, the altar, and everything associated with them were to be holy, because God who is holy was to dwell among them:

"And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex.25:8 KJV). See also Ex.29:43-45; 26:11-16; Deut.23:10-14.

Within the temple, the priesthood practiced holy rituals and acts of holiness. And from the temple, the priesthood taught the people God's laws which are the rules and standards for being holy and maintaining a holy lifestyle. See Ex.29:36-46; Lev.10:10-11;19:2; Deut. 23:14.

When The Messiah returns as King of kings and Lord of lords, he will dwell in Israel in order to teach the way of holiness from the temple:

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains [above all governments], and it shall be exalted above the hills [above all nations]; 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 [the Creator God, Jesus Christ]; 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.4:1-2 KJV). See also Isa.9:6-7.
Under the gospel age agreement that the Father has with his children, his personal spirit, his holy spirit, and the spirit of Christ dwell within them:

"But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that God's spirit dwells in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom.8:9 KJV).

"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" (2.Cor.6:16 KJV).

Today, the situation is similar to the one that existed when the Creator God dwelled in the sanctuary in national Israel. However, now it is the Father's priests who are his holy temples, perform acts of holiness, and practice and teach his law, which contains the rules and standards for being holy and remaining holy.

The priests Nadab and Abihu and many others were killed because they violated the strict laws of holy behavior concerning the holy temple and the holy things pertaining to it. See Lev.10:1-2; 1.Sam.6:19; 2.Sam. 6:1-7.

"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).

The great price paid to redeem humanity was the death of Jesus Christ who was the Creator God before he emptied himself of his immortality and became human.

Many people do not realize that God has not changed; he still requires all things and all people that he owns by divine decree and right of covenant to be and to remain holy (i.e., free of all sin and impurity). See Mal.3:6; Heb.9:22-28.

"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).

Under the gospel age agreement, the defilement of the Father's temple occurs in the same way it did under the first covenant with national Israel. It occurs through willful disobedience of God's law or careless neglect of his law. See Isa.66:17-18; 1.Cor.3:16-17; 6:15-20; Tit.1: 15-16.
The Father's holy spirit resides within his children who are also his personal temples on earth just like the Creator God's spirit-presence resided within the tabernacle and the temple in Israel. Because the Father will not allow his spirit to inhabit an impure place, a physical and a spiritual change occurs during baptism. In the baptismal water, the Father purifies the physical body through his spirit-power so that his holy spirit (his spirit-presence) can dwell within the repentant believer'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; 4:4.

In order to maintain a holy state of existence, one must become separate from that which is by nature unholy, common, and profane. However, this is not easy; it takes mental and physical effort to maintain a separation from the things that would contaminate one's holiness. One must make an effort to resist unholy (sinful) thoughts and unholy actions. In some instances, one must avoid an association with certain circumstances and individuals that could negatively impact one's holy lifestyle.

"For through Jesus we both have access by one spirit to the Father. Therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints [i.e., the hagios, the pure or the blameless ones], and of the household of God; And are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the corner-stone; In whom all the building fitted together grows into a holy temple in the Lord: In whom you also are built together into a dwelling-place of God in the spirit" (Eph.2:18-22 Para.).

The writings of the apostles leave no doubt that the physical body of a holy one is a temple where the spirit-presence of God dwells—a holy one is the Sovereign God's sacred temple on earth.

**The Holy Sacrifices and Prayers**

All lawful sacrifices to the Creator God under the first agreement with national Israel were considered holy and so are all lawful sacrifices offered to the Sovereign Father under the gospel age agreement. In fact, holy sacrifices are demanded by the Father from his children just as the Creator God demanded holy sacrifice from the Israelites.

Although the sacrifices under the gospel age agreement are spiritual in nature, they are still holy and are offered for the same primary reasons that they were required of ancient Israel. There are physical and spiritual lessons pertaining to holiness to be learned through sacrifice. The following are a number of instructions to the Father's elect that show the importance of making spiritual sacrifices:

"Therefore, lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speech As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby: If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as to a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy
priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1.Pet.2:1-5 KJV).

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy [hagios], acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom.12:1-2 KJV).

"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. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God" (Phil.4:15-18 KJV).

The writer to the Hebrews confirms that the acknowledgment of the Father's awesome greatness to him by his children through the office of Jesus Christ as their high priest is considered by him to be a pleasing sacrifice:

"For here we do not have a continuing city [earthly Jerusalem], but we seek the city to come [heavenly Jerusalem]. Then through him [Jesus] let us always offer up a vocal sacrifice of praise to God the Father by confessing his name" (Heb.13:14-15 Para.).

The apostle Peter said, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1.Pet.2:9 KJV).

A parallel can easily be drawn between the necessity of offering the incense on the golden altar in the light of the seven lamps in the tabernacle and the necessity for the Father's elect to praise him in his temple (which they are) after being called into the light of his truth and presence.

The Book of Revelation shows the prayers of the elect pictured as being accompanied by a musical instrument and as incense. It shows these prayers ascending to God with the smoke of incense from the golden altar in his heavenly temple:

"And he came and took the scroll out of the right hand of him [God the Father] that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four beasts and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb [Jesus Christ], having every one of them harps, and golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of saints" (Rev.5:7-8 KJV Para.).
"And another angel stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and he was given much incense, that he should add it to the prayers of all saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God out of the angel's hand" (Rev.8:3-4 KJV Para.). See also Rev.5:8.

**Things Dedicated to God**

Shortly after the beginning of the early church, Ananias and Sapphira (a married couple) dedicated all the money they had received from a land sale to God. Because this money was dedicated to God it was considered holy and it belonged to God. However, Ananias and Sapphira violated the law of holiness by first stealing a part of what they had dedicated to God and then lying about the price of the land. This violation of the law resulted in their deaths:

"Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price," Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events" (Acts 5:1-11 NIV).

Understanding the concept of transferring something to God's use, whether it is an object or a person, through a divine decree, a lawful ritual, or a dedication is very important to the Father's elect children. It is important for God's children to know that, once God takes possession of an object or a person and that object or person enters into his divine, sacred realm of the holy, the laws that govern all that is holy apply to it. Because the Father's elect are his holy possession, they can never return to the common or profane without forfeiting their salvation. See also Lk.9:62; 2.Pet.2:1-22.
Holy objects are not merely dedicated to a use; they are dedicated to serve a godly purpose instead of a common purpose. Therefore, they are symbolic of that which is good and pure as opposed to that which is common and profane. Holy objects are to remain holy.

The word of God cautions all who are holy to carefully consider the extreme importance of adhering to the laws of holiness and maintaining holy objects in a holy condition.

**The Family and the Holy Condition**

While giving instructions and guidelines about marriage, the apostle Paul addresses the situation where only one spouse in the marriage is a child of God. In these instructions, Paul reveals three basic understandings about the sacred status of unconverted individuals within a family where this condition exists. These understandings concern the unbelieving mate being sanctified, the children being made holy, and an opportunity for salvation being given to an unconverted mate:

"And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, let her not leave him. Because the unbelieving husband has been sanctified (hagiazo) because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified (hagiazo) because of her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy (hagios). But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, if you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?" (1.Cor.7:13-16 Para.).

The first clue to understanding what Paul said to the believing spouse is that being sanctified and being holy are two completely different things:

- The English word sanctified is translated from the Greek word hagiazo, which means purify, or consecrate.
- The English word holy is translated from the Greek word hagios, which means sacred, pure, blameless, holy, or saint.

There is a clear difference between the unconverted mate and the unconverted children in the eyes of God. The unconverted mate is sanctified but not holy, and the children are holy but not sanctified. These scriptures show two different degrees of the sacred realm being administered. The unconverted mate is purified or consecrated to a sacred use, but the children are placed in a sacred state of existence.

**Sanctified and Holy**

The following are two important questions that need to be answered about a converted person's unconverted spouse and a converted person's unconverted children:
1. How can an unconverted spouse be sanctified and an unconverted child be made holy?

2. Are the unconverted spouse's sanctified status and the unconverted children's holy status the same quality as the converted spouse or parent(s) sanctified and holy status?

To answer these questions, one must clearly understand that all unconverted people are sinners, which includes the unconverted spouse of an elect person and a converted parent's unconverted children. One must also understand that, because the unconverted spouse and the unconverted children are sinners, they live outside the specific agreement for salvation that a converted person has with the Sovereign Father.

Under the first covenant with national Israel, sins were never removed or forgiven; sins were only covered from God's view. Each year on the Day of Atonement, all of the accumulated sins of Israel were symbolically placed on the head of a live goat and symbolically sent away from God's sight. Although the Israelites were a holy people, they were sinners and under the death penalty for their sins because they did not have a perfect sacrifice that could be given to pay for their sins.

The ancient nation of Israel was a nation of sinners who were under the death penalty for their sins; however, they were a sanctified (i.e., set apart for a holy purpose) and holy people through divine decree, lawful ritual, and dedication to God. The Israelites were a physical people who were physically sanctified and holy, whereas the Father's elect children have been transformed into a new creation unlike any other on earth and are both physically and spiritually sanctified and holy.

Under the gospel age agreement, the Father's elect children are purged of sin in order to become sanctified and holy and are kept in a sanctified and holy condition through the following process:


2. The sacrificial blood of Christ covers and removes one's sins which results in one being perpetually blameless before the Father (i.e., not under the penalty of the law). See Rom.6:1-16; Gal.5:1-18).

3. The indwelling of God's spirit through which the Father's elect are kept in a state of physical and spiritual purity. See Eph.4:30; 2.Cor.1:20-22; Jude 1:24-25.
Because no justification (i.e., forgiveness of sin) is required for an unbelieving mate to be sanctified or the unconverted children to be made holy, it is clear that neither the unbelieving mate nor the unconverted children noted by Paul are of the Father's new creation. Yet, one is sanctified and the other made holy by divine decree. Neither are intrinsically holy like the believing mate, because neither the unconverted mate nor the unconverted children have been transformed into a new creature through the process of justification under the gospel age agreement. Therefore, the sanctification of the unconverted mate and the holy condition of the unconverted children are different in quality and degree from that of the converted spouse.

The Father has shown special favor to the unconverted spouse and unconverted children of a converted person and made an allowance in his plan for the unconverted spouse to be physically sanctified and unconverted children to be made physically holy like it was under the first covenant with national Israel.

The unconverted spouse's sanctified status and the unconverted children's holy status is only a physical condition and not a physical and spiritual condition which it is with the Father's elect children.

The Unconverted Mate

The only explanation Paul gives for the unconverted mate being sanctified is so that the children will not be unclean. Therefore, the meaning of the word unclean is the key to understanding the kind of holiness and the degree of holiness that the children possess.

The English word unclean in 1.Corinthians 7:14 is translated from the Greek word akathartos, which is associated with a group of words that pertain to physical, moral, and cultic defilement and cleansing. Akathartos has to do with physical, cultic, and moral impurity which are all closely related.

The scriptures show that, under the gospel age agreement, spiritual impurity and defilement can only be removed through the process of conversion, which renders one totally sinless. Moreover, there is only one method by which the process of conversion into a sinless person can be performed under the gospel age agreement. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that, when Paul uses the word akathartos in verse 14 to denote an unclean condition in reference to the children, he is referring to a physical state of existence, not a spiritual state of existence.

What Paul said about unconverted children being unclean in the physical state and the unbelieving mate being sanctified for the sake of the children becomes clear when viewed in the context of the temple system of worship that God prescribed for national Israel, the Father's heavenly temple system of worship, and the Father's temple system of worship on earth during the gospel age.
Remember that all things closely associated with the temple system of worship in ancient Israel were to be ceremonially purified and that nothing unclean was allowed to enter into the temple. Once a person or a thing was accepted for use in the temple, that person or thing was holy and had to be respected as such. Moreover, it seems logical that, because the temple system of worship for ancient Israel was patterned after the heavenly temple system of worship (Heb. 8:1-5; 9:19-23), the same logic concerning the clean and unclean applies today under the Father's temple system of worship on earth (2.Cor. 6:17; Eph. 5:5).

Because it is physical purity which is the issue in verse 14, it seems that one other reason for the purification or consecration of the unconverted spouse has to do with the physical relationship between the husband and wife. The scriptures tell us that a husband and wife are one flesh (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31-33) and that the flesh can be contaminated by that which is physically impure (i.e., unclean); therefore, the physical relationship must be kept physically pure in order to keep the mate who is a holy temple of God from being defiled. See also Lev. 7:19-21; 2.Cor. 6:16-13.

The Unconverted Children

The Greek word for children in 1.Cor. 7:14 is teknon, which is taken from the Greek root tiko. It means to produce (from a seed, as a mother, a plant, the earth) to bear, be born, or bring forth. Therefore, it seems that the unconverted children Paul refers to are the offspring produced from a union between a converted and an unconverted spouse. If this is the case, it would reinforce the logic behind the necessity to change the physical state of the unconverted spouse from unclean to clean in order to guarantee that the children from the union would be holy. The law of holiness shows that nothing unclean can enter into or issue forth from a temple of God and all things that issue forth from a holy being must be holy.

Although no scriptural proof has been found so far, it may also be true that, if children exist before a parent is converted, children of such a parent are made holy by divine decree at the time of the parent's conversion.

The Children's Holy Status

Because children of the elect are considered holy, there are a number of things concerning this holy status that need to be considered in order to determine the kind and the degree of their holy condition:
1. The children Paul speaks of in verse 14 are unconverted and without the spirit of God dwelling within them. If they were true believers with God's spirit dwelling within them, Paul's explanation of their holy state would not be necessary. Therefore, three of the meanings of the Greek word *hagios* (i.e., pure, blameless, and saint) in reference to the children being holy do not apply, which means only the other two meanings of the Greek word *hagios* (i.e., sacred and holy) can apply to the children. Also, the Greek word *amomos*, which means blameless and moral perfection and connotes perfect piety, is never used in reference to the elect's unconverted children.

2. With the understanding that there are different degrees of being sanctified and being holy, one can determine the holy status of the children noted in verse 14 by reviewing the following two categories in which the holy state exists:

   • There is the degree to which someone or something is more holy or less holy with the spirit-power of God expressed on or within it, which demands that one show reverence and respect for that which is holy (e.g., The Temple, the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant, and the High Priest).

   • There is the degree to which someone or something is more holy or less holy in the cultic sense (i.e., formal religious veneration, worship as a system of religious beliefs and ritual, great devotion to a person, idea, or thing), which demands that one show reverence and respect for that which is holy (e.g., God's name, God's law, the Sabbath and the office of the High Priest).

Because unconverted children of a holy person do not have the holy spirit residing within them, they cannot have the holy status granted to them; they can only have the holy status placed upon them.

Although it is not a perfect analogy, the following review of how Israelite children initially received their holy status does serve to illustrate how children of the elect also receive their holy status.

It was God's original intent for the nation of Israel to be a holy sacred nation (Ex. 19:5-6) comprised of holy individuals through which all nations would be blessed. When children were born into an Israelite family, they were also born into the national covenant; therefore, the children received their holy status and covenant relationship with the Creator God through birthright.

It is important at this point to note that the gospel age agreement between God the Father and his children is not a national agreement; it is an agreement between two individuals which can only be entered into and maintained through the performance of very specific terms and conditions on the part of the individual with whom the Father has chosen to enter into an agreement.
Paul said that children of a converted person are holy; therefore, it is probable that children of the elect receive their holy status as a birthright, just as the Israelite children received their holy status. However, because unconverted children do not have the spirit of God dwelling within them, they are not intrinsically holy like their converted parent(s). Therefore, it seems logical that the children's holy status is only physical as was the holy status of all Israelites under the national agreement with the Creator God.

Under the covenant with ancient Israel, foreigners living within the nation of Israel who gave themselves to the service and worship of the Creator God were to be treated with fairness and respect and were afforded many of the same benefits and privileges as the Israelites; thereby, they also became beneficiaries of the blessings that were bestowed on Israel (Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 10:17-19).

All citizens of national Israel received benefits from being a holy people, but not all citizens were allowed to participate in every aspect of its civil government or the sacrificial system of worship. Although all citizens of national Israel could participate in the sacrificial system of worship, only a few individuals were authorized specific functions and responsibilities for performing sacrifice and ritual at the temple and each of these individuals were limited by their function and responsibility in the degree of access they had to the temple and the Creator God.

Although children of the elect have holy status and are under the care and protection of the Father's holy nation and receive many benefits from having this sacred status, they are neither intrinsically holy like their parent(s) nor temples wherein the spirit of God dwells, because they are not of the new creation. Moreover, they are not citizens of the Father's spiritual nation and are therefore limited in their ability to participate in things of a spiritual nature, because the degree and quality of their holy condition is different from that of their holy parent(s).

**Children’s Conditional Holy Status**

The holy status of the unconverted children of the elect and its maintenance is conditional and inexorably tied to their parents’ holy status and its maintenance. In order to understand why this is so, we need to review the foundational elements of the covenant relationship between the Creator God and national Israel and the gospel age agreement between God the Father and his elect children.

The Creator God offered to make national Israel a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if they would obey his voice and keep his covenant. The Israelites agreed to this arrangement (Ex. 19:4-8) and as long as the Israelites adhered to the terms and conditions of the agreement, the covenant remained in force and the Israelites and their children were holy. However, if they broke their agreement and did not move to restore a harmonious relationship between themselves and the Creator God as provided in the terms and conditions of the agreement, the agreement
would be terminated and the Israelites and their children would no longer be a kingdom of priests or a holy nation.

The Creator God used the covenant relationship between a husband and a wife as an analogy for the relationship between himself and national Israel (Isa.54:4-8; Jer.3:20). Because of national Israel's (i.e., the Houses of Israel and Judah) adultery and whoredom with false religion and their flagrant violation of the terms and conditions of their covenant with God, he divorced Israel and terminated his agreement with them (Jer.3:8;11:10-11,17; 31:32). Today, Israel is not a kingdom of priests or a holy nation, because there is no agreement in force between them and the Creator God. At this time, national Israel has no means through which to acquire or maintain a holy status like they did under their first agreement with the Creator God.

During the gospel age of salvation, God the Father offers an opportunity to individuals to become kings and priests in his royal family and holy nation under certain terms and conditions. As long as individuals adhere to these terms and conditions, their agreement with the Father remains in force. But, if the individual breaks their agreement with the Father and does not move to restore a harmonious relationship with him as provided under the terms and conditions of the agreement, the agreement and their holy status is terminated (Matt.12:32; Rom. 6:23; Tit.3:10-11; Heb.10:26-31).

Because the holy status of the elect's children is predicated on the holy status of the parent(s), when the parent's holy status is terminated the unconverted children's holy status is also terminated and they no longer receive the benefits which resulted from the parents' holy status. See Deut.5:9-10; Hos.4:6.

The Opportunity

It seems that a unique opportunity for salvation under the gospel age agreement is granted to an unconverted individual married to one of the Father's elect children. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze this opportunity in detail, but it does seem that this opportunity only exists for some individuals during this age in this particular situation (this may also include the unconverted children. See Acts 2:39).

"But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, if you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?" (1.Cor.7:15-16 Para.).
HOLINESS: A RECOGNIZABLE QUALITY

Is there something that can be observed, heard, seen, or touched in this physical dimension that will reveal if a person is holy or practices holiness, or is practicing holiness just an abstract religious concept with no real substance? The condition of being holy and the true practice of holiness are clearly recognizable. There are many ways to determine if a person is truly holy and is practicing holiness according to the Bible's definition of being holy and practicing holiness. The following scriptural examples show how the physical and spiritual condition of being holy and the practice of holiness can be recognized by people and by spirit-beings.

The New Covenant

The focal point of the new covenant with national Israel is the placing of God's law within the innermost parts of one's being. The reason that the law needs to be a part of a person's very being is because it is the law that teaches a person what holy attitudes, behaviors, and character are and how to practice the way of holiness:

"Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that 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 that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband to them, says the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer.31:31-33 KJV).

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Heb.8:10 NIV).

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Heb.10:16-18 KJV).

Because people who lived before and during the first covenant with national Israel did not have the law of God as a part of their mental and spiritual make-up, they found it very difficult to maintain their holy status and obey and worship God as he originally intended. It is for this reason that God formed a new agreement, which included a provision that would change what was wrong with people by placing his laws in their minds and spirits.
God has only one set of laws that show people how to be holy, how to behave toward each other, and how they should worship him. Therefore, the law being spoken of in Jeremiah, chapter 31 and Hebrews, chapter 10 is the same law that he gave to the nation of Israel as a part of the first agreement with them. This is the law that he will write in the hearts and minds of people under the new agreement with national Israel and that is a part of the agreement with the Father's earthly children during the gospel age of salvation. In other words, God will write these laws in the innermost part of one's mind; thereby, he will make the law a part of one's thinking process.

This is how we are truly reconciled to God the Father. There is a change of mind, which is called conversion. One is converted from a hostile, sinning, evil-minded person into a loving, law-abiding, person who does the will of God. After conversion, one becomes holy and is no longer an enemy of God! Therefore, one indication that a person is holy is the practice of God's law.

**Known by Their Fruits**

Both Jesus and Paul reveal how one holy person can recognize another holy person when they are given enough time to evaluate a person's attitude, behavior, and character:

"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 cut down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore 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" (Matt.7:18-21 KJV). See also Matt.12:33; Lk.6:43-44.

Throughout the Bible, good trees and good fruit are associated with people who are in conformity with God's law, while bad trees and bad fruit are associated with people who are living in opposition to God's law.

"When you were the servants of sin, you were free from righteousness. What fruit resulted from doing those things that you are now ashamed of doing? The end result of doing those things is death. But you are free from sin, and become servants of God, now you have the fruit of your holiness, which will result is everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but God's gift is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:20-23 Para.).

Why is the fruit of righteousness eternal life and the wages of sin death? The reason is that "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Rom.7:12) and "All your [God's] commandments are righteousness" (Psa.119:172), but sin is the violation of God's holy law. The sacred state of righteousness and the practice of holiness are inexorably tied to obedience to God's law which results in eternal life. See Matt.19:16-20.
"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" and "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Gal.5:23-25; Eph.5:9).

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, haughty, Without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2.Tim.3:1-5).

Jesus Christ was just like the Sovereign Father and reflected his attitude, behavior, and character. A holy one is instructed to imitate these characteristics; therefore, one indication that a person is holy is that the person is following Jesus Christ's example and instructions about the practice of holiness and has godly characteristics—one fruit of the spirit is holiness.

Clearly, a person who is consistently out of step with God's way of life and refuses to conform to the basic laws of holiness is not a holy person.

**Marked For Recognition**

A holy individual who has the spirit of God dwelling within them and practices holiness is recognizable to beings who inhabit the spirit realm. The following accounts show that spirit-beings can easily recognize a person who is holy.

The prophet Ezekiel was given a vision showing that God's patience with national Israel will come to an end and that he will no longer sit quietly by while the houses of Israel and Judah and their civil and religious leaders commit their abominations and idolatry before him. In this vision, Ezekiel sees a spirit-being with an inkhorn being sent to mark for protection against God's wrath many of the elect who inhabit Jerusalem:

"Cause them that have charge over the city [Jerusalem] to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came . . . and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side . . . . And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; And the Lord said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man on whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary" (Ezk.9:1-6 KJV).
How does the spirit-being with the inkhorn know who is worthy to receive the mark of protection? He could have a list of these people, another spirit-being could point them out to him, or perhaps there is something that emanates from a holy person that distinguishes them from other people. From the following accounts it seems that a spirit-being can distinguish a holy person from an unholy person by something emanating from a holy person which can only be perceived by a spirit-being.

The three following accounts show that spirit-beings easily recognize the difference between a person who is holy and one who is not:

"And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone: what have we to do with you, you Jesus of Nazareth? art you come to destroy us? I know you who you art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold your peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not" (Lk.4:33-35 KJV).

"And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew to us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:16-17 KJV).

"Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took on them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded" (Acts 19:13-16 KJV).

Yes, a holy person can be recognized; however, it is obvious from what we find in the scriptures that the only ones who can truly recognize if someone is holy and is practicing holiness are people who themselves are holy and understand the rules and standards for being holy, as well as spirit-beings who know the difference between the holy and the unholy.

SUMMARY

National Israel

The Creator God's covenant with national Israel required that all Israelites imitate his attitude, behavior, and character (You shall be holy, because I am holy) and maintain this sacred holy state of existence in order to receive benefits under the national covenant. Therefore, God revealed to the Israelites the laws which govern the holy state of existence and he instructed them in the practice of these laws in order for them to be holy and remain holy.
The laws of holiness given to the Israelites governed every aspect of their lives. Every circumstance was addressed either by a specific law, a concept, or a principle within the law. Therefore, when a holy state of existence was established through God's decree, lawful ritual, or dedication to God, the holy condition was to be maintained through adherence to the laws of holiness.

If a person violated the law of holiness and that violation was serious, the violator was to be put to death. The death of those who polluted the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant and the failure of national Israel to maintain a holy state of existence even after repeated warnings for them to be holy clearly show the importance of understanding how to become holy and how to maintain a holy lifestyle. See Lev.10:10-11.

If a person or a thing was defiled and the law allowed for the holy state to be reestablished, it could be reestablished through one or more of the following: The repentance of the violator, the removal of the defiling element, the proper sacrifice, and a purification ritual.

Among the Israelites, certain objects and animals were transformed from the natural realm to a holy existence to varying degrees depending on function, responsibility, or use. This was done through God's decree, lawful ritual, or dedication to God. The mental transformation from the natural state to the holy state came about for national Israel through a desire and willingness to obey God's instructions. God defined this desire and willingness to obey him as being circumcised in the heart. See Deut.10:16; 30:6.

God'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 Father calls to salvation during the gospel age have an agreement that is different from the one ancient Israel had with the Creator God, this agreement still requires the Sovereign Father's earthly children to be holy as he is holy:

"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. And they are his ambassadors who are to represent him and his way of life to humanity.

Although the Father's 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:

"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).

"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 unto iniquity to iniquity; even so now yield your members servants unto righteousness unto holiness" (Rom. 6:19 KJV).

In order to live a holy life and imitate god-like attitudes and behaviors, a person must 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. This is one of the reasons why the scriptures say to study the law and meditate on God's law. 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 and the apostle Paul 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 hast made me wiser than mine 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).

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15 NKJV).
Tremendous Blessings

Those who truly follow God's laws, precepts, and principles during the gospel age of salvation will be blessed beyond comprehension, because they are among the first of humanity to be given the opportunity to be holy as God is holy in the spiritual sense:

"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways" (Psa.119:1-3 KJV).

There are awesome rewards for those who diligently pursue a holy lifestyle in obedience to God's law and successfully maintain their sacred state of holiness:

"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).

"Blessed and holy [hagios] is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev.20:6 KJV).

"And he said to me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy (hagiazo), let him be holy (hagios) still. 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. 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. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loves and makes a lie" (Rev.22:10-15 KJV).

The English word holy in Revelation 20:6 and 22:11 is translated from the Greek word hagios, which means sacred, pure, blameless, holy or saint. The English phase be holy in Revelation 20:11 is translated from the Greek word hagiazeto, which means purify or consecrate.

All of these holy, righteous individuals are to be blessed, because after they were made holy through the process of repentance and baptism, they continued to practice God's law of holiness.
THE FUTURE

Isaiah records that, after Christ's return and the government of God is established in Jerusalem, all the residence of the city will be called holy. It seems that the reason these people will be called holy is because they will be practicing the laws of holiness:

"In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remains in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. And the Lord will create on every dwelling place of mount Zion, and on her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for on all the glory shall be a defense" (Isa.4:2-5 KJV).

The prophet Ezekiel was inspired to record that the priests who administer the temple system after the return of Christ will teach the same things concerning holiness that were taught to ancient Israel, the early church, and the elect at the end of the age:

"And they [the Priests] shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezk.44:23 KJV). See also Lev.10:9-11; 11:46-47.

There is a heavy penalty to be paid by anyone who has had holiness placed within them and then contaminates their holy state and neglects to repent and ask for forgiveness for their violation of the law of holiness:

"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.5:24 KJV).

A Physical and Spiritual Reality

The Sovereign Father and his firstborn son Jesus Christ are holy; they are spirit-beings who inhabit a dimension of existence which is ruled by perfect law. For God the Father's holy children, holiness is a physical and spiritual reality that derives its sacred quality of existence from God the Father through the power of his holy spirit. It is this sacred quality of existence that separates the Father's earthly children from the rest of humanity and allows them to interact with the Father's heavenly realm.
What does it mean to be holy during the gospel age of salvation?:

- One is intrinsically holy with God's holy spirit dwelling within them.
- One is not human as others are human, but is a holy creation.
- One is a member of the Sovereign Father's holy family and holy nation.
- One must practice the laws of holiness which are applicable to one's life.

All who desire to become an immortal spirit-being, inherit the Kingdom of God, and reap the awesome rewards that are promised for being holy must remain holy, love God with all their being, and obey his laws of holiness:

"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).

By B. L. Coherell
What is expected of the elect of God today regarding the laws that were given to national Israel through Moses? Which ones, if any, must be practiced by God the Father's children? Some people would answer that none of these laws need to be practiced. Some believe that all of these laws are still binding on God's people and others believe that only some of these laws must still be practiced by God's elect today.

Are there any solid answers to the many difficult questions about the practice of God's law? Yes, there are easily understood answers to the questions about which of the laws of God must be practiced by the elect of God today. Those who desire to live their lives after the ways of God can easily find these answers, because the apostles recorded them for all who are seeking to do God's will in their life.

In order to understand what the Father requires of his children today regarding his law given through Moses, it is important to remember that the temple worship system existed for about 40 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Moreover, during this time many converted Jews still worshiped in local synagogues, as well as at the Temple in Jerusalem and they continued to observe certain aspects of the temple worship system. It is during this time of transition between the old and new agreements with national Israel that we find much of the controversy about the law and its observance.

A QUESTION ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

In the Book of Acts, chapter 15, the apostles are gathered at Jerusalem to consider the questions brought to them about circumcision, God's law given through Moses, and salvation. The apostle's decision about these issues was for their day as well as ours. Their decisions regarding this matter established a concise guideline as to what God the Father expects of his children regarding the practice of his law given through Moses to national Israel.

The Authority of the Eldership

It is important to understand that this meeting at Jerusalem was a formal council of the apostles and elders who governed the congregations of God. This was not just an informal gathering of a few of the elect; this was a meeting to resolve major issues that affected the entire body of the elect and needed to be resolved by those who were in authority.

The authority to govern the church first resided with the apostles and later with the apostles and the elders:
"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Matt.18:18-19 NIV).

The First Question

"And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15:1-2 KJV).

Is circumcision required for salvation? The reason this question is so important is that it has to do with how a person is supposed to obtain justification and be declared righteous in God's eyes.

The Second Question

"But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5 KJV).

The second question before the apostles and elders concerns obedience to the laws God gave national Israel through Moses.

These men who believed in Jesus Christ thought that, in order for the Gentile converts to secure salvation, they had to practice all of the laws that were a part of the first agreement between God and Israel. This is exactly what many people today believe; they feel that virtually everything in the first covenant with national Israel applies to Christians (spiritual Israelites) today.

The two questions answered in Acts 15:

- Was it necessary for a Gentile convert to be circumcised in order to be saved?
- Was it necessary for the Gentile convert to practice all of the laws the Creator God gave to the nation of Israel through Moses?

PETER GIVES HIS OPINION

"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said to them, Men and brethren, you know how that a good while ago God made a choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knows the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the holy spirit, even as he did to us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:7-9 KJV).
Here, Peter refers to the events recorded in Acts 10. Notice that the Gentiles were to "hear and believe." These are very important scriptures because, Peter was inspired to document that there is no difference between an Israelite and Gentile regarding the call to salvation and the requirements for justification before God. Peter clearly shows that, regarding salvation and justification, both Gentiles and Jews are equal in God's eyes. Therefore, they must have the same covenant relationship with God.

The Gentiles did receive justification, their sins were forgiven, and their hearts were purified through their faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. Moreover, they did receive the holy spirit without being circumcised. See Acts 5:32.

THE YOKE

"Therefore why do you test God, by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we had the strength to bear? But through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we believe in order to be saved, according to the same manner they also believed" (Acts 15:10-11 Para.).

Peter felt that those who wanted the Gentiles to obey the law of circumcision and other laws given to Israel through Moses were trying to place an unbearable burden on them. Again, Peter points out the fact that both Jew and Gentile were saved by the same belief in Jesus Christ.

But what is this yoke that is an impossible burden to carry? Was this yoke a part of the law given through Moses, which these men felt the Gentiles should practice? It seems reasonable to believe this is what Peter was saying. The word, yoke in verse 10 is from the Greek word zugos, which means of bondage. As we will see, this bondage only refers to the laws about justification (the sacrificial worship system), which Christ altered by becoming the perfect sacrifice to take away sin.

When one studies the laws given to ancient Israel about justification, it becomes evident that there was no way for a person to remain in a state of perpetual harmony with God under the terms and conditions of that agreement. Each time a person intentionally or unintentionally sinned they would cause a breach in their relationship with God, and this breach could only be repaired and a harmonious relationship with God could only be re-established when the appropriate sacrifice was offered. And even then, the atoning sacrifice could only provide a temporary repair of the breach between God and the one guilty of violating his law.

Animal sacrifices could only provide for the temporary setting aside of sin. The sin and its penalty was not forgiven nor forgotten; it still remained and awaited the perfect sacrifice of Christ to remove it forever:

"For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb.10:4 Para.).
The yoke that neither the fathers nor the apostles could bear was the sacrificial system of justification that was not able to remove sin and its penalty; therefore, it left the worshiper subject to eternal death. If Christ had not accepted the penalty for the sins of humanity, all humanity would still be in bondage to sin and the penalty of death. But he did die in the place of humanity; thus, he set the fathers (the ones who followed the sacrificial system), the apostles, the elders, and all of humanity free from the yoke of sin and death.

The second reason the law of sacrifice was considered a yoke is that it was very difficult for a person to continually come before God with the proper sacrifice each time they knew they had sinned. Under the new agreement, both Jew and Gentile remain in a constant state of justification, and upon recognition of sin, they only need to ask forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ; hence, they are no longer in bondage to sin.

THE YOKE

In order to more fully understand the yoke of bondage, it is necessary to review some of the teachings of Paul after the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

"Tell me, those desiring to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written: Abraham had two sons, one out of a slave-woman, and one out of the free woman. But indeed he of the slave-woman has been born according to the flesh; and he of the free woman through the promise" (Gal.4:21-23 Para.).

Here, Paul begins to explain the difference between the sacrificial system of justification that the patriarchs and national Israel were under and being justified through the sacrificial blood of Christ under the new agreement.

"Which things are being allegorized; for these are two covenants, one indeed from Mount Sinai bringing forth slavery—which is Hagar, for Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, and she is in slavery with her children" (Gal.4:24-25 Para.).

Paul uses Ishmael's mother, Hagar, as an allegory for the Sinai covenant. And depicts those who look to the temple system in Jerusalem for their justification as being in slavery (i.e., in bondage to the sacrificial system).

"But Jerusalem from above is free, who is the mother of us all. For it has been written, be glad barren one not baring: break forth and shout, the one not travelling, for more are the children of the desolate rather than she having the husband" (Gal.4:26-27 Para).
Those who have accepted the freedom offered by God the Father from heavenly Jerusalem are totally free because they have come under the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ and are free of sin—justified before God continually. They are no longer slaves to the sacrificial system of justification but they are partakers of a new agreement and freed from the bondage of the former.

"But brothers we are children of promise according to Isaac. But then even as he born according to flesh persecuted the one according to the spirit, so is it now. But what do the scriptures say? Cast out the slave-woman and her son, for in no way shall the son of the slave-woman inherit with the son of the free. Then brothers we are not children of a slave-woman, but of the free woman" (Gal.4: 28-31Para.).

Paul continues to make an analogy of the bondage of the former agreement and the freedom of the new. Only the free could legally have an inheritance in Israel under the law of God. Moreover, those under the old sacrificial system of justification do not have an inheritance, but those under the new system through the blood of Jesus Christ do have an inheritance because they are truly free.

BARNABAS AND PAUL

It is important to note that, after Paul's conversion, he continued to observe many of the laws God gave to Israel through Moses (See Acts 17:2; 20:6,16; Col.2:16). However, neither Barnabas nor Paul taught circumcision or obedience to the law of God for the purpose of being justified to the Father.

Barnabas and Paul relate their experiences with the Gentiles and tell of the miracles and wonders that were being done among them by God:

"Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (Acts 15:12 KJV).

JAMES: HIS ASSESSMENT, AND JUDGMENT

After all the apostles and elders had given their opinions about circumcision and God's law given through Moses, the apostle James who was the president of the Jerusalem council gives his assessment and judgement regarding these questions before the council:

"When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages" (Acts 15:13-18 NIV). Quoted from Amos 9:11-12.
Through their writings the prophets agreed with what had been said so far, because they had foretold that God would call individuals from among other nations to receive his spirit.

By quoting the prophets, James begins to lay the foundation for his decision regarding circumcision and God's law given through Moses and the edict, which the council wrote that was to be sent to the churches.

Verse 16 holds the key to understanding the edict of Acts 15:

"After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it" (Acts 15:16 NIV).

After what events will David's tent be rebuilt?:

• During the period of time from Christ's resurrection to the time of his return as King of Kings.
• After Christ's return to the earth, he will restore David to rulership over Israel. See Ezk.34:22-24; 37:24.

It is apparent from the biblical record that God is concerned with national Israel before the return of his Son to rule the earth. See Jer.31:31-33; Hos.2:16,19; Heb.8:8-13. However, during this age before Christ returns, God the Father is choosing people out of all nations to partake of salvation with the Patriarchs and the Israelites. See Acts 10; Rom.2:9-15, 28-29; Heb.3:1-19.

Acts 15:17-18 reveal that after Christ returns, God the Father will call other nations in a systematic way and have them participate in the re-established sacrificial worship system at Jerusalem and live in obedience to all his laws until, eventually, all nations on earth come under his rule and authority. See the prophecies in the Book of Ezekiel that show the new temple worship system, which will be administered by the descendants of Zadok.

THE PROPHECY OF AMOS

The prophecy of Amos verifies the assessment and decision of James about circumcision and the law given through Moses and the meaning of Peter's experiences while proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles:

"For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall on the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us. In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old" (Amos 9:9-11 KJV).
Amos also speaks of salvation being offered to all nations after Christ returns:

"That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, says the Lord that does this" (Amos 9:12 KJV).

The following is a more accurate translation of verse 12:

"That the rest of mankind may seek [the Lord], and all the nations on whom my name is called, says the Lord, who does all these things."

The corruption of this verse must have occurred after the time of the apostles, because James quoted the verse as noted in the Scofield Bible at the Jerusalem Council and based his decision upon it (Acts 15:14-17). There were learned men present at the Jerusalem council, and some of them were hostile to James' view on God's calling of the Gentiles. These men would certainly have shouted him down if he had based his decision upon a reading that was different from that which existed in Hebrew manuscripts. See Scofield Bible quote.

"Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that sows seed; and the mountains shall drop with wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them on their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, says the Lord your God" (Amos 9:13-15 Para.).

James quoted the prophecy of Amos, which can be summarized as follows:

• The scattering of Israel throughout the nations (vs.9-10).
• The restoration of the Davidic dynasty (v11).
• The conversion of all of the Gentile nations (v12).
• The fruitfulness of the land of Israel after Christ's return (v13).
• Israel's return from captivity (v14).
• The rebuilding of Israel's destroyed cities (v14).
• Israel's permanent settlement of the Holy Land (v15).

The prophesies of Isaiah and Micah both lend support to what James had to say about salvation being offered to Gentiles:

"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious" (Isa.11:10 KJV). Please read verses 1-16 for the context of Isa.chp.11.
"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the
house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains,
and it shall be exalted above the hills; 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.
And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations
afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their
spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against
nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Mic.4:1-3 KJV).

Without doubt, James is referring to the return of Christ as King of
kings when he quotes the prophet Amos:

"After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of

THE JUDGMENT OF JAMES

"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for
the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to
them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual
immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.
For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times
and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath" (Acts 15:19-21
NIV).

The Living Bible Paraphrased translates verse 21, "For these things
have been preached against in Jewish synagogues in every city on every
Sabbath for many generations."

The things taught in the synagogues referred to in verse 21 were the
laws about idolatry, sexual immorality, improper slaughter of animals,
eating blood, and diet.

The analysis and conclusion of James was correct and was supported
by all the Council. Therefore, the Council wrote a letter to be distributed
as a confirmation to the Gentiles and other converts, then sent men to
deliver the letter who could further explain the Council's decision.

"Then it seemed good to the apostles and elders, with all the church,
to send chosen men from them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas;
Judas called Barnabas and Silas, leading men among the brothers" (Acts 15:22 Para.).

"And they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and
elders and brethren send greeting to the brethren which are of the
Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. Forasmuch as we have
heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with
words, subverting your souls, saying, You must be circumcised, and
keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment" (Acts 15:
23-24 KJV).
The Council felt that those who taught justification by works were subverting the flock. It seems that these heretical teachings not only included circumcision but also other aspects of the law given through Moses that the Jerusalem Council knew to be unnecessary for justification and salvation.

"It seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to send chosen men to you along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul. Men who have forsaken their own pursuits on behalf of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore, Judas and Silas, they also through word announcing the same things. For it seemed good to the holy spirit and to us to put not one greater burden on you than these necessary things" (Acts 15:25-28 Para.).

THE LOGIC OF THE DECISION

The majority of the converted Gentiles were not living in Judea, so they were subject to the civil laws of the nations where they lived. Because these Gentile converts were scattered throughout the world and the Jews had a hostile attitude toward them, it was impossible for most of the Gentiles to worship at the temple in Jerusalem.

It was obviously impossible for most Gentile converts to follow all of the laws God gave to national Israel, because of who they were and where they lived. In light of this and other considerations, the apostles and elders made their decision about circumcision and God's law given through Moses.

THE ELECT OF GOD

The Father's elect, whether Jew or Gentile, are living under the same conditions concerning the worship of God, because there is no longer a temple worship system. The temple system at Jerusalem ceased being practiced in 70 B.C. Therefore, the elect are now in the same situation as the early Gentile converts.

The edict of Acts 15 will continue to apply to all of the elect everywhere on earth even after the temple system is re-established at Jerusalem before Christ returns.

THE EDICT OF ACTS 15

After investigation of the rationale behind the decision that the apostles and elders made, it is possible to understand the details of the four major points of the edict.

"Abstain from foods offered to idols and blood, and that strangled, and from fornication; from which if you keep yourselves, you shall do well. Farewell" (Acts 15:29 Para.).
Although these Gentile converts lived during a time when pagan religions impacted almost every aspect of daily life, these people were neither given a special dispensation nor exempted from practicing the laws of God that were necessary for salvation, because this would have been inconsistent with the teachings of the apostles and scripture:

"After being dismissed they went to Antioch. And gathered the multitude, and delivered the letter. And reading it they rejoiced at the comfort in it. And Judas and Silas, themselves also being prophets, exhorted the elect with many words and confirmed what was in the letter. And continuing for a time, they were sent away with peace from the elect to the apostles" (Acts 15:30-33 KJV Para.).

THE FOUR THINGS THE GENTILES HAD TO AVOID

The following are the four specific things listed in the letter from which the Gentiles had to abstain:

- Eating meats sacrificed to idols
- Practicing sexual immorality
- Eating meat from strangled animals
- Consuming blood

In order to understand why these were the only things listed for the Gentiles to abstain from, it must first be discovered what God finds wrong with each of these things. A good place to begin the search is to review the events that occurred while the Israelites were camped at Mount Sinai and Peor.

WORSHIPING THE GOLDEN Calf

At the foot of Mount Sinai, the Israelites broke the agreement they had made with God. Notice that God became so angry that he would have destroyed the entire nation if it had not been for the pleadings of Moses.

"When Moses didn't come back down the mountain right away, the people went to Aaron. "Look," they said, "make us a god to lead us, for this fellow Moses who brought us here from Egypt has disappeared; something must have happened to him." "Give me your golden earrings", Aaron replied. So they all did—men and women, boys and girls. Aaron melted the gold, then molded and tooled it into the form of a calf. The people exclaimed, "O Israel, this is the god that brought you out of Egypt!" (Ex.32:1-4 LBP).

"When Aaron saw how happy the people were about it, he built an altar before the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a feast to Jehovah!" So they went up early the next morning and began offering burnt offerings and peace offerings to the calf-idol; afterwards they sat down to feast and drink at a wild party, followed by sexual immorality" (Ex.32:5-6 LBP).
"Then the Lord told Moses, "Quick! Go on down, for your people that you brought from Egypt have defiled themselves, and have quickly abandoned my laws. They have molded themselves a calf, and worshiped it, and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of Egypt.' "Then the Lord said, "I have seen what a stubborn, rebellious lot these people are. Now let me alone and my anger shall blaze out against them and destroy them all; and I will make you, Moses, into a great nation instead of them" (Ex.32:7-10 LBP).

**ISRAEL WORSHIPS BAAL-PEOR**

While the Israelites were camped east of the Jordan river at Peor, they repeated many of the same mistakes they made at Mount Sinai: they were having wrongful sexual relations with the Moabite women and participating in the worship of the Moabite god, Peor. It is useful to read both the KJV and LBP translations of Numbers 25:1-5 in order to clearly understand what Israel had done in worshiping Peor.

"And Israel abode in Shittim [Acacia], and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself to Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" (Num. 25:1-3 KJV).

"While Israel was camped at Acacia [Shittim], some of the young men began going to wild parties with the local Moabite girls. These girls also invited them to attend the sacrifices to their gods, and soon the men were not only attending the feasts, but also bowing down and worshiping the idols. Before long all Israel was joining freely in the worship of Baal, the god of Moab; and the anger of the Lord was hot against his people" (Num.25:1-3 LBP).

"And the Lord said to Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said to the judges of Israel, Slay every one his men that were joined to Baal-peor" (Num.25:4-5 KJV).

"He issued the following command to Moses: "Execute all the tribal leaders of Israel. Hang them up before the Lord in broad daylight, so that his fierce anger will turn away from his people." So Moses ordered the judges to execute all who had worshiped Baal" (Num. 25:4-5 LBP).

"They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods; they provoked the Lord to anger by their wicked deeds. . ." (Psa.106:28-29 NIV). See also Num.25:6-18; 31:1-17; Deut.4:1-4; Jos. 22:1-17; Hos.9:8-10; 1.Jn.5:21; Rev.2:14, 20-23.

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IDOLATRY

The Israelites' behavior at Mount Sinai and Peor showed their disregard for the foundation of God's laws, principles, and precepts; to worship another god and to commit sexual immorality are abominations in God's sight. Both of these actions by the Israelites violated God's law and displayed a great contempt and lack of respect for their Creator and the agreement they had made with him at Mount Sinai. In Revelation 2:24, Jesus says that these types of sins are the deep things of Satan.

The incident in the wilderness in which the Israelites worshiped the golden calf shows how abhorrent idolatry is to God. But does idolatry affect a person's relationship with God? The first four of the Ten Commandments give instruction on how one must relate to God. Three of these laws are as follows:

1. You shall not have any other gods beside me.
2. You shall not make a carved image for yourself of any likeness, which is in the heavens above, or which is in the earth beneath, or which is in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them and you shall not serve them, for I am God your God, a jealous God, visiting the lawlessness of fathers on their children, to the third and on the fourth generations of them that hate me; and doing kindness to thousands who love me, and to those who keep my commandments.
3. You shall not take the name of God in vain; for God will not leave unpunished the one who takes his name in vain.

These three laws define the respect a person must have for God, and if a person violates these laws, the relationship between the person and God is severely damaged. Moreover, if the violations are not repented of, they will lead to the severing of the relationship between God and the violator of the law.

The Israelites had an agreement with God and they were accountable to him under its terms and conditions. By making the golden calf at Mount Sinai, the Israelites broke the first two laws governing their relationship with God. Therefore, they showed their contempt for the one who had saved them from the Egyptians and made an agreement with them to bless them above all the nations of the earth:

"They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped the molten image. They changed their glory into the similitude [image] of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God their savior, which had done great things in Egypt" (Psa.106:19-21 KJV).
SEXUAL IMMORALITY

At Sinai, sexual immorality followed the making of the golden calf and was a part of their drunken feast to their new god. At Peor, sexual immorality preceded the Israelite's worship of the god of Peor. Both of these events demonstrate the destructive effects that sexual immorality has on the character of an individual and a nation. Both are examples of the flesh and spirit—being defiled by unholy relationships with false gods.

There can be no doubt that sexual immorality is in direct opposition to God's instructions for human behavior and his desire and purpose for humans to become a part of his family.

God's law prohibits sexual promiscuity, deviance, and adultery. The immoral sexual acts of the Israelites at Sinai and Peor were considered by God as spiritual infidelity (i.e., spiritual adultery), because they were committed as a part of worshiping a false god. Thereby, the Israelites broke the Sinai agreement, and the law regarding idolatry. The following are a few of the many scriptures which tell of God's great concern for the Israelites and his judgment on them because of their infidelity.

- Exodus 34:10-17: God warns the Israelites not to give themselves to other gods or make molten images.
- Jeremiah 3:1-25: God tells of his divorce from Israel because of their spiritual adultery. He also foretells the time when he will again try to save them.
- Ezekiel 16:1-63: God tells of his blessings to Israel, Israel's infidelity by worshiping other gods, his punishment on them, and his promise to save them out of their wickedness.
- Hosea 2:11-17; 4:1-19; 9:1-17: These scriptures reveal Israel's physical and spiritual infidelity and God's punishment on them for their infidelity.
- Lev.17:7; Deut.31:15-20 and Ezek.6:1-14 all warn of a loss of blessings for committing idolatry.

PAUL INSTRUCTS THE CORINTHIANS

Before the formation of the early church, the Jewish world had been taught for centuries that sexual immorality and idolatry were wrong. However, this was not generally true with the Gentile world; many of the Gentile nations still practiced basically the same satanic worship system that had ensnared the Israelites of Moses' time. This is why Paul instructed the elect (both Jew and Gentile) at Corinth to avoid sexual and spiritual immorality. Moreover, this is why he gave them guidance about when it was acceptable and when it was not acceptable to eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol.
"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor 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. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything. Food for the stomach and the stomach for food—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also" (1.Cor.6:9-14 NIV).

It is important to understand that Paul taught from the law of God, and he said that, although he had the right to do everything that God permits, he would still maintain control of his actions. He did not say that he was allowed to do anything he wanted to in opposition to the law of God.

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit" (1.Cor.6:15-17 NIV).

The critical point Paul made is that, if a person does something in opposition to God's rules of behavior, this person is in danger of being united with evil spirits.

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1.Cor.6:18-20 NIV).

Paul instructed the Corinthians to flee from sexual immorality and he explained that the physical body of a child of God is in fact the dwelling place of the holy spirit. If a child of God commits immoral acts, they violate the temple of God (the physical body) where the holy spirit dwells. See also 1.Cor.3:16-17; 2.Cor.6:14-18.

Paul's message to the Corinthians was not for them alone, because many of the problems they experienced were common to the other early Christian communities that lived within Gentile nations. Notice Paul's admonition and warning to those at Thessalonica about unrighteous behavior that leads to destruction.
"It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his holy spirit" (1.Thes.4:3-8 NIV). See also Rom.1:21-32.

Understanding Rebellion

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry. We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died" (1.Cor.10:1-8 NIV).

Paul reminds the Corinthians of God's punishment on the Israelites for their idolatrous and immoral conduct. It is important to note that eating things sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, and idol worship are mentioned together many times throughout the biblical record, because it is through these three methods that evil spirits repeatedly teach people to disobey God.

MEATS SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

Paul urges the elect at Corinth to behave themselves in a righteous manner because they are of the body of Christ. Then, in verses 18-21, he speaks very bluntly about the consumption of meats sacrificed to idols and he leaves no doubt as to the seriousness of such an act and its end result:

"Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1.Cor.10:14-17 NIV).
"Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons" (1.Cor.10:18-21 NIV).

**EAT EVERYTHING?**

Paul restates what he said earlier in 1.Corinthians 6:12 about the eating of food:

"Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (1.Cor. 10:23-24 NIV).

"Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. "If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience sake—the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?"

(1.Cor.10:25-30 NIV).

Some people interpret these verses to mean that it is lawful to eat meat that has been contaminated by idol worship. Some also feel that verses 25-30 and 1.Timothy 4:3-4 give the elect of God the freedom to eat any kind of meat desired. However, this is absolutely not true. God's law prohibits the slaughtering of animals to idols and forbids eating of such sacrifices.

In context, 1.Corinthians 10:25-26 clearly refers to a person's attitude about what is eaten and not the type of meat eaten. However, God's law only permits the eating of meats fit for human consumption. It is lawful to eat only those species God designated as fit for human consumption and have been slaughtered according to his directions. A good guideline to remember is that something can only be lawful if it is in harmony with God's law:

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1.Cor.10:31-32; 11:1 NIV).
Paul was not only concerned about what was lawful, he was also concerned about what brings a person to spiritual maturity. Paul says that mature Christians should carefully consider their actions when they are in the presence of other people to ensure that what is done or said will not give the wrong impression to others or a brother or sister in Christ. A legal act according to the law of God would be unprofitable to a weaker brother or sister if he or she is led astray by a misconception of what the brother who was acting legally had done.

If a member in the Father's earthly family is offended or their relationship with the Father is adversely impacted by one's behavior, even though it does not violate God's law, it is wise to refrain from the offending behavior in their presence. This advice is transferable to several subjects which are in question among believers today. When this advice is followed, it will help promote and maintain spiritual maturity, peace, and purpose within the body of Christ.

ANIMALS STRANGLED AND BLOOD

There are many reasons why the edict of Acts 15 included the prohibitions against eating animals strangled and consuming blood. The following are two of these reasons:

- Many pagan religious festivals included eating strangled animals, which retained their blood, as a part of their sacrificial system.
- Many of the pagans sought to increase or preserve their own life force by the eating blood, which sustains life.

Therefore, the instruction against eating strangled animals and their blood was a reminder that this law was still in force and was a part of the terms and conditions of God's agreement with his elect children (See Lev.7:26-27). A clear understanding of "things strangled and blood" must also include an understanding of the significance of blood in relation to God's law and the sacrificial worship system.

THE LAW

The penalty for violating the law of God is the death of the violator. In order to satisfy the law, God allowed an animal life to be a temporary substitute, under certain circumstances, for the life of the law breaker.

In order to form a new and better agreement with humanity, God the Father sent the Creator God (Jesus Christ) to sacrifice his own life as a permanent substitute for the life of all humans who violate his law.

With this understanding, it is possible to see the sacredness of blood from the aspect of the edict in Acts 15.

The Blood of Atonement

In the Book of Leviticus, there is a clear statement that the life-blood of an animal is given to make atonement for a human life:
"Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood—I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood. Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is [in] its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is [in] its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off" (Lev.17:10-14 NIV).

Life is in the Blood

"Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it" (Gen. 9:3-4 NIV).

The blood that was shed in the sacrifices was sacred; it was the life of the sacrificial victim. And because life is sacred, the blood that sustains it is also sacred and symbolic of life.

In Deuteronomy 12:20-25 the Israelites were told the following about animal blood:

"When the Lord your God has enlarged your territory as he promised you, and you crave meat and say, "I would like some meat," then you may eat as much of it as you want . . . . But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. You must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water. Do not eat it, so that it may go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord" (Deut.12:20, 23-25 NIV).

God also gave instructions that care must be taken not to eat the blood of an animal when partaking of a fellowship meal with him:

"Set apart for the Lord your God every firstborn male of your herds and flocks. Do not put the firstborn of your oxen to work, and do not shear the firstborn of your sheep. Each year you and your family are to eat them in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose. If an animal has a defect, is lame or blind, or has any serious flaw, you must not sacrifice it to the Lord your God. You are to eat it in your own towns. Both the ceremonially unclean and the clean may eat it, as if it were gazelle or deer. But you must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water" (Deut.15:19-23 NIV). See also Gen.9:4; Lev.7:26-27; Deut.12:15-16; 1.Sam.14: 32-34.
TODAY'S WORLD

Today, many who profess to follow the teachings of the Bible believe that the things mentioned in Acts 15 do not apply; however, these things are very relevant, because the same basic attitudes that existed during the time of the early church still exists today.

Do people of our day eat things sacrificed to idols, live sexually immoral lives, eat blood and strangled animals? Yes, they do.

Do any of the things mentioned for the Gentiles to avoid exist in today's societies? The answer is obviously they do. They all exist in one form or another. Divorce, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and many other types of sexual immorality exist within all societies. Moreover, religious celebrations (e.g., Christmas and Easter) in every nation are rooted in the worship of idols and demons. The source of such celebrations and their sacrifices has been very cleverly disguised over the centuries to hide their true meaning. For example, during the Christmas and Easter celebrations, millions of worshipers eat meals in honor of the false gods represented by these days. See Deut.12:29-31; Jer.10:1-5; Ezk.8:16.

In many nations, the eating of blood pudding, blood sausage, blood bread, and animals which have been killed without draining the blood from them is still practiced.

The concepts Paul conveyed to the Corinthians about the interaction among God's elect, immoral behavior, and false worship systems are just as valid today as they were then; the only difference is that these practices are sometimes very cleverly disguised as something harmless.

Paul instructed the elect at Corinth and others about the law; so that, they would know what is pleasing to God. Today, true servants of God also teach and proclaim God's law and way of life, a way in which "the called out ones" may grow into spiritual maturity.

THE FOUNDATION

Without the foundation of God's law, those who are called by God to become perfect would not have a guide to help them achieve perfection in the spirit. Those who do not teach God's commandments, precepts, and principles, which were not questioned by the apostles and prophets, are deceived by the lawless spirit who deceives the whole world (See Rev.12:9). Those who teach that the law of God has been done away with through the sacrifice of Jesus have not heard the voice of God's spirit, because the holy spirit upholds the law of God and teaches the elect to do likewise. See 1.Jn.2:1-6; 3:7-10; Rev.2:12-29.

The law of God is not burdensome, it is the way of love. Every law is based on the principle of love—love for God and love for one's neighbor. Without Godly love just like ancient Israel, we will also violate the law of God.
THE TRANSITION PERIOD

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, there was a short period of time when both the old agreement with ancient Israel and the new agreement existed together. This situation allowed the elect of God to participate in certain aspects of the temple worship system. When the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., what remained of the original agreement and relationship between God and national Israel ended.

"In the saying, New, He has made the first old. And the thing being made old and growing aged will soon disappear" (Heb.8:13 Para.).

The following events in the transition from the temple worship system to the worship of God in spirit are listed in sequential order:

1. When Christ became the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin, the need to sacrifice animals to atone for one's sin in order to become justified before God was abolished.

2. On the Day of Pentecost in 30 A.D., the holy spirit came to dwell within the elect of God. This demonstrated that God had moved his dwelling place and that the new and better agreement that he had promised through the prophets was in effect.

   The indwelling of the holy spirit eliminated the need for a physical priesthood to mediate between God and his elect children of the gospel age of salvation, because Christ is now the new High Priest who intercedes for the elect. See 1.Cor.3:16; 6:19-20; Heb.4:14-16.

3. With the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., all laws that required the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices for their fulfillment were suspended until the return of the Messiah. After Christ returns, animal sacrifices will again be instituted as noted in Ezekiel 45 and Zechariah 14:16-21. The Bible gives few details regarding these future sacrifices, except that they will be officiated over by the sons of Zadok.

AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

In the book of Lamentations, God inspired a prophecy of the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem:

"And he has violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he has destroyed his places of the assembly: the Lord has caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and has despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest. The Lord has cast off his altar, he has abhorred his sanctuary, he has given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast" (Lam.2:6-7 KJV).
With the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., it became impossible for anyone to take part in the temple worship system as required under the first agreement with national Israel. Therefore, all temple services were set aside. This also applies to all of the laws about the operation of a national Israel/Judah. Without the temple and the priesthood, neither converted Jew nor Gentile can legally observe any law that requires the temple and the priesthood for its practice.

The Future Temple:

The prophetic writings show a restoration of the temple worship system will occur before the return of Jesus Christ. Shortly after his return, he will establish the Davidic dynasty again (Acts 15:16), along with his Father's government through which he will rule the world. After these events, a new temple system will be instituted. See Ezk.chps. 40-48.

GOD'S HOLY PLACE TODAY

God's Holy Place (his earthly temple where his spirit resides) was transferred from the temple at Jerusalem in 30 A.D. to the physical bodies of his elect children whom he calls from among all peoples during the gospel age of salvation.

"Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells within you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1.Cor.3:16-17 KJV).

"What? know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?" (1.Cor.6:19 KJV).

THE SHADOW OF GOOD THINGS

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshipers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb.10:1-4 Para.).

These scriptures prove that there was a need for a perfect sacrifice, which was the sacrifice of Christ that allowed for an individual to be totally justified to God the Father.
"Therefore when he comes into the world, he says, Sacrifice and offering you do not want, but a body have you prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do your will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin you do not want, neither have pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do your will, O God. He takes away the first, that he may establish the second" (Heb.10:5-9 Para.).

Christ's sacrifice provided total justification, canceled the old agreement that required animal sacrifices for the atonement for sin, and established a new agreement between God the Father, Jesus Christ, and those called to salvation.

"By which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the holy spirit also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before" (Heb.10:10-15 Para.).

The New Agreement

"For finding fault with them, he says, 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. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:" (Heb.8:8-10 KJV). See also Jer.31:31-34.

"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and lawlessness I will not remember. Now where there is remission of sin, there is no more offering for sin. 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 [Christ's] flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; 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. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)" (Heb.10:16-23 KJV).
This new agreements terms, conditions, and performance is totally different in many ways from the first agreement with national Israel. Remember, it is called a better agreement not only because of better promises and rewards but also because of better terms, conditions, and performance standards between God the Father, Jesus Christ, and those called to salvation during the gospel age.

THE LAW WITHOUT AND WITHIN

The sacrificial system was used as a school master to bring us to Christ. Therefore, because this was accomplished by the law, what particular law was the schoolmaster?

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal.3:24-25 KJV).

Before the sacrifice of Christ, people stood outside the law and tried to measure up to its standards, but they could not because people are physical and the law of God is both physical and spiritual. It was only possible for a few individuals to measure up to the physical side of the law temporarily, but it was impossible to totally measure up to its spiritual aspects until Christ came.

Those who have the spirit of God become at one with God's law, because the law resides within them. The law is a part of their thought process. Notice what is said about the law becoming a part of those whom God calls to salvation:

"For this is the agreement that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb.8:10 Para.).

The elect of God are stewards of the law because it resides within them. They are to be a representation of the law of God in action. No longer is the law to be symbolic, because a converted, spirit-filled, child of God is to be a reality of the law just as Christ was.

HOW THE EDICT OF ACTS 15 APPLIES TODAY

The answers given to the questions asked of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 and the edict that was issued are still valid. But now, the principles of their edict apply to all of God's children, whether they are Gentiles or Jews. Today, both converted Gentiles and Jews are in the same situation in regard to the law of God.

By B. L. Cocherell
Circumcision of all males was one of the terms and conditions of God's agreement with ancient Israel and will be required as a part of his new agreement with them after Christ returns. But, is male circumcision required for Israelites and non-Israelites under the gospel age agreement with God the Father? Are there spiritual or physical advantages to being either circumcised or uncircumcised?

In order to understand the law of circumcision and its past, present, and future application one must understand the original intent of the law and its literal and symbolic meaning. Moreover, in order to determine whether or not male circumcision is required under the gospel age agreement between the Sovereign Father and the sons of his new creation, the following basic topic areas must be explored:

1. A review of biblical circumcision from a prophetic and historical perspective
2. An understanding of the edict of Acts 15 about circumcision
3. The apostle Paul's thoughts and teachings about circumcision

HISTORICAL AND PROPHETIC REVIEW

Abraham and the Covenant

The first biblical record of circumcision is in the Book of Genesis and seems to tell us that any male descendant of Abraham must be circumcised in order to benefit from a covenant relationship with the Creator God:

"And God said to Abraham, you shall keep my covenant, you and your seed after you in their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your seed after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised. And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you" (Gen.17:9-11 Para.).

The terms and conditions of the covenant between the Creator God and Abraham dictated that the act of circumcision was to be the physical evidence that there was indeed a perpetual covenant between the Creator God, Abraham, and his descendants.
"A son of eight days shall be circumcised among you, every male child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of your seed. He that is born in your house, and he that is bought with money, must be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" (Gen.17:12-13 Para.).

According to the Creator God's instructions to the Israelites, every newborn male descended from Abraham or a foreigner considered to be a member of an Israelite's household must be circumcised on the eight day of its life. Moreover, it is clear from the instruction "and he that is bought" includes the circumcision of males of all ages who are considered to be the property of an Israelite. This covenant is a perpetual covenant which is to be in force as long as there are descendants of Abraham.

"And the uncircumcised male child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" (Gen.17:14 Para.).

The perpetual covenant between the Creator God, Abraham, and Abraham's descendants promised many benefits for diligent adherence to its terms and conditions, but penalties for its violation.

If a male descendant of Abraham or a male who is considered property fails to be circumcised, that man is to be cut off from the benefits provided through the perpetual covenant between God, Abraham, and Abraham's descendants. Moreover, the Hebrew words used in the instruction in verse 14 strongly imply that "that soul shall be cut off" means a man who refuses circumcision was to be killed.

Moses Violates the Law

After Moses fled Egypt, he married Zapporah the daughter of a priest in the land of Midian. While he lived in Median, he fathered two sons by her. In the course of time, the Creator God revealed himself to Moses and told him what he wanted him to do about the Israelites in Egypt and sent him to do it:

"And you shall say to Pharaoh, The Lord says, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say to you, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if you refuse to let him go, Know this, because I will kill your son, even your firstborn" (Ex.4:22-23 Para.).

"And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met Moses and had determined to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her sons, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband you are to me" (Ex.4:24-25 Para.).
Although Moses was a man of great knowledge, ability, and humility, he had neglected to circumcise at least one or both of his two sons in accordance to God's law. It is not clear from the text (Ex.4:24-25) if God was going to kill Moses or Moses' sons. What is clear is that God felt this was a serious violation of his law and the offending party must die for this act of rebellion.

Zapporah understood God's law about circumcision, but did not act on it until a life was in jeopardy. Regardless of whom God was going to kill, it was Moses as the head of the family who was responsible for not having his sons circumcised in compliance with God's law.

The failure of Moses to obey God's law about circumcision shows that he did not yet fully understand the connection between obedience to God, blessings from God, and punishment for flagrant disobedience of God's law. Zapporah's quick action literally saved a life—once the circumcision was accomplished, both Moses and his sons were in compliance with God's law.

The scriptures leave out too many details about this event to make a thorough analysis; however, what is clearly shown is that compliance to the law of circumcision is an extremely important part of the covenant relationship between God and the Israelites.

The First Passover

Just before the Israelites observed the first Passover and were thrust out of Egypt, the Creator God gave them an instruction about circumcision. This instruction documents that circumcision was being practiced among the Israelites as a part of their cultural heritage.

"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat of it. But every man's servant that is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then shall he eat of it" (Ex.12:43-44 Para.).

Only those males who were considered to be an Israelite or the property of an Israelite could participate in the Passover ceremony, but only if the male was circumcised. Why was it important for all males to be circumcised before they could eat the Passover? It was important because circumcision was physical evidence that a covenant relationship existed between the Creator God and the Israelites.

National Israel

"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and say, If a woman has conceived and gives birth to a male child; then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Lev.12:1-3 Para.).
God reminded national Israel of the existing covenant between him and Abraham and that as inheritors of this agreement, they had to circumcise every newborn male child in the eighth day of its life in accordance to the terms and conditions of this covenant relationship.

Circumcision of an eight day old male was not for the purpose of establishing a covenant between the child and God, because when children were born into an Israelite family, they were also born into the national covenant. The children received their covenant relationship with the Creator God through birthright, not through the act of circumcision. The act of circumcision was performed as an act of compliance to the terms and conditions of the covenant.

Joshua

When the nation of Israel had crossed the Jordan river and began to claim the promised land, God ordered Joshua to perform a second national circumcision of all the males of Israel, because not all the males had been circumcised:

"At that time the Lord said to Joshua, Make sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel a second time. Joshua made sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. This is the reason why Joshua was told to perform the circumcision: All the males that came out of Egypt, that were men of war, died in the wilderness. All the males that came out were circumcised: but all the males that were born in the wilderness after they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised" (Josh.5:2-5 Para.).

The scriptures do not tell us why the newborn males were not circumcised while national Israel was being forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years as punishment for their rebellion. We are just told that they were not and that they were to be circumcised and were to carry this evidence of their covenant relationship and obedience to the Creator God into the promised land.

John the Baptist and Jesus

Circumcision in accordance with God's law was performed on both John the Baptist and Jesus:

"Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbors and her cousins heard how the Lord had showed great mercy on her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child . . .” (Lk.1:57-60 KJV).

"And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Lk.2:21 KJV).
Circumcision is of the Heart

Although circumcision is a physical act, its spiritual implications were known by the Israelites:

"Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's your God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in your fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked" (Deut. 10:14-16 KJV). See also Deut.30:6; Jer.4:4.

After Christ Returns

The time setting of Ezekiel, chapter 44, is sometime after Christ returns to earth and all of the scattered tribes of Israel, including Judah have been gathered out of the nations and established as national Israel again. It is the time when God's government rules the world and a new temple and its attending priesthood and sacrificial system of worship have been reestablished in Jerusalem.

"Then he brought me to the way of the north gate before the temple: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled his temple: and I fell on my face. And the Lord said to me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I say to you concerning all the ordinances of the Lord's temple, and all its laws; and mark well the entering into the temple, with all the exits from the sanctuary" (Ezk.44:4-6KJV Para.).

In this prophecy, Ezekiel is told to carefully note everything he sees and is told about the ordinances and the law in God's temple. Moreover, he is to carefully note the things pertaining to entering and leaving the temple area and its sanctuary.

"And you shall say to the rebellious house of Israel, This says the Lord God; O you house of Israel, let all your abominations be sufficient for you, In that you have brought into my sanctuary foreigners, uncircumcised in their heart, and uncircumcised in their flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when you offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations" (Ezk.44:6-7 KJV Para.).

This prophecy is meant for the new nation of Israel. The Creator God reminds them of their past rebellion against him and his law and that the time of continual rebellion against him and his law has come to an end. He then reveals the two sins which caused this rebellion against him—an uncircumcised heart and an uncircumcised penis.
The following are the reasons these sins are the major causes of rebellion against God:

- Having an uncircumcised heart is symbolic of being unrighteous. The scriptures reveal that a person with an uncircumcised heart is sinful and rebellious in attitude and behavior before God. Having an uncircumcised heart is not gender-specific, because both men and women can be sinful and rebellious against God and his law. See Deut.10:12-16; 30:5-6; Jer.4:1-4.

- Being uncircumcised in the flesh prevents a male from having a covenant relationship with God under the terms and conditions of both the first and second agreements with national Israel. Moreover, this uncircumcised condition speaks to a sinful and rebellious attitude and behavior that places a barrier between God and the uncircumcised male. This makes it impossible for God to accept offerings or sacrifices from the uncircumcised male and prevents the priesthood from presenting sacrifices and offerings to God on behalf of the uncircumcised male.

Today, as we wait for Christ's return, the descendants of national Israel are scattered among the nations—a nation in exile—and are considered by God to be a nation of people who are uncircumcised of heart and flesh. See Jer.9:26.

"And you have not kept the charge of my holy things: but you have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves" (Ezk.44:8 KJV Para.).

God says that national Israel abandoned their responsibility in regard to the holy things he had placed in their care, which include his place of worship, the sacrificial system and all the ordinances and laws which pertained to it. Not only did they abandon their charge but they delegated these responsibilities to people who were not authorized to perform them.

"This says the Lord God; No foreigners, uncircumcised in heart, or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any foreigner which are is among the children of Israel" (Ezk.44:9 Para.).

After Christ returns and the temple and sacrificial system of worship are again established in Jerusalem, no non-Israelite who is uncircumcised in heart or is an uncircumcised male will be allowed to enter Jerusalem or this new temple to worship God. See Isa.52:1.

"And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall kill the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them" (Ezk. 44:10-11 KJV Para.).
The biblical record clearly shows that circumcision of the heart and of the flesh as specified by God were an integral part of the covenant relationship between the Creator God, Abraham, Abraham's descendants, national Israel and its citizens, and it will be apart of the new covenant relationship between God, Israelites and non-Israelites after Christ returns.

The scriptures clearly show that it is God who dictates the terms and conditions of any covenant relationship between him and those who worship and serve him. And it is clear from the holy scriptures that circumcision was required before the advent of Christ and will be required after his return.

THE EDICT OF ACTS 15

Is male circumcision required in order to have a covenant with God the Father during the gospel age of salvation? In order to answer this question we must go to the Book of Acts and see how the apostles decided this issue and how the apostle Paul carried out this edict in his ministry.

When God made the first agreement with national Israel at Mount Sinai, he required all the males to be circumcised as an outward sign of the agreement. This condition was imposed on any male who was considered to be a part of national Israel. Moreover, non-Israelite males (e.g., servants, slaves, and converts of other nationalities) who were considered a part of national Israel were to be circumcised without exception.

There is no doubt that circumcision was part of the terms and conditions of the first agreement with national Israel, and that it was a physical sign of this agreement. The reason circumcision was so important under this agreement was that it had to do with the relationship between the Creator God, each individual, and the nation. Moreover, circumcision pertained to the ability to worship God and receive his blessings. The men who asked the question regarding circumcision in Acts 15 believed it was still necessary for all males (both Israelite and Gentile) to be circumcised in order to have an agreement with God. Therefore, they said, "Except ye be circumcised ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1 KJV). However, the decision of the apostles and elders about the question of circumcision and the law of Moses proves that salvation is not tied to physical circumcision:

"Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, You must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the holy spirit, and to us, to lay on you no greater burden than these
necessary things: That you abstain from meats offered to idols and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if you keep yourselves, you shall do well. Fare you well" (Acts 15:24-29 KJV).

All four of the items in the list of things the Gentiles were to avoid concern the application of God's written law about the defilement of the body, not with establishing a covenant with God the Father.

The edict of Acts, chapter 15, shows us that circumcision does not justify one before God the Father nor is circumcision required in order to establish or maintain a covenant relationship with him. Moreover, it is only through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ that one is reconciled to the Father and can maintain a covenant relationship with him.

PAUL AND THE LAW OF CIRCUMCISION

TIMOTHY AND TITUS

Some use the example of Timothy's circumcision to argue that, even though Paul had agreed with the Jerusalem council's decision that circumcision was no longer necessary for salvation, he later decided they were wrong and went against their decision. However, this assumption is not true. See Acts 15:19-24.

Timothy

"Paul wanted to take him [Timothy] along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in the area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3 NIV).

The reason for Timothy's circumcision is very clear. It was done because it was the wise thing to do under the circumstances. Although Timothy's mother was Jewish, the Jews considered him a Gentile because his father was Greek. Therefore, Timothy was circumcised so he would be more acceptable to the Jews.

Titus

"Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preached among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you" (Gal.2:1-5 NIV).

Paul and his companions resisted those who demanded that Titus be circumcised. This clearly shows that Paul and others of the Eldership were upholding the edict made about justification and Gentile men.
"Know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one shall be justified" (Gal.2:16 NIV Para.).

WHO IS A SPIRITUAL JEW?

"For indeed circumcision profits if you practice the law, but if you are a transgressor of the law, your circumcision becomes no circumcision. If, then, the circumcision keeps the demands of the law, will not his lack of circumcision be counted for circumcision? And will not the lack of circumcision by nature by keeping the law judge you, the one who through letter and circumcision becomes transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew that is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that of the outwardly flesh; but he is a Jew that is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, of whom praise is not from people, but of God" (Rom.2:25-29 Para.). See also Deut.10:14-16.

Paul wrote this letter to the Romans around 56 A.D., which was about seven years after the ministerial conference of Acts 15 held in 49 A.D..

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

"Then stand firm in the freedom with which Christ made us free, and do not again be held with a yoke of slavery. Behold, I, Paul, say to you that if you are circumcised, Christ will not profit you" (Gal.5:1-2 Para.).

Paul warns the Galatian men against attempting to become justified before God by becoming circumcised, because anyone who does this places himself back under the law before Christ's sacrifice and shows by his actions that he does not believe Christ's sacrifice seals the breach between a sinner and God the Father.

"Behold, I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man if circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Gal.5:2-4 NIV Para.).

Those who became circumcised in an attempt to become justified before God are fallen from grace, because they make the sacrifice of Christ void by trying to earn justification through keeping the law through their own efforts. Christ died for our justification and reconciliation to God the Father, and anyone who seeks to be justified under the conditions of the old agreement with national Israel is fallen from grace.

"For we through the spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal.5:5 KJV).
Paul tells the Romans it is through the death of Christ that we are justified and put into right-standing with the Father. In addition, he says it is only through Christ's life that we can obtain salvation:

"For if being enemies, we are reconciled to God through the death of his son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life" (Rom.5:10 Para.).

Physical circumcision does not bring salvation:

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love." (Gal.5:6 Para.).

Paul's statement is extremely important because he supports the decision made by the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem council pertaining to circumcision and the law. See Acts 15:19-30.

"You were running well; Who held you back that you do not obey the truth? The persuasion is not from him calling you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I trust as to you in the Lord that you will think nothing else, but the one troubling you shall bear the judgment, whoever it is" (Gal.5:7-10 Para.).

Paul warns the Galatians about those who were destroying them with the false teachings about circumcision and the law, and he confirms that he was not teaching circumcision as a way to obtain salvation. Moreover, Paul issues a stern warning to those who cause others to doubt their salvation through the false teaching of reconciliation through circumcision, because those who teach these things will themselves be cut off from salvation:

"But I, brothers, if I proclaim circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the offense of the cross has passed away. Oh' that the ones causing you to doubt will cut themselves off" (Gal.5:11-12 Para.). See also Eph.2:8-22.

"See in what large letters I write to you with my hand. As many as desire to look well in the flesh, these compel you to be circumcised; only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For they themselves having been circumcised do not even keep the law; but they desire you to be circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. But may it never be for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any strength, nor the lack of circumcision; but a new creation" (Gal.6:11-15 Para.). See also Rom.3:27-30; 4:9-12; 1.Cor.7:18-19; Col.2:8-13; 3:9-11.

"When you came to Christ he set you free from your evil desires, not by a bodily operation of circumcision but by a spiritual operation, the baptism of your souls. 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.2:11-14 LBP).

SUMMARY

Did any action or teaching of the apostle Paul about circumcision contradict the decision of the apostles and elders noted in Acts 15? The answer is an emphatic no! All of Paul's writings show that he supported and clearly understood the edict of Acts 15.

MALE CIRCUMCISION AND ITS HEALTH BENEFITS

The Creator God did not make mistakes, everything he did and said had purpose and meaning and every instruction in the biblical record is meant for the benefit those who have the insight to obey and practice these instructions.

The benefits of obeying God's instruction for Abraham and ancient Israel to circumcise all newborn males on the eighth day of life go far beyond the intent of circumcision as evidence of a covenant relationship between the nation of Israel and God. Circumcision for a male has many lifetime benefits which are easily identifiable through a small amount of research and study into the medical and scientific data widely available on the subject.

Existing medical and scientific evidence reveals many potential health related benefits of male circumcision. However, with these potential health benefits there are also potential health risks; therefore, in order to make an informed choice parents or guardians of male children or an adult male who is contemplating circumcision should thoroughly research and analyze both the pros and the cons of male circumcision before making this important life altering decision.

Because circumcision is a life altering procedure, logic tells us that a parent, guardian, or an uncircumcised adult male would be wise to make this decision after doing the following:

• Making a thorough investigation into the various aspects involved in circumcision.
• Performing a careful review of the benefits and the risks involved in circumcision.
• Comparing both short and long term benefits and risks of circumcision.
Note:

Because of the ongoing debate among medical practitioners and scientists, as well as the publication of new research data about circumcision, the information contained in this document should not be used as a substitute for the medical advice and care of one's personal doctor or pediatrician, nor should it be considered a total explanation of the subject.

Much of the following information is taken from research data published in various reputable medical journals about the benefits and risks of circumcision and focuses primarily on the protection afforded by circumcision against infection by micro-organisms, other physical benefits, such as hygiene, and risk factors involved in circumcision.

WHO'S DECISION IS IT?

Who is responsible to make the decision if whether or not to circumcise? Clearly, for a mature uncircumcised male, it is his decision; however, for the newborn male this decision rests with his parents or guardian.

Many opponents of infant circumcision believe that the male himself should be allowed to make this decision when he becomes mature enough to make it; however, research shows that male circumcision provides different benefits at different ages in a male's life [1]; therefore, it is obvious that, by the time a male is old enough to make an informed decision about his circumcision, many of circumcision's major benefits are no longer available to him. Moreover, if parents or guardians are interested in the benefits which can be derived from infant circumcision they must make this decision for the child.

What is Male Circumcision?

At birth, a boy's penis (including the shaft and the head (glands)), is covered by a fold of loose skin. This loose skin is called the foreskin. Circumcision removes the foreskin to expose the glands. Male circumcision is practiced by many different cultures with a variety of methods used to remove the foreskin.

What is Female Circumcision?

Female circumcision (i.e., female genital mutilation), is common in many cultures, but is clearly not sanctioned by any biblical law. This practice involves the removal of part or all of the clitoris and may also involve sewing up the opening of the vagina. This practice has no known medical benefit, but has many serious side effects, including disfigurement, pelvic and urinary tract infections, negative psychological effects, painful intercourse, and in some cases the inability to deliver a baby vaginally.
HEALTH AND PHYSICAL PROBLEMS

Although health and physical problems associated with the penis may develop in both circumcised and uncircumcised males, the data supplied in medical studies consistently shows that circumcised males have far fewer penile problems than the uncircumcised male.

The following information shows the significant differences in health and physical problems between circumcised and uncircumcised males.

Risk of Infection

The increased risk of infection in uncircumcised males may be attributed to the fact that the foreskin presents the penis with a large surface area, moist skin next to the glands, a thinner epidermal barrier than the drier skin of the circumcised penis, and a propensity to sustain greater trauma to the penis during sexual intercourse.

Clearly the accumulation of secretions from the penis, glands, sexual intercourse, urine, dead skin cells and smegma secretions in this warm moist environment may help facilitate the growth of micro-organisms which might present an easier entry for infectious agents into the bloodstream [2,3].

Smegma

Smegma is a whitish material that is a mixture of shed skin cells, skin oils, and moisture on the foreskin.

Urinary Track Infections

Many studies suggest that uncircumcised male infants are 10-20 times more likely than circumcised male infants to experience a urinary track infection in the first year of life. Moreover, all studies which have examined the association between urinary track infections and circumcision status show an increased risk in uncircumcised males, with the greatest risk in infants younger than 1 year of age. [4,5]

Penile Cancer

Although penile cancer is a rare disease, several case studies link the uncircumcised status to an increased risk for penile cancer. [6,7] Data shows about 1 male in 100,000 annually in the USA will be affected with penile cancer with a mortality rate of between 25-33%. [8,9,50]

Data also shows cancer of the penis is almost completely confined to uncircumcised men and that only 10 out of 10,000 deaths due to penile cancer between 1930 and 1991 in the USA were circumcised men and that these men were circumcised later in life. [11,12,13,50] Moreover, in 5 major studies in the United States of America since 1932, not one man with penile cancer had been circumcised as a newborn. [9,10,50]
**Prostate Cancer**

Studies show that uncircumcised men have twice the incidence of prostate cancer compared with circumcised men [14,15] and that this type of cancer is extremely rare among Jewish males. [16]

**Balanitis and Posthitis**

Balanitis is an inflammation of the foreskin or head of the penis and posthitis is an inflammation of the foreskin, both of these conditions can be very painful and are primarily limited to uncircumcised males. Balanitis is caused by a group A haemolytic streptococcus exclusively confined to uncircumcised boys. [17,18,19] Moreover, some data indicates that balanitis occurs more frequently in uncircumcised soldiers during wartime and in uncircumcised men with diabetes than in circumcised males. [20]

**Phimosis**

Phimosis is the inability to retract the foreskin and is normal in very young uncircumcised boys and normally only affects 2-10% of uncircumcised males after age 6. The very narrow foreskin opening can cause several problems, such as block the flow of urine and infections.

**Paraphimosis**

This is a condition where the retracted foreskin cannot be brought back again over the glands and is a very painful problem which can be relieved by circumcision or slitting the dorsal surface of the foreskin.

**Balanoposthitis**

This condition is the inflammation of the foreskin, glands, and penis. It is common in uncircumcised diabetic men owing to a weakened, shrunken penis. Data also shows that men with this condition have pain after intercourse. [20]

In elderly, uncircumcised men, infections and pain from balanoposthitis, phimosis, and paraphimosis present problems in achieving optimal hygiene.

**Frenular Chordee**

The condition of frenular chordee is present in about 25 percent of all uncircumcised males [21] and is the result of an unusually thick and often tight frenulum which prevents the foreskin from fully retracting. The frenulum may tear during intercourse which results in the formation of scar tissue which is generally more fragile and less elastic than normal tissue. This tear often reoccurs causing much pain, bleeding, and the inability to have pleasurable sexual relations. This problem can sometimes be resolved by excising the frenulum during a circumcision (i.e., Frenoplasty, which removes just the tight frenulum).
Sexually Transmitted Disease

Data regarding the relationship of circumcision to sexually transmitted disease is complex and conflicting; however, almost all studies show that sexually transmitted disease is significantly higher (3-9 times depending on the disease encountered) in sexually active, uncircumcised males and their sexual partners than in circumcised males and their sexual partners. [7,22,25] Moreover, most of the evidence shows that the sexually promiscuous uncircumcised male is much more likely to acquire or transmit a venereal disease than a circumcised male. [24]

Some studies suggest the reason for these differences is that the foreskin of the uncircumcised male traps infected vaginal or other secretions and provides a more hospitable environment for infectious substances. Also, the increased surface area of exposed skin, physical damage to the skin during intercourse, and inflammation of the penis glands may facilitate the entry of infectious substances into the male body. [25,26,27,28,29]

Clearly, most sexually transmitted diseases would be totally eliminated in a few generations if all people would heed God's law about sexual behavior regardless of male circumcision status.

Cervical Cancer

Several studies show higher rates of cervical cancer in women who have had one or more male sexual partners who were uncircumcised. Many studies indicate that the uncircumcised male is a contributor to the high rate of cervical cancer in women around the world. [30,31,32,33,34,35]

Sexual Gratification

Surveys show much conflicting data about sexual practices, pleasurable sensations, personal gratification during intercourse, and more or less sexual dysfunction between circumcised and uncircumcised, adult males. [36,37,38]

Clearly, these surveys are anecdotal and without merit because there is no known standard or benchmark against which to make scientific measurements. These types of surveys are meaningless in determining penile sensation and sexual satisfaction of the circumcised and uncircumcised male.

HYGIENE

Although the uncircumcised penis is normally easy to clean, immediately after washing under the foreskin bacteria start multiplying again in the warm moist environment and contribute along with skin secretions, to form smegma. The sad truth is that even if optimal cleansing is performed, there is no evidence that this cleansing confers any long term protection against the many types of harmful micro-organisms which find optimal conditions to proliferate under the foreskin. [13,39]
Although opponents to circumcision decry the practice, they almost universally promote penile hygiene. However, many studies conclude that penile hygiene among young boys is poor at best and nonexistent at worst. [40,41]

If personal hygiene is a priority, clearly it is far easier for parents to keep their infant son's penis clean if it is circumcised. And compared to the uncircumcised penis it is clearly far easier for circumcised young and adult males to maintain a clean penis.

METHODS OF CIRCUMCISION

The most commonly used devices used to protect the penis during the removal of foreskin are the Gomco clamp, Mogen clamp, and PlastiBell or variations derived from the principles on which these devices are based. The PlastiBell method clamps the foreskin, which then falls off after a few days. This method eliminates the need to cut the foreskin off, and seems to reduce the period of discomfort for the infant. [42]

The common elements of these methods are the use of a device that allows an estimation of the amount of foreskin to be removed, the dilation of the preputial orifice in order to see the glands, and the freeing of the inner preputial epithelium from the epithelium of the glands.

Pain

Clearly, newborns who are circumcised without anaesthetic procedures experience pain and stress. Research data shows that infant responses to circumcision pain include changes in heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen saturation, and cortisol levels; [43,44] however, there is no evidence of any long-term psychological harm arising from circumcision.[45]

There are a number of safe and effective compounds and methods available to minimize pain during and after the circumcision procedure. However, each of these compounds and methods should be evaluated for their potential benefits, risks, side-effects, and complications. Moreover, one should understand these potential risks and make an informed decision about whether or not to use any of them during or after the circumcision procedure.

Risk of Damage

Circumcision is a physical procedure that has a lifelong effect. Therefore, regardless of the method used to perform the circumcision, the most important element in the procedure is the knowledge and skill of the person performing the circumcision.
Although circumcision is a simple, low-risk procedure and the risk of damage to the penis is avoidable, damage can happen with devastating results. Therefore, in order to minimize the chance of something going wrong with the circumcision and to help ensure the best possible results from the circumcision procedure, the following two things should be carefully considered:

• Make absolutely sure, to the best of your knowledge, that the person performing the procedure is technically knowledgeable and skilled in the method that is to be used for the circumcision.
• Make absolutely sure, to the best of your knowledge, that the person performing the procedure is competent and well experienced in the method that is to be used for the circumcision.

Complications

Although circumcision is a simple procedure, it is not without the risk of medical complications. The true incidence of complications after newborn circumcision is unknown; however, two very large studies suggest that the complication rate is somewhere between 0.2% and 0.6% and that most complications are minor. [42,46,47,48]

The most common complication of circumcision is excessive bleeding, which can normally be taken care of using either pressure, hemostatic agents, cautery, or sutures.

The second most common complication of circumcision is a minor infection which is normally easily cured. [42]

There are also rare reports of circumcision complications, such as recurrent phimosis, wound separation, concealed penis, inclusion cysts, sepsis, scalded skin syndrome, skin bridges, meningitis, necrotizing fasciitis, and retained Plastibell devices, as well as major surgical problems, such as urethral fistula, amputation of a portion of the glands penis, penile necrosis and urinary retention. [46,48]

THE EIGHTH DAY

"Every male shall be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. This applies to every foreign-born slave, as well as to everyone born in your household. This is a permanent part of this contract, and it applies to all your posterity. All must be circumcised. Your bodies will thus be marked as participants in my everlasting covenant. Anyone who refuses these terms shall be cut off from his people; for he has violated my contract" (Gen.17:12-13 TLB).

This instruction to Abraham to circumcise all males on their eighth day of life was also made a part of covenant between the Creator God and national Israel (See Lev.12:3). But why did God specifically require a newborn male to be circumcised on the eighth day of life instead of at birth or on some other day?
Today, we can easily know and understand the reasons why the eighth day is the optimum period of time in which to perform a circumcision. The following is a short explanation of one of these reasons.

Simply put, the human body needs vitamin K to make clotting proteins; however, a newborn baby's body does not begin to produce vitamin K until they are five days old. This lack of vitamin K results in about a 60 percent drop in the vital clotting protein prothrombin when the newborn is about three days old. Research data shows that the greatest risk of excessive bleeding for newborns occurs between the second and seventh day of life. [49]

Three days after the newborn's body begins to produce vitamin K, the prothrombin levels jump to 110 percent of the adult level, which makes the eighth day of a male's life the safest day on which to perform circumcision and minimize the risk of infection.

Male circumcision later in life is normally a very painful experience. Clearly, the optimum time for a male to be circumcised is in the eighth day of life in accordance with the biblical law of circumcision.

**BENEFITS AND RISKS**

**Benefits**

The following are major benefits of circumcision over the span of a male's lifetime:

- Reduced risk of death in the first year of life due to kidney failure as a complication of urological infection
- Reduced risk of urinary tract infections and urological problems
- Reduced problems with erections, especially at puberty
- Reduced risk of contracting certain sexually transmitted diseases
- Dramatically reduced risk of penile cancer
- Decrease in physical problems involving a tight foreskin
- Lower incidence of inflammation of the head of the penis
- Improved penile hygiene for the male
- Improved hygiene for the male's sexual partner

**Major Risks**

The following are major risks of circumcision:

- Excessive bleeding
- Infection shortly after circumcision
- Improperly administered surgical procedures resulting in damage to the penis
- Excessive pain
- Death due to complications
SUMMARY

It is doubtful that Abraham or the ancient Israelites understood much about the many health benefits that their obedience to the law of circumcision would bestow on them and their descendants; however, today virtually no one needs to remain ignorant of the tremendous health benefits of male circumcision because of the vast amount of research data on circumcision available and the ease with which it can be obtained.

Although there are undoubtedly some rare cases where circumcision would not be advisable for medical or physical reasons, almost all research shows many lifetime benefits of male circumcision, especially if the circumcision is performed early in the male's life.

Regardless of whether or not one makes the decision to circumcise or not, what is clear is that there are substantial benefits derived from male circumcision and that the Creator God knew exactly what he was doing when he instituted this law for the benefit of humanity.

Moses gave this reminder to the nation of Israel a short time before they were going to enter the promised land. The wisdom of God's law and the benefits derived from obedience to it apply just as much today as it did centuries ago:

"You shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you: you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess" (Deut.5:32-33 Para.). See also Deut.10:12-13.

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Other Resources:

In Favor of Circumcision by Dr Brian Morris, published by University of New South Wales Press, 1999, ISBN 0-86840-537-X (104 pages). This book expands on the information on his website at (www.personal.usyd.edu.au) and includes much new material, including many personal stories from men circumcised as adults or as babies, and men who are uncircumcised.

None Of These Diseases by Drs. S.I. McMillen, David E. Stern, ISBN 0-8007-5719-X. This book contains information on circumcision and other health issues that are addressed in the Bible.


By B.L. Cocherell
The account of Paul's trip to Jerusalem and his Nazarite vow gives a clear picture of the apostles' and elders' views and practices about the existing temple worship system and justification under the old agreements with national Israel and justification under the new agreement established by Jesus Christ.

In order to establish the fact that Paul and others of the early church observed much of the temple worship system, it is important to understand that Paul had taken a Nazarite vow, which was part of the temple worship system. He had taken this vow sometime before going to Jerusalem. Moreover, once he was at the temple in Jerusalem, he offered sacrifices in conjunction with his vow.

"Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken" (Acts 18:18 NIV).

The only vow that required one to cut off all the hair on one's head was the Nazarite vow.

THE NAZARITE VOW

Numbers 6:1-21 Paraphrased

"And the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, When either a man or a woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves to the Lord. He or she shall separate from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no wine vinegar, or strong drink of vinegar, nor drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist or dried grapes' (vs.1-3).

"All the days of this separation nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk shall be eaten. All the days of the vow of this separation there shall no razor come on the head: until the days of separation are fulfilled to the Lord, and he or she shall be holy, and let the locks of the hair of the head grow' (vs.4-5).

"All the days of the separation to the Lord he or she shall not touch a dead body, nor become unclean for a father, mother, brother, or sister that dies: because of the consecration of God is on the separated one's head. All the days of separation he or she is holy to the Lord" (vs.6-8).
"And if anyone dies suddenly by one who is separated, and defiles the head of his consecration; then the head of the separated one must be shaved in the day of cleansing, on the seventh day the head shall be shaved. And on the eighth day the separated one shall bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation’ (vs.9-10).

"And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for the separated one, because of the sin caused by touching the dead, and he or she shall hallow their head that same day. And shall consecrate to the Lord the day of separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering: but the days that were before shall be lost, because the separation was defiled’ (vs.11-12).

"And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of separation are fulfilled: he or she shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: And offer an offering to the Lord, one he-lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings’ (vs.13-14).

"And a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meal offering, and their drink offerings. And the priest shall bring them before the Lord, and shall offer his or her sin offering, and burnt offering’ (vs.15-16).

"And he or she shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord, with the basket of unleavened bread: the priest shall offer also the meal offering, and the drink offering. And the Nazarite shall shave the head of the separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of the separation, and put it into the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings’ (vs.17-18).

"And the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them on the hands of the Nazarite, after the hair of the separation is shaved: And the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the Lord: this is holy for the priest, with the wave breast and heave shoulder: and after that the Nazarite may drink wine’ (vs.19-20).

"This is the law of the Nazarite who has vowed, and of his or her offering to the Lord for the separation, beside that, that the separated one's hand shall get: according to the vow which was vowed, so he or she must do after the law of the separation’ (v21).
In Acts, chapter 21, is the account of Paul and four others performing the process which would show that they had completed the commitment they had made through a nazerite vow:

"So shortly afterwards, we packed our things and left for Jerusalem. Some disciples from Caesarea accompanied us, and on arrival we were guests at the home of Mnason, originally from Cyprus, one of the early believers; and all the believers at Jerusalem welcomed us cordially. The second day Paul took us with him to meet with James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. After greetings were exchanged, Paul recounted the many things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his work" (Acts 21:15-19 LBP).

Zealous for the law

"...You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20 NIV).

What is the law that is being referred to? Is it the Ten Commandments or some other law? As we review this event it will become apparent that the law referred to here is the sacrificial law which required the temple at Jerusalem for its practice.

Before coming to Jerusalem, Paul was accused of teaching the Jews to stop practicing the law of Moses:

"They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children..." (Acts 21:21 NIV).

Paul did not teach the Jews to turn away from the law that the Creator had given through Moses; he merely pointed out the fact that circumcision and the practice of the law would not justify a person before God:

"Be it known to you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39 Para.).

In order to show the Jews that he still believed and taught the laws of the temple system of worship, which did not pertain to justification, Paul was advised to participate in the rites of the Nazarite vow at the temple:

"What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law" (Acts 21:22-24 NIV).

It is extremely important to understand that Paul and the men spoken of here were converted Jews who had taken a Nazarite vow, which had nothing to do with forgiveness of sin or justification.
This event clearly shows that, as late as 56-57 A.D., Paul and the other apostles were teaching and practicing some of the laws that were a part of the first agreement.

"As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality" (Acts 21:25 NIV).

It is clear that the apostles knew it was not necessary for Gentile converts to participate in the temple worship system that God gave to Israel through Moses. However, they also knew it was permissible and expedient for themselves as teachers of the way of God to participate in the temple worship system as an example to the Jews.

"The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them. When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him" (Acts 21:26-27 NIV).

Verse 26 and 27 are very important because they contain the following irrefutable proof that Paul had taken a Nazarite vow:

- Paul purified himself with these men.
- Paul gave notice when the Nazarite vow would end for the men and himself.
- Paul was seized during the waiting period prior to the ending of the Nazarite vow.

Paul Stands Accused Before Felix

In defending himself against the accusation of heresy before Felix, Paul states some very important beliefs and tells why he was in the temple in the account of Acts 21:27.

Paul's Beliefs:

- He believed that he worshiped God as Jesus taught.
- He believed God's written word.
- He believed in the resurrection.
- He believed that he was careful not to offend God or man.

Paul Speaks to Felix:

"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 were written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. And I do hereby exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men" (Acts 24:14-16 KJV).
Notice the primary reason that Paul went to the temple:

"Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Wherein certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult" (Acts 24:17-18 KJV).

Here, we see Paul observing part of the worship system commanded under God's first agreement with national Israel. This is yet another proof that Paul observed and practiced much of the temple worship system many years after his conversion.

Although an Israelitish Christian could partake of the temple worship as Paul did, it was not mandatory for a Christian to follow or obey the temple worship system. However, it still existed for about 40 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Did Paul's Nazarite vow, sacrifice, and giving of gifts at the temple contradict the decision regarding the Law of Moses that the apostles and elders made, which is recorded in Acts 15? Did his taking this vow violate the terms and conditions of the new agreement that Jesus Christ instituted? The answer is an emphatic NO! Paul was not seeking forgiveness of sin or justification before God by these acts; he did them because of a prior commitment and as a witness to those who accused him of teaching against the law of Moses.

**THE APOSTLES AND SACRIFICE**

The account of Paul's trip to Jerusalem and his Nazarite vow reveals the mind of the Father and Christ regarding those who are of the elect and their relationship to the offering of sacrifices after the formation of the new covenant church.

This account clearly shows that certain aspects of the temple and sacrificial worship system are perfectly compatible with the new agreement that was instituted by Jesus Christ and that these aspects could be practiced by the Father's sons who have his spirit residing within them.

It is also noteworthy to mention that Jesus Christ who had the holy spirit without measure also participated in the sacrificial system as he lived his life and presented himself as the perfect example of righteousness.

**REMEMBER THE LAW**

Under the first agreement with the people of national Israel, the Israelites were to perform certain physical acts as a reminder of the laws of God. Under the new agreement, the law is implanted within a person by the holy spirit. Therefore, these physical reminders are not necessary.

The following are two of the commands to the nation of Israel regarding the law and its remembrance:
Fringes on the Garment

"Speak to the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put on the fringe of the borders a ribbon of blue: And it shall be to you for a fringe, that you may look on it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that you seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to go a whoring: That you may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God" (Num.15:38-40 KJV).

Law on the Door Post

"Therefore shall you lay these words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign on your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the door posts of your house, and on your gates" (Deut. 11:18-20 KJV).

Would it be wrong for a Christian to wear a fringe on their garments or write the commandments on their door post? It would not be wrong if the person is not doing these things to obtain justification before God; these laws were a part of the first agreement between God and national Israel, but they are not a part of the new agreement between the Father and the elect of God.

However, it would be wrong for one called to salvation during the gospel age to perform these acts in hope of being justified. This would be trying to gain justification under the law of justification by works; thereby, it would deny the sacrifice of Christ.

Notice what Paul says about trying to be justified by the law:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free, and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say to you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace" (Gal.5:1-4 Para.).

By B.L. Cocherell and Vernon O. Jones
The question of whether or not the dietary laws the Creator God gave ancient Israel apply to the Sovereign Father's earthly children today is one which is easily answered if one allows the biblical record to speak for itself and does not attempt to reason around the clear scriptures.

In order to show why the dietary laws given to ancient Israel are to be practiced by the Sovereign Father's earthly children, it is necessary to review the biblical record before the advent of Christ and analyze the New Testament scriptures which people use in an attempt to prove all animal flesh is fit for human consumption.

Before The Great Flood

"And the Lord said to Noah, You and all your household come into the ark; for I have seen you righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean beast you shall take to you by sevens, the male and its female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and its female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive on the face of all the earth. For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made I will destroy from off the face of the earth. And Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him. And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth. And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creeps on the earth, There went in two and two to Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah" (Gen.7:1-9 KJV Para.).

Noah who was the only righteous person on earth during his day understood the difference between animals which were fit for human consumption and those that were not. The logical explanation for why more clean animals were to be taken into the ark is that only clean animals could be eaten as food and sacrificed to God.

"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.
The Covenant People

The Creator God brought the Israelites out of Egypt because he had a job for them to do and a purpose for their existence as a nation. These people were called to be a nation of priests who would represent God and his plan for the salvation of humanity. Moreover, the Israelites were chosen to be an example of a godly lifestyle, which would result in a happy, prosperous, and productive physical life with the promise of salvation and eternal and immortal life in the Family and Kingdom of God.

The Clean and the Unclean

The dietary laws pertaining to eating animal flesh were among the many laws which were given to the Israelites to promote a healthy lifestyle for them.

The kinds of beasts, fish, birds, and insects which the Creator God determined to be either fit or unfit for human consumption are found in Leviticus, chapter 11 and Deuteronomy, chapter 14. At the end of the dietary instructions in Leviticus, chapter 11, the Creator summarizes his instruction and states the primary reasons for this law:

"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." (Lev.11:43 KJV).

The English word abominable in verse 43 is translated from the Hebrew word shaqats, which means to be filthy, to loathe, or pollute. The English word defiled in verse 43 is translated from the Hebrew word tamah, which means to be impure in a religious sense.

Verse 43 reveals that eating creatures which are unfit for human consumption contaminates the human body, resulting in a change in its physical composition, which makes a person unacceptable to God:

"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 upon the earth. For I am the Lord that brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Lev.11:44-45 KJV).

In verses 44 and 45, the Creator states his authority to require the Israelites to practice the dietary law and instructs the Israelites to be holy as he is holy. Other laws given to the Israelites reveal that a physical state of holiness cannot be acquired or maintained if people or objects are contaminated with physical items which God has determined to be impure in a physical sense.

In verse 46 the Creator makes it clear that this is a law which the Israelites are expected to practice.
"This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps upon the earth: To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten" (Lev.11:46 KJV).

Deuteronomy, chapter 14, gives additional information and instructions as to the kinds of beasts, fish, birds, and insects which are determined to be either fit or unfit for human consumption, along with other dietary considerations. Verse 21 of this instruction also shows the primary reason for this law is that the Israelites are considered a holy people to God:

"You shall not eat of any thing that dies of itself: you shall give it to the stranger that is in your gates, that he may eat it; or you may sell it to an alien: for you are an holy people to the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in his mother's milk" (Deut.14:21 KJV Para.).

You Shall Be Holy

The three basic requirements the Israelites had to fulfill in order to maintain their agreement with the Creator and receive the benefits promised under this agreement were as follows: 1) Obey whatever the Creator told them to do (Ex.19:3-6); 2) Practice the laws the Creator gave them; and 3) Be a holy people (Lev.11:44).

It is important to understand that it would be impossible for the Israelites to keep their part of their agreement with the Creator unless they became holy, because being holy was necessary before being able to interact with the Creator and perform their priestly duties or represent the Creator as a holy nation (Ex.19:5-6).

In order to understand what it meant to be holy under God's agreement with the Israelites, it is important to understand that the Hebrew words translated into the English words holy, holy one, and holiness are different ways of expressing a condition of existence which is separate from the natural world and is in harmony with the attitude, behavior, and character of God and the dimension of existence that God inhabits.

The Creator's many instructions to the Israelites for them to be holy shows that being holy and being unholy are not compatible states of existence, and that the physical must be maintained in a holy state of existence in order to safely interact with God's sacred realm of existence. See Lev.10:1-11.

The ancient Israelites were not a spiritual people; they were a physical people given physical laws to practice to make them physically holy. Remaining holy was a necessary prerequisite for interacting with the Creator and for him to bless the people and the nation physically.
No promises of physical blessings were given to ancient Israel in the sacrificial ceremonial law. The Creator promised to bless the Israelites physically for their obedient practice of the laws he gave them pertaining to their worship of him and those pertaining to the lifestyle he prescribed for them to practice. Because the promised blessings were physical, the breaking of these physical laws would result in physical punishments (Deut. chps.11; 28; 30).

Ceremonially Unclean

It has been argued by some that the Hebrew word *tameh* (English, *unclean*) actually denotes the state of being ceremonially unclean; therefore, they believe the dietary laws were only for the ceremonial purposes of the ancient Israelites, not for Christians today.

But, does *tameh* mean ceremonially unclean? 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 8:23 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 or ritually unclean? Obviously the word *tameh* is not limited to this definition. It is also used to denote the physical state of being defiled or unclean.

The following are two biblical reference works which lend support to the understanding that holiness was the primary reason the Creator required the practice of the dietary laws by the Israelites:

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).
Friedlander states the following in *The Jewish Religion*:

"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).

**Time Element**

Many of the laws given to Israel which are considered ritual can be found in the same book and chapters of the Bible as laws which are not ritual. One way to distinguish the difference between ritual laws pertaining to uncleanness and other laws is that ritual laws usually mention a time period of uncleanness.

The laws pertaining to 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 that must be recognized in order to keep from being led astray by those who misapply scripture or those who do not wish to obey God's law. An analysis of the law pertaining to clean and unclean meats will not show a time element associated with this law.

In ancient Israel, it was possible to become physically and ritually unclean. This uncleanness (e.g., touching something that was unclean or having a communicable disease - Lev.15:1-5; Num.5:1-3) prevented the Israelites from involvement in various requirements, such as Passover observance (Num.9:6-11) and interaction with the Israelite community.

**God's Food**

A careful study of the sacrificial law reveals that the Israelites were required to offer some sacrifices which were to be considered God's food. Some offerings were to be totally consumed by fire on the altar and some were only to have portions consumed by fire with portions left aside to be eaten by the priests and the offerer.

The biblical record shows that the altar of burnt offerings was considered the Lord's table and that the food placed on it must be the type of food that he was willing to consume.

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)
- Doves (Lev.1:14)
- Oxen (Num.7:87)
Only animals considered to be clean in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 were allowed to be used as a burnt offering. No unclean animals were to be offered by the priests as God's food. Moreover, God instructs those who want to obey him to eat only those foods that he himself would eat (Lev.11:1-40).

**Food Unfit for God**

The prophet Malachi records the following reprimand to the Israelites for their failure to offer proper sacrifices to God:

"You offer polluted bread on my altar; and you say, How have we polluted you? In that you say, The table of the Lord is contemptible" (Mal.1:7 Para.).

"But you have profaned it, in that you say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his food, is contemptible" (Mal.1:12 KJV).

The Israelites were offering worthless contemptible food on God's altar (i.e., his table):

The biblical record shows that God would only accept a sacrifice which he sanctioned as food fit for his consumption. Moreover, God instructed the Israelites to eat only those animals he himself would partake of (Lev.1:1-40).

**THE DIETARY LAWS AND ISRAEL**

The dietary law given to ancient Israel reveals which animals are fit and which are unfit for human consumption:

"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 Israelites? The identity of Israel is greatly misunderstood today. To most people, the words 'Israel' and 'Jew' are synonymous, but actually they are not.

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 to Israel by God. Israel then had twelve sons whose descendants became the tribes of Israel.

King Solomon was the last king to reign over national Israel while it still consisted of all the tribes of Israel. After his death, there was a civil insurrection that resulted in national Israel being divided into two separate nations called the House of Judah and the House of Israel.
Because the temple of God was located in Jerusalem, which is within the boundaries of Judah, the tribe of Judah, the priesthood, most of the Levites, and many from the tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to Solomon's son, Rehoboam. These southern tribes were called the House of Judah and are the Jewish people of the end time prophecies.

The northern tribes who followed Jeroboam of the tribe of Ephraim became known as the House of Israel and formed their own government and religious system in Samaria.

Although there are people from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi also scattered among the tribal nations of Israel, the House of Israel is not Jewish. The ten tribal nations of Israel are predominantly comprised of the eight single tribes of Asher, Dan, Gad, Issachar, Nephtali, Ruben, Simeon, Zebulun, and the two half tribes of Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh. These ten tribal nations are the peoples who are commonly called "the lost ten tribes of Israel."

Secular history and the biblical record tell us that the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrian Empire in 721-718 B.C.. Subsequently, its people were scattered throughout the world and lost their national identity. Wherever the descendants of Israel are today, whether they are descendants of Judah or other tribes of Israel, their ancestors were the ones to whom the dietary laws were given.

Jews today are often called God's "Chosen" people. One reason for this is that a large number of these individuals have not forgotten God's weekly Sabbath or his annual festivals. Moreover, many of them continue to observe the dietary laws given to ancient Israel.

**The Jews and the Law**

During Christ's ministry, some Jews came to him and accused his disciples of violating an ordinance, 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 KJV).

Although the Jews of Jesus day observed God's law, which included the dietary law, they had managed to pervert them with their own teachings and traditions.

Modern practitioners of Judaism observe the dietary laws noted in the biblical record, plus their own historical dietary traditions, which are recorded in the Talmud and other Jewish publications. These traditions contain many do's and don'ts about meat and other foods and their preparation that are not a part of the original dietary law.
Blessing or a Curse

The agreement the Creator God made with the Israelites contained laws which the Israelites were to practice in order for them to receive the benefits promised through the agreement. Within this agreement were laws which would promote physical health and protect against illness and disease epidemics for those who practiced them.

Before the Israelites entered into the promised land, Moses reminded them of their agreement with the Creator God and the blessings he had promised for their obedient practice of his law and the curses that would surely come if they failed to keep their part of the agreement:

"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" (Deut.30:15-16 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).

Moses reminded the Israelites that obedience to God's law would bring them tremendous blessings (good) and that disobedience would bring horrible curses and death (evil). One of the laws which would be a tremendous blessing to the Israelite's physical health was the dietary law which described the animals which were either fit or unfit for human consumption.

The Creator did not always have to directly punish the Israelites for violating his laws; some of these punishments came automatically and were self-induced, such as the eating of animals unfit for human consumption which harm the human body.

Science, Not Ceremony

Many 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 one example of a negative physical result for disobeying God's dietary law.

The Israelites understood that the practice of the dietary law was required to maintain them in a holy state physically and that, if they diligently practiced this and the other laws given to them, none of the diseases which the Creator brought upon the Egyptians would effect them (Ex.15:26).
Today, it is possible to scientifically show why 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, Salem Kirban, p.46-50).

THE DIETARY LAW AND CHRISTIANS

Many who profess to follow Christ believe they are not obligated to practice any of the laws contained in the biblical record, one of which prohibits eating certain kinds of animal flesh. In an attempt to justify their belief that the dietary laws the Creator gave to ancient Israel are no longer applicable, they might cite the following:

1. Jesus' conversation with the Scribes and Pharisees in which he says food does not defile a person
2. The apostle Peter's vision in which he is told to eat animals noted in the law given to ancient Israel as unfit for human consumption
3. Portions of the apostle Paul's letters in which he mentions the freedom which followers of Christ have in eating and drinking

In order to show that the dietary laws recorded in the biblical record should be practiced by the followers of Christ today, the six scriptural references in the New Testament which many feel prove these dietary laws are no longer applicable will be analyzed in the remainder of this chapter.

JESUS, JEWISH TRADITIONS, AND DEFILEMENT

During the centuries following the separation of national Israel into the House of Israel and the House of Judah (i.e., the tribes of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin), much of the understanding of God's law given to ancient Israel was lost. It is during these centuries that many Jewish traditions were invented and assigned equal status with the written and oral law by the spiritual leaders of the House of Judah.

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

Washing of Hands, Food, and Defilement

When some Scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus and asked him why his disciples had eaten bread without first washing their hands in accordance with tradition, what Jesus said about this tradition and the things which actually defile a person are often used in an attempt to prove that a person can eat any kind of animal flesh they desire. Therefore, it is necessary to quote both accounts in order to fully understand what Jesus actually said about this tradition, food, and defilement.
Ritualistic Washing

"Then Scribes and Pharisees which were of Jerusalem, came to Jesus and asked, Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat bread" (Matt.15:1-2 KJV Para.).

"Then Pharisees, and certain of the Scribes came to him from Jerusalem. And they saw some of his disciples eat bread defiled, that is with unwashed hands, For the Pharisees and all the Jews, do not eat, except they wash their hands, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they do not eat. And many other things, which they have received to keep, such as the washing of cups, and pots, brass vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and Scribes asked him, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" (Mk.7:1-5 KJV Para.).

The ritualistic practice of washing hands before eating and the ritualistic washing of cups, pots, vessels, and tables is not a requirement of God's law. These practices were added by the religious leaders of the Jews in violation to the Creator God's specific instruction not to add anything to the law he gave ancient Israel:

"And now, O Israel, listen carefully to these laws I teach you, and obey them if you want to live and enter into and possess the land given you by the Lord God of your ancestors. Do not add other laws or subtract from these; just obey them, for they are from the Lord your God" (Deut.4:1-2 TLB). See also Deut.12:32.

Hypocritical Worship

In reply to these men's subtle accusation that Jesus' disciples had broken 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.).

"Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But, in vain they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you practice the tradition of men" (Mk.7:6-8 KJV Para.). See also Isa.29:13; Ezk. 33:31-32.

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

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Failure to Honor Father and Mother

In order to show these men that their man-made traditions and practices were violations of God's law, Jesus refers them to their teaching and practice of "corban" through which a child could disregard their responsibility to help their needy parents:

"He said to them, Why do you also violate the commandment of God by your tradition? For God said, Honor your father and mother: and, One that curses father or mother, let them die the death. But you say, Whoever shall say to one's father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatever you might be profited by me; And you do not honor your father or mother, one shall be free. Thus have you made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition" (Matt.15:3-6 KJV Para.).

"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 someone shall say to their father or mother, It is corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever you might be profited by me; they shall be free. And you suffer him no more to do ought for their 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.).

In verse 11, the Greek word corban is derived from the Hebrew word qorban, which means an offering or oblation of self-sacrifice coming from one's life substance.

These religious leaders twisted and manipulated God's law to fit their own selfish desires. The translation of Jesus' reprimand in the Living Bible Paraphrased puts what he said in 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).

Although much of the perversion of truth which the religious leaders of the Jews taught came from their own perverted thinking, Christ pointed out that much also came through the influence of evil spirits:

"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 clear and severe. He basically told them that their thoughts and behavior were so closely aligned with the Devil and his ways that they were, for all intent and purpose, the Devil's children.

Defilement

There were many laws that the Creator gave to ancient Israel which defined physical defilement, how to avoid being physically defiled, and how to remove physical defilement. Moreover, it was through the diligent practice of these and other laws that the Creator promised to bless the Israelites.

"And he called the multitude, and said to them, Hear, and understand: It is not that which goes into the mouth that defiles a person; but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a person" (Matt.15:10-11 KJV Para.).

"And when he had called all the people to him, he said to them, Listen to me everyone, and understand: There is nothing from outside a person, which enters into him that can defile them: but the things which come out of a person, those are they that defile a person" (Mk.7:14-15 KJV Para.).

Many believe what Jesus said about the things people put into their mouth not defiling them is proof that Jesus canceled the law given to ancient Israel prohibiting the eating of certain kinds of flesh. They believe this proves that a person can now eat any kind of flesh; but this is not what Jesus said or meant.

Jesus did not practice or teach anything contrary to God's law because he had to remain sinless in order to become the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. Therefore, what he said about being defiled had nothing to do with physical defilement under God's original agreement with national Israel, but had everything to do with the defilement of a person's character.

"Then his disciples came, to him and said, Don't you know that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father has not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt.15:12-14 KJV Para.).

The religious leaders of the Jews taught that, in order to maintain a harmonious relationship with God and derive benefits from him, a person must be obedient to the written and oral law and practice the traditions of the elders which were being taught as an extension and clarification of certain aspects of God's law, such as the washing of hands before eating. Because of these teachings, those they taught could not understand the spiritual concepts of God's law. Therefore, the spiritually blind were leading the spiritually blind.
In his answer to questions asked by Peter and the other disciples, Jesus shows the error of ritualistic hand washing before eating and also explains what actually defiles a person's character.

"Then Peter said to him, Explain this parable to us. And Jesus said, Are you still without understanding? Don't you know that whatever goes into the mouth goes into the stomach and then exits the body? But those things which come out of the mouth come from the heart; and they defile a person. For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a person: but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a person" (Matt.15:15-20 KJV Para.).

"And when he had entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, Are you also without understanding? Don't you comprehend, that whatever thing enters a person cannot defile them, because it does not enter into their heart, but into the stomach and then exits the body? And he said, It is that which comes out of a person, that defiles the person. Because from within, and out of the heart of person, go evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile a person" (Mk.7:17-23 Para.).

Although the Scribes and Pharisees were speaking about physical defilement being acquired through the violation of the Jewish ritual of washing hands, Jesus took this opportunity to show that Jewish traditions were perversions and violations of God's law and that the things which defile a person's spiritual character come from the mind of a person.

There is nothing in what Jesus said about defilement that remotely infers that he canceled God's dietary law which defines what flesh is fit for human consumption.

The conversation between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees and his explanation to his disciples was in the context of a person's spiritual character, not physical defilement or the eating of meat.

**PETER'S VISION AND CORNELIUS**

The Book of Acts, chapters 10 and 11, contain the lengthy account of an angel being sent to Cornelius the centurion telling him to send for the apostle Peter and Peter receiving a vision, which he later understood to mean that Gentiles were also being given an opportunity for salvation through Christ's sacrifice:
"At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea" (Acts 10:1-6 NIV).

In this account, an angel is sent to a non-Jew with a message telling him that God has been listening to his prayers and is acknowledging his generosity. The angel also instructs Cornelius to send for a man he does not know for a purpose which has not been fully explained to him.

"About noon the following day as they [servants of Cornelius] were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (Acts 10:9-13 NIV).

Being surprised that he would be asked to eat animals which were strictly prohibited to be eaten according to God's dietary law, Peter replies with the following rebuttal:

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven" (Acts 10:14-16 NIV).

This scripture shows Peter still observing the laws prohibiting the eating of unclean animals. Because the voice in the vision said not to call anything impure that God has made clean, many think this statement is proof that the law prohibiting the eating of certain kinds of flesh has been canceled. However, this is not what this vision was intended to reveal which is shown by subsequent events:

"While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (Acts 10:17-20 NIV).
"The following day, Peter and the others arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence, but Peter made him get up. Stand up, he said, I am only a man myself" (Acts 10:24-26 Para.).

"Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?" (Acts 10:27-29 NIV).

Some time after Peter's vision of the unclean animals, the arrival of Cornelius' servants to fetch him, and his arrival at Cornelius' home, Peter came to an understanding that the tradition of the Jews about avoiding contact with gentiles was not correct.

The rest of the account in Acts 10 records Cornelius telling Peter about his experience with the angel, Peter explaining the sacrifice of Christ, and the subsequent baptism of these non-Israelites into the Sovereign Father's earthly family of king-priests. In Acts, chapter 11, Peter relates the vision and the events which followed to the elect in Jerusalem and explains to them that God is also offering salvation to non-Israelites.

The vision given to Peter of the unclean animals in no way proves the law prohibiting eating flesh which is unfit for human consumption has been abolished.

EATING AND DRINKING

In the apostle Paul's letter to the elect at Rome, he address a serious problem about eating and drinking which had the potential to cause some to lose their salvation if they did not resolve the problem in a righteous manner. In Romans, chapter 14, Paul clearly defines the problems along with the process and options for a resolution.

Because the eating of meat is a part of the problem being addressed, some people cite portions of chapter 14 as support for their belief that the dietary laws the Creator gave to ancient Israel are no longer valid.

The following analysis of chapter 14 will show that the subjects Paul discusses have nothing to do with the law prohibiting eating flesh unfit for human consumption; they have everything to do with spiritual maturity and personal dietary preferences and practices which do not violate God's law, but should be done in a righteous manner. Read also Romans, chapters 13 and 15 to gain a better understanding of the contextual setting of chapter 14.
Romans 14:1-23

"Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believes that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eats herbs" (Rom.14:1-2 KJV).

The following is a more correct translation of verses 1 and 2:

"Accept the one whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat everything, but another person, whose faith is weak, only eats vegetables" (Rom.14:1-2 NIV).

Paul begins his resolution of this problem by appealing to the more spiritually mature individuals in the congregation to accept the less spiritually mature individuals. Then, he instructs the more spiritually mature individuals to avoid arguing about this subject or condemning the spiritually immature person because of their personal food preferences.

Verse 2 shows that the first problem Paul is attempting to resolve concerns a difference of opinion about what kind of food is lawful for the elect to consume.

In order to understand what kind of food is being spoken of in verse 2, it is important to understand that the phrase eat all things is the English interpretation of the Greek word pas, which is a root word that can mean all, any, every, or the whole. The addition of the English word things by the King James translators clouds the true meaning of what Paul wrote, because God's law stickily prohibits those who worship him in truth to eat the flesh of certain animals. Moreover, there are several scriptures in the biblical record which reveal the punishment reserved for those who refuse to obey God's dietary law. See Lev.11:1-47; Isa.65:1-5; 66:15-17.

Logic should tell us the belief that a person can eat all things is inconsistent with biblical law and natural law—eating a poisonous substance can be deadly. This alone tells us that the King James Translation of the Greek word pas is in error.

In Romans 14:2, the spiritually mature person correctly believes that he or she can eat everything that is lawful, but the spiritually immature person incorrectly believes it is only lawful to eat herbs (i.e., vegetables). The difference of opinion between the meat eater and the vegetarian concerns the legality of eating meat and whether or not eating or not eating meat will impact one's piety.

Because Paul does not resolve this problem by quoting a specific biblical law as he does many times in his other letters to the elect, it follows that no specific law is being directly violated by either eating or not eating meat. Therefore, we can conclude that the root cause of the problem within the congregation has to do with personal beliefs and preferences which do not violate God's law.
"Let not one who eats despise one who does not eat; and let not one which does not eat judge the one who eats: for God has received them" (Rom.14:3 KJV Para.).

The English words *despise* and *judge* in verse 3 are translated from the Greek words *exoutheneo* and *krino* respectively. *Exoutheneo* is a variation of *exoudenoo*, which means *to make utterly nothing of* (i.e., *despise*). *Krino* means *to distinguish*, (i.e., *decide—mentally or judi-

Paul's use of these two strong Greek words shows that the contention between the two differing opinions on the subject had reached a level where unrighteous attitudes were being manifested among congregational members. If this were not true, Paul would not have addressed the subject in this manner.

Paul cautions the meat eater not to despise the vegetarian and the vegetarian not to condemn the meat eater. Whether one is a meat eater or a vegetarian, one should not think oneself more pious because of one's dietary preference.

To despise or condemn a brother or sister in the faith is a very serious matter, because to do so is in opposition to God's royal law of love. Jesus said the following about the love that we should have for one another:

"A new commandment I give to you, That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another" (Jn.13:34-35 KJV). See also Rom.13:8-10; 1.Jn.2:9-11; 3:14-17; 4:11-12, 20-21.

Despising and having contempt for one's brother or sister in the faith and considering oneself to be more pious because of one's personal beliefs, practices, and preferences is being self-righteous.

Biblical law does not prohibit a person from practicing meat eating or vegetarianism, but there are laws which prohibit eating blood and specific kinds of flesh. Clearly, if a person has health issues stemming from a malfunction of the body, such as an inability to metabolize animal protein or an allergic reaction to animal protein, eating only plant food would be prudent. Moreover, no law in the biblical record prohibits practicing vegetarianism because of personal preference. However, to practice either meat eating or vegetarianism because one believes its practice is mandated by biblical law and doing so makes one more pious or superior to those of a different belief, is clearly in error. See Rom.14: 17; Col.2:16.

**Authority to Judge**

In verse 4, Paul issues a stern reprimand to both the meat eater and the vegetarian about their lack of authority to judge a brother or sister in matters of personal preferences and practices which are lawful.
"Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he shall stand: for God is able to make him stand" (Rom.14:4 KJV Para.).

The apostle James echoed a similar thought to the elect who were scattered among the twelve tribes of Israel throughout the world:

"Do not speak evil one of another, brethren. He that speaks evil of his brother, and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law: but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are you that judge another?" (Jms.4:11-12 KJV Para.).

Only the Sovereign Father has the authority to judge his children in matters of the heart and personal preference. For anyone to assume that they have this authority is a serious error for which there is a severe penalty. Therefore, one must be extremely careful not to impute wrong motives or judge the thoughts of a brother or sister in matters of a personal preference which does not violate God's law.

A Special Day

In verse 5, Paul begins a new subject which also has to do with personal preference and is also causing problems among members of the congregation at Rome:

"One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom.14:5 KJV).

The English word "esteems" in verse 5 is translated from the Greek word krino which, in the context of this verse, means "to distinguish, (i.e., decide).

Why does one person consider one day superior to another and another person sees no difference between one day and another? What gives each person the authority to decide the value of a specific period of time? In order to answer these two questions, we must differentiate the days which are not in question from days people have no authority over.

Paul is speaking to people who are commanded by God to observe the Sabbath, the New Moons, the Passover, and the annual festivals. Moreover, the scriptures show these days to be special and of a higher value than all other days of the year. Therefore, it is logical to assume the problematic days noted in verse 5 are days that are special to an individual based on their own preferences, not days of a commanded observance.

By saying that a person be fully persuaded in his own mind, Paul indicates there must be a weighing of alternatives before a person decides which day to value above another day.
Although Paul's letter does not specifically indicate whether or not the day in question is to be observed by the entire congregation or an individual, from the personal pronouns used, it seems these are days which individuals value as superior.

"He that regards the day, regards it to the Lord; and he that regards not the day, to the Lord he does not regard it. He that eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he that eats not, to the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks" (Rom.14:6 KJV).

The English phrase *he that regards not the day, to the Lord he does not regard it* is not found in the original text, but was added by the King James translators. Verse 6 should read as follows:

"He that regards the day, regards it to the Lord; and he that eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he that eats not, to the Lord he eats not, and gives God thanks" (Rom.14:6 KJV Para).

The English word *regards* in verse 6 is translated from the Greek word *phroneo*, which basically means to *exercise the mind* (i.e., *have an opinion*). One person thinks of a particular day as special and dedicates this special day to God and forgoes eating on this day, while another person feels no need to forgo eating on the day which the other individual holds as special.

Because the day in question concerns eating or not eating, it is logical to conclude that the day in question is a day set apart for fasting and prayer. One individual feels no need to fast on a particular day and eats and communes with God in giving thanks as he normally does, while another individual chooses to set aside a specific day for fasting and communing with God.

Paul explains that neither individual is wrong in their personal preference, because one can show gratitude whether eating or fasting.

"For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live to the Lord: and whether we die, we die to the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom.14:7-9 KJV).

Paul reminds the congregation at Rome of what they already know and understand about how one member can have a positive or negative impact on the entire congregation, and that their heavenly Father has absolute sovereignty over his children in life and death.

The Father's children neither live nor die to themselves; when one member suffers, the entire family suffers; when one member is honored, the entire family is honored (1.Cor.12:26-27). We are not our own masters; we are slaves to each other (Gal.5:13), to our Sovereign Father, and our Savior (Rom.6:22; 1.Cor.6:19-20; Eph.6:6). Arguing about the importance of a specific day on which to fast is meaningless in the Father's overall plan for one's life.
"But why do you judge [i.e., condemn] your brother? or why do you set at nought [i.e., despise/feel contempt for] your brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 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.14:10-12 KJV).

The Father's children do not have the right to judge their brothers and sisters in matters of personal preferences which are not violations of God's law. Harboring a feeling of contempt for a member of the Father's earthly family because of their lawful choices in matters of personal preference is wrong and a great error. Moreover, Paul reminds the elect at Rome that each individual is responsible for their own conduct before God, not another person's conduct. See also 2.Cor.5:10.

"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Rom.14:13 KJV).

Each of the elect is being judged for their attitude and behavior and do not have authority to judge a bother or a sister in matters of belief and personal preferences which do not violate God's law. Moreover, one should be careful not to do or say anything which could adversely impact another person in their pursuit of salvation.

**Clean and Unclean**

Many people falsely believe Romans14:14 is proof that the laws God gave to ancient Israel requiring them to maintain a difference between the clean and unclean and the holy and unholy do not apply to the followers of Christ today. This false belief leads them to conclude that a person can eat any kind of flesh they desire without fear of punishment.

"I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteems anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean" (Rom.14:14 KJV).

The English word *unclean* in verse 14 is translated from the Greek word *koinos*, which means *common* i.e. (literally) *shared by all* or *several* or *profane*. *Koinos* is much different in meaning from the Greek words *akathartos*, which means *impure* (ceremonially, morally *lewd* or *demonic*) and the Greek word *koinoo*, which means to make (or consider) *profane* (ceremonially). The Greek word *koinos* as used in verse 14 speaks to something common, not something defined in Gods law as being unclean or unholy, which must be avoided.

It is important to note that in verse 14 no reference is made to meat or food of any kind and that the two primary subjects Paul is dealing with in chapter 14 are, contentions between meat eaters and vegetarians and which day is more appropriate to set aside for fasting and prayer.
These two subjects have nothing to do with God's law about the kinds of flesh which is either fit or unfit for human consumption, but have everything to do with spiritual maturity and personal preferences which do not violate God's law. Paul clearly explains that his reference to common things in verse 14 is a reference to food in general:

"But if your brother be grieved with your meat, now walk you not charitably. Destroy not him with your meat, for whom Christ died" (Rom.14:15 KJV).

The English word meat in verse 15 is translated from the Greek word broma, which means food in general.

A more accurate translation of verse 15 would be; "But if your brother is bothered by the food you eat, you are not acting in love if you go ahead and eat it. Do not let your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died."

Paul's advice in the situation where a spiritually immature member of the congregation is offended because of the food a person is eating is for the more spiritually mature person to forgo eating this food in their presence.

The basic premise of Paul's advice is also applicable to other situations involving differences in personal preferences were there is no violation of God's law being practiced. Moreover, when this advice is followed, it will help maintain peace and harmony within a congregation.

But, why would what a person chooses to eat be offensive to another person? The answer is that it should not be offensive, if the food is lawful to eat according to God's law. It seems that, in verses 14 and 15, Paul is again speaking to the subject he began with in verses 1-4 and is giving further instructions about how to deal with a difference of opinion between the meat eater and the vegetarian.

"Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the realm of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy spirit" (Rom.14:16-17 Para).

Paul appeals to the elect at Rome to not let their good (i.e., their piety/their expression of righteousness) be ridiculed because of arguing over food, drink, and days on which to fast or not fast. Moreover, the distinctive characteristic of God the Father's realm is righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy spirit.

"For he that in these things [i.e., righteousness, peace, joy] serves Christ is acceptable to God [i.e., the Father], and is approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For food does not destroy the work of God. All indeed is pure; but it is worthless for the person who offends in eating" (Rom.14:18-20 KJV Para.).
Paul says to *follow after the things which make for peace*, but what are the things that make for peace among members of the Father's earthly family and what are the things that bring peace of mind?

According to Paul, to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Rom. 8:6), and glory, honor, and peace are given to everyone who does good works (Rom.2:10).

Throughout chapter 14, Paul shows that the path to peace is being spiritually minded, refraining from saying and doing things which should not be said or done, and forgoing one's own personal preferences for the common good.

Exhibiting righteous behavior within a congregation is beneficial to all its members. Although being a meat eater or a vegetarian does not violate God's law, eating food that is offensive to a brother or sister in their presence is unrighteous behavior and shows a lack of love and respect for the offended person.

Being a meat eater or a vegetarian does not destroy God's work here on earth; it is one's attitude and behavior as a meat eater or a vegetarian that has the potential to destroy one's character and cause others to be offended and stumble in their pursuit of salvation.

It is true that all food originally created for human consumption will not defile your physical or spiritual purity (i.e., the Father's earthly temple). See 1.Cor.3:17; 6:19. But if you eat or drink anything in the presence of a brother or sister, knowing that it is offensive to them, the exercise of your freedom to eat and drink violates the principle of being harmless (Phil.2:14-15) and God's royal law of love (1.Jn.2:9-11; 3:14-17; 4:20-21). Moreover, your freedom in practicing your personal preferences for food and drink is worthless to you if you knowingly offend another person while exercising your freedom. This makes you a prisoner to sin because of your unrighteous attitude and behavior toward another person.

In Romans 14:21-23, Paul summarizes his thoughts on the value of eating and drinking in the light of how this affects fellow members of the Father's earthly family:

"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby your brother stumbles or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom.14:21 KJV).

The English phrase *or is offended, or is made weak* in verse 21 is not in the original text, but was added by the King James translators. Therefore, the verse should read: "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby your brother stumbles" (Rom.14:21).

To cause a person to stumble spiritually is a very serious matter; therefore, we should carefully weigh what we say and do as a member of the Father's earthly family, in order to be harmless and a righteous example to others.
"Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. He is happy that does not condemn himself in what he does. And he that doubts is damned if he eats, for whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom.14:22-23 KJV Para.).

Note: The English phrase "because he eats not of faith" is not in the original text and is therefore omitted from verse 23.

If a person is not totally convinced that what they are doing is in harmony with God, it is not of faith and is sin. It is sin because it is being done without a clear conscience.

The Living Bible's paraphrase of verses 21-23 clearly reveals the conceptual meaning of Paul's instruction to the congregation at Rome:

"The right thing to do is to quit eating meat or drinking wine or doing anything else that offends your brother or makes him sin. You may know that there is nothing wrong with what you do, even from God's point of view, but keep it to yourself; don't flaunt your faith in front of others who might be hurt by it. In this situation, happy is the man who does not sin by doing what he knows is right. But anyone who believes that something he wants to do is wrong shouldn't do it. He sins if he does, for he thinks it is wrong, and so for him it is wrong. Anything that is done apart from what he feels is right is sin" (Rom.14:21-23 TLB).

An individual's personal choice about which day to observe as a day of fasting and prayer or an individual's personal preferences in food and drink within the congregation at Rome were not sin in and of themselves. However, what was sin was a lack of tolerance, a judgmental attitude, and inappropriate behavior toward other members because of their lawful personal beliefs and preferences.

The subjects Paul discussed in Romans, chapter 14, have nothing to do with God's dietary law which prohibits eating flesh unfit for human consumption. What Paul discussed has to do with spiritual maturity and personal preferences which do not violate God's law, but should be practiced in a righteous manner, so that other members of the congregation are not offend.

FOOD SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

In Paul's first letter to the congregation at Corinth, he addresses the eating of foods which have been sacrificed to idols and the attitude and behavior which spiritually mature individuals should have toward those less spiritually mature when dealing with the issue of eating or not eating foods sacrificed to idols. Although some believe what Paul says to the elect at Corinth indicates that all animal flesh is fit for human consumption, an analysis of 1 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 10, show this belief to be in error.
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 crossroads 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 and it 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.

Things Offered to Idols

"Now about things offered to idols, we know we all have knowledge. Knowledge inflates the ego, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks they know everything, they know nothing as they should know. But if anyone love God, the same is known of him" (1.Cor.8:1-3 Para.).

Paul begins his discussion about foods offered to idols with a cautionary note which sets the tone for his analysis of the problem between those who understood that food sacrificed to idols did not become defiled and unfit for human consumption merely by being offered to idols and those who were not totally convinced of this.

"As concerning eating things offered in sacrifice to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in this world, and that there is no other Sovereign God but one. For even if some are called gods in heaven or on earth; (even as there are many gods and many lords) but to us 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. However, not everyone has this knowledge: but some being aware of the idol eat an idolatrous sacrifice at this present time; and their conscience being weak is defiled" (1.Cor.8:4-7 KJV Para.).

The English phrase being aware in verse 7 is translated from the Greek word suneidesis, which means perception. (i.e. moral consciousness).
Some of the elect at Corinth would eat foods they knew had been sacrificed to idols, but they did not have a clear conscience in doing it; therefore, it was sin for them to eat these foods because they were compromising their conscience in this matter. See Rom.14:21-23.

"But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (1.Cor.8:8-9 NIV Para.).

The English word food in verse 8 is translated from the Greek word broma, which means food (literally or figuratively), especially (ceremonially) allowed or forbidden by the Jewish law. The usage of the Greek word broma in verse 8 does not specify whether the food offered is meat, milk, bread, wine, vegetables, or some other food.

Paul explains that the mere act of eating or not eating food which may have been sacrificed to an idol does not affect one's relationship with God. But, he cautions those of the Corinthian congregation who understood this not to let their understanding become a barrier to a less spiritually mature person's spiritual growth and cause them to fail in their pursuit of salvation.

**Eating at an Idol's Temple**

Because of the following King James Version's translation of verse 10, many assume some members of the Corinthian congregation were eating food sacrificed to idols in an idol's temple:

"For if any man see you which have knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols" (1.Cor. 8:10 KJV).

The English phrase idol's temple is translated from the Greek word eidoleion, derived from the word eidolon, which means an image (i.e. for worship). Eidoleion seems to be a derogatory term for a place where idols are located, but does not necessarily mean an idol's temple.

It is clear from the biblical record that God finds all false religions repugnant and to be avoided by those who worship him. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that his earthly children would venture into an idol's temple to eat a meal. What seems more likely is that food being sold in the local restaurants or being offered to a guest of an idol worshiper may have had portions of this food offered to an idol before being served. A more logical translation of verses 10 though 12 might to be as follows:
"You see, this is what may happen: Someone who thinks it is wrong to eat this food will see you eating where an idol is located, but you know there is no harm in it. Then he may become bold enough to do it too, although he still feels it is wrong. So because you know there is no harm to do it, you will be responsible for causing a brother for whom Christ died to violate his conscience and thereby sin. And it is a sin against Christ to sin against your brother by encouraging him to do something he thinks is wrong" (1.Cor.8:10-12 TLB Para.).

Paul says the spiritually mature members of the congregation must be aware that, although they understand food sacrificed to an idol is not defiled, they should be careful not to eat foods which may have been sacrificed to an idol in the presence of a less spiritually mature member, because it may cause them to violate their conscience by also eating this food.

Paul summarizes his thoughts about eating food that may have been sacrificed to idols when he says, "Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble" (1.Cor.8:12 NASU).

The English word food in verse 12 is translated from the Greek word broma, which means food (literally or figuratively), especially (ceremonially) allowed or forbidden by the Jewish law.

The English word meat in verse 12 is translated from the Greek word kreas, which seems to be a primary word meaning (butcher's) meat. Therefore, Paul is clearly referring to animal flesh.

Why would Paul write that he would never again eat meat if this would cause one of the elect to fail in their pursuit of salvation? In order to understand the reason Paul specifically singles out animal flesh in his closing statement about eating things sacrificed to idols, we must analyze what he writes in chapter 10, because it is a continuation of the subject of eating things sacrificed to idols.

An Idol Is Nothing

The primary subject of 1.Corinthians, chapter 10, is worshiping evil spirits by proxy through the participation in their worship system, which included knowingly eating foods sacrificed to idols:

"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 [Greek, broma, i.e., food]; 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).
"But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be you idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (1.Cor.10:5-7 KJV).

Paul reminds the elect at Corinth about the death of the Israelites who participated in the worship of the golden calf and a wild party with excessive drinking and indiscriminate sexual activity while Moses was on the mountain receiving God's law:

"Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur you, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (1.Cor.10:8-10 KJV).

The English word fornication in verse 8 is translated from the Greek word porneuo, which can mean to act the harlot or an idolater. It cannot be determined from the Textus Receptus which meaning to apply in verse 8; however, both meanings seem to apply to the behavior of the Israelites referenced in verses 5 through 7.

Paul cautions the elect at Corinth to be careful not to follow the Israelite's example and to be careful not to continually complain about different things, because this will also lead to their death in the Lake of Fire.

"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. Therefore, let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1.Cor.10:11-12 KJV).

Paul specifically warns those who thought they could have a close association with unrighteous people, participate in unrighteous behavior, or mix false religion with God's worship system to pay attention lest they fail to obtain salvation.

"There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1.Cor.10:13 KJV).

Although Paul addresses temptations in general where a righteous person must make a decision whether or not to compromise righteous behavior, the subject he is addressing in this chapter deals specifically with some of the elects' participation in idolatrous religious practices.
"Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1.Cor.10:14-17 NIV). See also Col.3:5; 1.Sam.15:23.

Some of the elect at Corinth were justifying their participation in certain aspects of other religions practiced in Corinth. This is why Paul urges these individuals to flee Idolatry. Paul then explains that the elect are to only practice the Sovereign God's worship system, because they are of the body of Christ.

In 1.Corinthians 10:18-21, Paul speaks very bluntly about participating in idolatrous religious practices through knowingly eating food sacrificed to idols and he leaves no doubt as to the seriousness of such an act and its end result. For clarity of verses 18-21, both the NIV and TLB translations are quoted below:

"Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons" (1.Cor.10:18-20 NIV).

"And the Jewish people, all who eat the sacrifices, are united by that act. What am I trying to say? Am I saying that the idols to whom the heathen bring sacrifices are really alive and are real gods, and that these sacrifices are of some value? No, not at all. What I am saying is that those who offer food to these idols are united together in sacrificing to demons, certainly not to God. And I don't want any of you to be partners with demons when you eat the same food, along with the heathen, that has been offered to these idols" (1.Cor.10:18-20 TLB).

When the Levitical priesthood and those who sacrificed ate portions of certain sacrifices offered to the Creator, they were considered to be eating with him at his table as an act of worship and fellowship. This is why Paul wrote that it is not possible to mix the worship of evil spirits with the worship of God:

"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons" (1.Cor.10:21 NIV).

"You cannot drink from the cup at the Lord's Table and at Satan's table, too. You cannot eat bread both at the Lord's Table and at Satan's table" (1.Cor.10:21 TLB).
The elect at Corinth knew exactly what Paul was saying, because he had taught them the Passover rituals and they understood that, when participating in this ritual, they were considered to be eating at the Lord's table.

A major part of what is being discussed in chapter 10 pertains to how close an association a righteous person can have with false religions and still maintain a harmonious relationship with their heavenly Father and their Savior. This is why Paul asked, "Are you trying to provoke the Lord to anger? Are you more powerful than he?" (1.Cor.10:22 Para.).

Although idols and the foods sacrificed to them are meaningless in and of themselves, these are in fact objects used to worship evil spirits. When a person knowingly eats sacrifices offered to an idol or a false god, they are in fact participating in the worship of demons. Also, when a person observes a false religions' holiday or participates in any false religions' practices, they are worshiping demons either directly or by proxy.

God the Father will not tolerate his earthly children's participation in the worship of evil spirits or the commingling of his worship system with that of evil spirits. A person with the indwelling of the holy spirit must totally distance themselves from all aspects of false religion in order to remain righteous. A person cannot mix truth and error and still maintain a harmonious relationship with their heavenly Father and their Savior.

"All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful, but all things do not edify. Let no man seek his own, but everyone another's benefit" (1.Cor.10:23-24 KJV Para.).

It is oblivious in there verses that Paul is not saying a righteous person can do as they please. The things which are lawful for a righteous person are clearly defined in the biblical record. Paul himself lists many attitudes and behaviors in his letters which will result in the second death in the Lake of Fire (See Rom.6:23). What he is saying is that sometimes it is not prudent to do things which are lawful.

Many individuals believe what Paul writes in 1.Cor.10:25-27 gives followers of Christ permission to purchase and eat any kind of meat and anything that is served to them:

"Whatever is sold in the meat market, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you accept the invitation; whatever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (1.Cor.10:25-27 KJV Para.).

Why would Paul say not to ask questions about the meat one purchases from a meat market and not to ask questions about the food a host who is not a believer sets before them to eat? Paul answers these questions in verse 28:
"But if anyone tells you, This is has been offered in sacrifice to an idol, do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience sake: (1.Cor.10:28 KJV Para.).

**Note:** The phrase "for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" which is in some translations of verse 28 is not in the Textus Receptus and therefore is omitted.

Remember Paul is writing about meat and other food sacrificed to idols and whether or not it is acceptable for a righteous person to knowingly eat them. The subject is not whether or not these sacrifices made to idols comply with the dietary laws set forth in God's law.

Although some believe that 1.Cor.10:25-30 give the elect of God the freedom to eat any kind of meat desired, this belief is absolutely false. The following translation of verses 25-30 clearly reveals the essence of what Paul is saying about not violating one's conscience and being a good witness of God's way of life:

"Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it [not in the Textus Receptus text]." If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience sake—the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?" (1.Cor.10 25-30 NIV).

If a person knowingly eats any food which has been sacrificed to an idol, that person is participating in the worship of evil spirits, which is a violation of God's law. See Ex.20:3-5; Matt.4:10.

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1.Cor.10:31-32 NIV). See also 1.Cor.11:1.

Paul was not only concerned about what was lawful but also what brings a person to spiritual maturity. Paul says mature Christians should carefully consider their actions when they are in the presence of other people to ensure that what is done or said will not give a wrong impression.

A legal act according to God's law would be unprofitable to a spiritually immature person if they are led astray by a misconception of what a person does who is acting legally. Therefore, it is prudent to forgo doing anything which might cause a brother or sister in the faith to stumble in their spiritual growth and pursuit of salvation.
Wise Use of Liberty

Just because a person has a good understanding of a subject, does not mean they have the liberty to exercise this understanding in front of others, because each person is in a different stage of spiritual growth. Some will have reached a high degree of spiritual maturity, but others will still be babes in the truth. The Scriptures show that we should be careful how we treat the spiritual babe and how we should set an example for those who are still young in the faith.

The overriding theme of Paul's first letter to the elect at Corinth in 1 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 10, is that of setting a righteous example for the young in the faith and taking care not to cause them to fail because one has a superior knowledge or understanding which someone new in the faith may not be mature enough to accept.

What Paul wrote in reference to eating food offered to idols and his approach to eating this food has nothing to do with God's dietary law which describes which animals are either fit or unfit for human consumption.

COLOSSIANS 2:16

When the commanded observances and the dietary laws which were given to Israel are discussed, many people quote Colossians 2:16 in an attempt to prove that all the laws given to ancient Israel have been canceled. But, did Paul tell the Colossians this or did he say something very different?

In order to begin to understand what Paul said in Colossians 2:16, one must first understand that Paul's letter to the Colossians is not one of correction; it is one of praise and encouragement. The elect at Colossi were faithful in what they had been taught and were living their lives in compliance with their heavenly Father's law.

"I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world, rather than on Christ" (Col.2: 4-8 NIV).

Paul warned the Colossians to be aware of those who may attempt to destroy their faith with clever lies and arguments. Paul also praises the Colossians for their obedience to the teachings of Christ and their stability in the faith.
"And you are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead" (Col.2:10-12 KJV).

Paul says the Colossians have been set free from their sinful past and evil desires through a spiritual operation which causes a change of heart. He reminds them that it is through baptism, that the old, evil nature of a person dies and is buried with Christ. And because they placed their trust in the Father who raised Christ from the dead, they are also raised from the dead to a new life.

The key to understanding Colossians, chapter 2, is knowing that Paul begins with reminding the Colossians of their past and present spiritual condition and that the primary topic of verses 13 through 15 is personal sin and how it is forgiven. Once this is understood, what Paul wrote in verse 16 in relationship to the Sabbath, New Moons, annual observances, and eating and drinking becomes clear:

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has he made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; by blotting 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. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Therefore, let no one judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the New Moon, or of the Sabbath days" (Col.2:13-16 KJV Para.).

Verse 14 shows God the Father has blotted out the violations of his law which were proved against them and has canceled the penalty for these violations. Because of Christ's sacrificial blood which he shed on the cross, the Sovereign Father took this list of violations and destroyed it by symbolically nailing it to the cross of Christ where these personal sins and their penalties were erased through the sacrifice of Christ.

A review of the Greek language used in verse 14 will reveal more insight into what Paul actually wrote.

The English phrase blotting out in verse 14 is translated from the Greek verb exaleipho, which means wipe out or obliterate. The ink of the ancients contained no acid, so it lay on the surface of the material and could easily be removed as if it had never been there. This is what happens when our sins are forgiven through the sacrificial blood of Christ. God the Father forgives and forgets our sins as if they had never existed.
The English word handwriting in verse 14 is translated from a Greek word which means an autograph, but its technical meaning refers to a note that was signed by a debtor to acknowledge his debt. This handwriting was symbolic of a confession of guilt. So, when the list of our sins are blotted out, no trace of them remains; they are gone and there is no penalty to be paid, because we are no longer guilty of a violation of the law.

It is important to clearly understand that, in this analogy, Paul said it was the list of a person's violations of God's law which were nailed to Christ's cross, and it was the list of these violations which were erased.

Just because people want believe verse 14 says that God's law was nailed to Christ's Cross and is no longer in effect, does not make it so. The Greek language does not support this belief. This belief is only wishful thinking and a lack of understanding of the Greek language. The only thing that the Greek language indicates as having been "erased" is the list of a person's violations of God's law, which the Father forgives through the sacrificial blood of Christ.

The reality is that Christ came to sacrifice his life in order to erase our sins and their penalty. Clearly, Paul's analogy shows that the list of our sins is the only thing that was nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ.

Let No Man Judge You

Colossians 2:16 discusses eating and drinking, the annual observances, the Sabbath, and the New Moons:

"Therefore, let no one judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the New Moon, or of the Sabbath days" (Col.2:16 KJV Para.).

Here, the English word judge is translated from the Greek word krino, which means condemn, punish, damn, or call into question. None of these meanings infer doing away with anything.

The English word meat in verse 16 is translated from the Greek word brosis, which basically means eating (literally or figuratively) or by extension food (literally or figuratively), whereas the Greek word for meat is kreas, which seems to be a primary word meaning (butcher's) meat. Therefore, Paul is clearly not referring to animal flesh in verse 16, but is referring to eating food in general.

Because verse 16 is difficult to understand when taken out of context, some people try to use it to prove that, during this age, no one needs to observe the annual observances, the Sabbath, the New Moons, or the dietary laws. However, even when this verse is taken out of context, the Greek language does not say that the Colossians were not to practice these observances or the dietary laws.
The Williams and Beck translations of verse 16 make Paul's meaning more clear than the King James Version:

"Stop letting anyone pass judgment on you in matters of eating and drinking or in the matter of annual or monthly feasts or Sabbaths" (Williams).

"Nobody should say you are wrong in what you eat or drink or do on a festival or the first of the month or on a Sabbath" (Beck).

When verse 16 is translated correctly, there is no reprimand from Paul in what he said to the Colossians about their observances of the sabbath, the new moons, the commanded observances and holy convocations, or their eating and drinking. Paul simply advises them not to give any credibility to what people say about their observance of the commanded observances and holy convocations or their dietary habits. The only reason that Paul would have said this is if there was a problem with people condemning the Colossians for their diligent practice of God's law.

It is easily shown beyond a doubt that Paul and the non-Jewish Christians at Colossi were observing the sacred observances and the dietary laws which the Creator God gave to national Israel. The writings of the New testament clearly show Christ and all his disciples practicing all of God's law while he was alive. And it is equally easy to show that, after his death, his followers continued to practice all of the laws given to national Israel which applied to them as the Sovereign Father's earthly children and priesthood.

A Brief Review

The things nailed to the cross with Christ were not God's law; they were a list of our personal violations of God's law and nothing else (Col.2:14).

The facts show Paul encouraging the Colossians to stand firm in their obedience to God and not pay attention to people who condemned them for their observance of the annual festivals, the first day of the month, the Sabbath, or their practice of God's dietary law.

Colossians 2:16 does not prove that any of God's laws have been canceled; instead, what Paul said supports the practice of God's law by those who diligently follow a righteous way of life.

If you are interested in grammatical, linguistic, and theological proof that what I have said about Colossians 2:16 is true, get a copy of Dr. Bacchiochi's book, "From Sabbath to Sunday", which was originally published at the Pontifical Gregorian University Press in Rome. This book contains much more proof that God's law was practiced by the early church than presented in this brief analysis of Colossians 2:16.
CELIBACY AND FOOD

In an attempt to prove that all flesh is fit for human consumption, many people quote Paul's warning to Timothy in which he wrote that there would come a time when the teachings of evil spirits would cause many to depart from the faith.

Because almost all translations of 1.Timothy 4:1-5 rely on the King James Version of the Bible as the conceptual foundation for their translation of these verses, it is necessary to quote these verses using this translation in order to show how easy it is to miss the point of what Paul wrote without referring to the Greek language of the text.

"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; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1.Tim.4:1-5 KJV).

In verses 1 and 2, Paul tells Timothy the reason some will fail in their calling to salvation is that they will pay attention to teachings promoted by evil spirits. In verse 3, Paul mentions two of these demonic teachings:

"Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1.Tim.4:3 KJV).

In order to understand what Paul is explaining to Timothy about food, it is important to note that the English word meats in verse 3 is translated from the Greek word broma, which basically means food of any kind (literally or figuratively). However, the Greek words which describe animal flesh are sārxa, which means in the strictest sense the meat of an animal (as food); and kreas, which seems to be a primary word meaning (butcher's) meat. The absence of the Greek words sārxa and kreas, which describe animal flesh, indicates that Paul is not referring specifically to meat in verse 3, but is referring to food in general.

Many falsely believe what Paul writes in verse 4 proves that all animal flesh can be consumed if one shows God gratitude for providing it and allowing one to eat it:

"For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving" (1.Tim.4:4 KJV).
The first key to understanding what Paul writes in verse 4 is to know that the use of the English word for before the English word every supports the premise that everything God created is good. However, the English word for in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word hoti, which basically means because. Translating the Greek word hoti correctly into the English word because, which means the reason that or since provides the correct meaning of Paul's statement.

The second key to understanding verse 4 is to know the English word if is not in the Textus Receptus from which the King James Version of the Bible is translated. The introduction of the English word if before it be received introduces a conditional clause, which allows for the concept of doing something to change preset conditions. A more accurate conceptual translation of verse 4 from the Textus Receptus would be: "Because every created thing of God has its value it should not be rejected, but accepted with gratitude."

In verse 4, Paul is saying that everything God has created has value (including marriage between a man and a woman as referenced in verse 3) and should not be dismissed as inadequate or faulty, but should be gratefully accepted.

Indeed everything God created is good in that everything was created to fulfill God's purpose. It is evident that everything was not created to be eaten by humans, because some animal flesh and plants are poisonous and if eaten can cause death if ingested. It is also true that foods which were created for human consumption should not be thought of as unfit for human consumption. Moreover, one should be grateful for the life sustaining energy these foods provide to one's body.

"For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1.Tim.4:5 KJV).

In order to understand the conceptual meaning of what Paul writes in verse 5, we must again return to the Greek language.

The English word for in verse 5 is translated from the Greek word gar, which is a primary particle; properly, assigning a reason (used in argument, explanation or intensification; often with other particles). In verse 5, the Greek word gar would be more accurately translated into the English word because.

The English word sanctified in verse 5 is translated from the Greek word hagiazo, which is derived from the word hagios, which basically means to make holy. Hagiazo, basically means (ceremonially) to purify or to consecrate.
The only animals which could be purified or consecrated and set aside for a holy use by the word of God are described in the sacrificial and the dietary laws given to the Israelites (Lev.11:1-47; Deut.14:3-21). Additionally, the word of God in verse 5 refers to the Creator God (Greek: Logos, i.e., the Word) who made everything for the Sovereign God (Greek: Theos, i.e., the Supreme Divinity). Moreover, it was the Creator God who delineated which animals were fit for human consumption. These are the only animals for which a person is to give thanks to God for providing as food.

A more accurate conceptual translation of verses 4 and 5 from the Textus Receptus would be as follows:

"Because every created thing of God has its value it should not be rejected, but accepted with gratitude, because it is consecrated by the Sovereign God's Word, the Creator God, and supplication."

During Paul's lifetime, many individuals, as a personal preference or a religious belief, did not eat meat or other food items. These same practices exist today among vegetarians and certain religions.

The two problems (imposed celibacy and avoidance of certain food items) which Paul describes as teachings of evil spirits were negatively impacting some of the elect and were the cause of their departure from the faith. A careful linguistic analysis of 1.Timothy 4:1-5 reveals that the kinds of animal flesh which are fit for human consumption is not the subject of Paul's warning to Timothy and therefore cannot be used as proof that the dietary laws recorded in the biblical record have been canceled.

THE EDICT OF ACTS 15

During the first few years of the early church, many problems arose about how to apply God's law to the elect who were under a different agreement from the one the Creator made with ancient Israel. These problems were especially difficult to resolve when dealing with non-Israelites who were being called to salvation out of idolatrous religions and lifestyle practices which were in opposition to God's law.

In order to resolve the question of whether or not non-Israelites must be circumcised in order to be saved, the elders held a conference in Jerusalem. During this meeting, the apostle James who was the president of the Jerusalem council also addressed two of the dietary laws given to Israel which apply to Gentile converts.

James' Assessment

After all the apostles and elders had given their opinions about the issues of circumcision and the law of Moses, the apostle James gave his assessment and judgement concerning the questions before the council:
"When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things that have been known for ages" (Acts 15:13-18 NIV).

The following is a summary of the prophecy James quoted from Amos 9:9-15:

• The scattering of Israel throughout the nations (vs.9-10)
• The restoration of the Davidic dynasty (v11)
• The conversion of all of the Gentile nations (v12)
• The fruitfulness of the land of Israel after Christ's return (v13)
• Israel's return from captivity (v14)
• The rebuilding of Israel's destroyed cities (v14)
• Israel's permanent settlement of the Holy Land (v15)

Through their writings, the prophets agreed with what had been said so far, because they had foretold that God would call individuals from among other nations to receive his spirit.

The prophesies of Amos, Isaiah, and Micah all lend support to what James had to say about the salvation of Gentiles. See Isa.11:1-16 and Mic.4:1-3.

By quoting the prophets, James lays the foundation for his decision about circumcision and the law of Moses, as well as the edict which the council wrote and sent to the churches.

James' Edict

"It is my judgment, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turned to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from being defiled by idols, from sexual immorality, from animals choked to death, and from eating blood. For Moses has been taught in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:19-21 Para.).

The things taught in the synagogues were God's law, which included laws about idolatry, sexual immorality, improper slaughter of animals, eating blood, and diet. The analysis and conclusion of James was correct and supported by all those at the Council. Therefore, the Council wrote a letter to be distributed to the Gentile converts. The edict James issued shows the dietary laws given to ancient Israel were still being taught and practiced by the early church many years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

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Although these Gentile converts lived during a time when idolatrous religions impacted almost every aspect of daily life, these non-Israelites were neither given special dispensation nor exempted from practicing the laws of God, because to do otherwise would have been inconsistent with the teachings of Christ and the scriptures.

The instruction against eating strangled animals and their blood was a reminder that this law was still in force and was a part of the terms and conditions of God's agreement with his elect children (See Lev.7:26-27).

Today, the Sovereign Father's children, whether Israelite or Gentile, are living under the same conditions as the early Gentile converts and the edict of Acts 15 applies to all of the elect everywhere on earth.

SUMMARY

Historians who research the early church find that the apostles and the early church practiced the observance of the Passover, the annual festival, the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the dietary laws given to ancient Israel, until this church disappeared from the historical record. But why did the early church continue these practices, especially when they were persecuted for doing so? Their practice of these laws makes no logical sense unless these practices were required under their agreement with God.

Is there something that the apostles and the early church were not aware of that would eliminate the need for God the Father's earthly children to practice these laws 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 laws? There are no satisfactory answers to these questions. An honest search of the Bible reveals that God's law has not been canceled or suspended.

Because the practice of God's laws 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 could not have been canceled or suspended. It should be obvious that in this age anyone who professes to follow Christ should also be practicing the Sovereign God's laws which apply to them.

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 that was not markedly different from that of the Jews. They took for granted that the good news message which Christ and the apostles taught did not conflict with the Creator God's covenant with national Israel, and that the agreement they had with the Sovereign Father, which was sealed by Christ's death, did not mean the covenant made between God and Israel was no longer in force.
The historical record clearly shows that the church observed the Passover, the festival of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and the festivals of the seventh month, as well as the weekly Sabbath and the dietary laws given to Israel through Moses.

The Elect are Holy

The following are a few of the many references in the New Testament which confirm that the Sovereign Father's earthly children are holy and are to remain in this sacred state of existence while living in the flesh:

"According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph.1:4 KJV). See also Rom.12:1.

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb.3:1 KJV).

"As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy" (1.Pet.1:14-16 KJV).

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an 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" (1.Pet.2:9 KJV Para.).

The Sovereign Father's Temple

"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's" (1.Cor.6:19-20 Para.).

Today, the Sovereign Father's earthly children are his temples on earth. His most holy place is now within his elect children. Therefore, we should keep our bodies from being defiled, just as the Creator instructed the Israelites to keep his temple and his holy place undefiled while he was dwelling in the Holy of Holies.

"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.).

During the gospel age of salvation, defiling God's temple is much more serious than it was for the Israelites who were under a physical agreement with physical penalties for the violations of God's law. The elect who have an agreement with the Sovereign Father have a spiritual agreement with him, which has physical and eternal consequences for the violation of his law.
Make no mistake, those who have the holy spirit dwelling within them who consciously and intentionally defile their body, which is the temple of the living God, will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire and cease to exist forever.

**When Christ Returns**

Near the end of the Book of Revelation, the apostle John was told the following which should convince anyone who is serious about their eternal salvation that being found holy when Christ returns is of paramount concern:

"And he said to me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. 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. 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. 22:10-14 KJV).

The prophet Isaiah recorded many earth shaking world events which will occur before and during Christ's return. Within one of these prophecies is recorded the punishment which will be exacted on individuals who practice an idolatrous worship system and eat pig and rodent flesh, all of which are violations of God's law of worship and God's dietary law which prohibits eating animal flesh deemed unfit for human consumption.

"I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, that walk 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 on 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 Christ returns to rule the earth. Isaiah clearly records the end result of violating the system of worship and the laws of physical and spiritual purity recorded in the biblical record:
"For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. 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.66:15-17 KJV).

Many people ignore what the biblical record says about eating flesh which is unfit for human consumption and the consequence of violating God's dietary law.

Conclusion

The laws the Creator gave to ancient Israel were for their benefit and would result in a happy, prosperous, and productive physical life with the promise of salvation and eternal and immortal life in the Family and Kingdom of God. The same principle exists during this age of salvation. Those who practice the laws of God which apply to them will receive a blessing.

God is not waiting around to strike you down or 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. A person can repent and ask forgiveness for acts of ignorance and lack of character. However, if a person persists in willful disobedience of God's law, that person is in jeopardy of losing their salvation (Heb.10:26).

Many people ignore what the biblical record says about eating flesh which is unfit for human consumption and the consequence of violating God's dietary law; however, many scriptures show that God will destroy those who will not come into conformity with his righteous law, which includes his dietary law.

Does God Care about Food?

Why should a follower of Christ be concerned about the dietary law given to the ancient Israelites in which the Creator God described the kinds of beasts, fish, birds, and insects that were and were not fit for human consumption? The answer is that, because these creatures have not changed their physical makeup since their creation, they are as unfit for human consumption today as they were before the great flood and during the existence of the ancient nation of Israel. The only thing that has changed is human perception of what is good for food. Unclean animals described in God's law are simply not fit for human consumption.
The dietary law in the biblical record only permits eating meats that God has designated as fit for human consumption, which have also been slaughtered in compliance with God's instructions. A good guideline to remember is that something can only be lawful if it is in harmony with God's law and the teachings of Christ and the apostles.

**CLEAN AND UNCLEAN 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 breathe 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, hawks, 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                      b4w12
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 Dionysiac, 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 com-
memoration 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
worshippers 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 substi-
tuted for the true Christian Passover and has been accepted as the authen-
tic 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

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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 . . .' (Ibid., p.401).

"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 everywhere 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 shows 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 worshiping 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:

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"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 Welsh 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 Hallowe'en tell the true meaning of the day. The Jack-O-latern 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 gloriais' 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 holidays. 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 Marchesan, 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 Zondervan 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 Britannica, 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 worshiping the Sovereign God through his worship system or you are worshiping 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 worshiping the true God. The existence of deceptive worship systems is a fact and many people fall prey to these counterfeits, thinking they are worshiping 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 your-
self 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
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).

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 par-
takers 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 κοινωνία, 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 four 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. Coherell
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 goeth to war any time at his own charges? who plants a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth 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 about 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 MELCHIZEDEDEC**

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 Zeboim, 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 slime pits; 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 I 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 thereof 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 Edersheim.

**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.

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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). 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 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.3:10-11 KJV 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, a 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 SCRIBE & 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 on 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 New Testament 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 legitimatize 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 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" (v12 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 Schaff-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'). McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia 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 on 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 he 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 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 on 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, on 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 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 on 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 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 writes:

"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 give. 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 on 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 on 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 elect's 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).
"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 [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.9:6-9 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 on 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 into 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 one 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. Verily I 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” (Mat.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: 35-40 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 \textit{brethren} is translated from the Greek word \textit{adelphos}, which generally denotes one's \textit{near kinsman} or \textit{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 \textit{mankind} or \textit{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.

\textbf{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 paper 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 had to 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
CHAPTER
FIFTEEN
THE LAW OF USURY

The Law of Usury is one of the few laws given to ancient Israel, that required the death penalty for its violation. God calls taking usury (interest) on something loaned an abomination, which is one of the most detestable of things. Through the prophet Ezekiel God says, "Is one worthy of life that loans for usury? . . . That person shall die and it shall be his own fault." Lending property or money for interest hardly seems worthy of death, but God says it is. On the surface, the law of usury seems harsh and unfair, but is it?

A DIFFICULT QUESTION FOR THE CHRISTIAN

Current theological thinking on usury by many Bible scholars seems to indicate that charging excessive interest on a loan is wrong. However, a careful study of this issue shows that in the cases where usury is prohibited, the prohibition is against the charging of any interest at all, excessive or not. This fact leaves the followers of Christ with a very difficult question to answer, especially if they are in the banking or money lending business. In fact, if one expects to buy or sell anything in this society, it is almost impossible to escape paying interest or being associated in some way with the business of paying or receiving interest.

The following questions must be answered by Christians:

• Does the law of usury apply to God the Father's elect today?
• If the law of usury does apply today, how do I obey this law?

This chapter will examine this subject and the scriptures which pertain to usury, in order to gain an understanding of this law in both a physical and a spiritual context.

USURY

The laws contained in the Bible cover the entire spectrum of human behavior from birth to death; every activity that humans can engage in is covered either specifically or in principle. God's laws, precepts, and principles are empirical and do not depend on human acceptance or approval for them to function. When these laws are obeyed, the end result is good. Moreover, when they are disobeyed, the end result is evil, and penalties are exacted on the lawbreaker, as well as society as a whole. The law of usury is a highly misunderstood law that offers tremendous benefits for obedience or the death penalty for disobedience. Moreover, the principles of this law affect every society on earth.
DEATH TO THOSE WHO VIOLATE THE LAW OF USURY

In Ezekiel, chapter 18, the prophet delivers an indictment and a stern warning from God to the people of Israel about their national and personal sins. This warning message was given to Ezekiel who was a captive with the nation of Judah about 127 years after the ten-tribe nation of Israel had been taken into captivity by a foreign power. Because Ezekiel was being held captive along with the nation of Judah, this warning never reached all Israelites at that time; therefore, this can be seen as a prophetic warning for today.

In Ezekiel, the introduction to the subject of usury shows the seriousness of violating this 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).

This verse says that a sinner will die. Here, the English word die is translated from the Hebrew word mut which means to die, to kill, or to have one executed. The use of this word indicates that this death sentence is a part of the condemnation on those who are judged worthy of eternal death.

Through the writer to the Hebrews, God says, "And as it is appointed to men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb.9:27 KJV). At this judgment all those who are not found worthy of eternal life will die the second death from which there is no return.

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 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.20:11-15 KJV).

"And he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said to me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 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.21:5-8 KJV).
IF A MAN IS JUST

Ezekiel 18:5-9 shows that there is a lifestyle that will lead to eternal life instead of death:

"But if a man is just, and does that which is lawful and right, And has not eaten on the mountains, neither has lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither has defiled his neighbor's wife, neither has come near to a menstruous woman, And has not oppressed any, but has restored to the debtor his pledge, has spoiled none by violence, has given his bread to the hungry, and has covered the naked with a garment; He that has not given forth on usury, neither taken any increases, that has withdrawn his hand from iniquity, has executed true judgment between man and man, Has walked in my statutes, and has kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, says the Lord God" (vs.5-9 KJV).

Ezekiel lists a number of positive things that are just and right for a person to do which will lead to eternal life. Notice the reference to the law of usury in verse 7: "but has restored to the debtor his pledge." This refers to a merciful creditor who does not keep the things given to him as a pledge by the poor debtor. See also Ex.22:25-26.

The Living Bible Paraphrased translates verses 5-9 as follows:

"And has not gone out to the mountains to feast before the idols of Israel and worship them, and does not commit adultery, nor lie with a woman during the time of her menstruation, . . . and is no robber, but gives food to the hungry and clothes to those in need, and grants loans without interest, and stays away from sin, and is honest and fair when judging others, and obeys my laws—that man is just, says the Lord, and he shall surely live" (LBP).

God says that the person that does these abominable things shall die, and it shall be his own fault. However, the one who has the opposite attitude and performs good deeds shall live.

"If he fathers a son who is violent, who sheds blood, and does to a brother any of these, and even if he does not any of these, but has eaten on the mountains, and has defiled his neighbors wife; he has oppressed the poor and needy and been a thief, and has not returned the pledge; and has lifted up his eyes to the idols; he has committed abomination, or he has loaned on interest and has taken increase; shall he also live? he shall not live; he has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be on him" (Ezk. 18:10-13 KJV).

"And has not oppressed a man; nor has withheld the pledge . . . and has given his bread to the hungry, and he has covered the naked with clothes; and has not held back his generosity to the poor; and has not received interest and increase; this man has done my judgments, he has walked in my statute—he shall not die for the lawlessness of his father. He shall surely live" (Ezk.18:16-17 Para.).
Clearly the good things mentioned in Ezekiel 18:16-17 are things God wants his people to do out of love and compassion for their fellow man. Notice also that these things are done in compliance with God's judgments and statutes.

"Behold, the princes of Israel, every one were in you to their power to shed blood. In you have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of you have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in you have they vexed the fatherless and the widow. You have despised my holy things, and have profaned my sabbaths. In you are men that carry tales to shed blood: and in you they eat on the mountains: in the midst of you they commit lewdness. In you they have discovered their fathers' nakedness: in you they have humbled her that was set apart because of menstruation. And one has committed abomination with his neighbor's wife: and another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law: and another in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In you have they taken gifts to shed blood; you have taken usury and increase, and have greedily gained of your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten me, says the Lord God" (Ezk. 22:6-12 KJV Para.).

USURY IS A CAPITAL CRIME

It is easy to understand why the death penalty should be administered to those who blaspheme God, murder, rape, or kidnap another person. The death penalty for adultery is even understandable. But the lending of property or money for interest hardly seems worthy of the death penalty to most people. And yet, the Creator of all that exists says usury is a capital crime and those who commit it shall be put to death.

On the surface the law of usury may seem harsh and unfair. However, this law reveals the great love, concern, and compassion God the Father and Jesus Christ have for each individual.

TO WHOM IS THE BIBLE WRITTEN?

The Bible was written almost totally to and for the physical and spiritual nation of Israel as they existed anciently and as they exist today. The biblical record only speaks to other peoples and nations as they affect and interact with Israel. The truth is that God is only dealing with humanity through physical (national) Israel and spiritual Israel (God the Father's elect children). Therefore, we must view God's laws, statutes, judgments, and ordinances as they pertain to physical and spiritual Israel and as they pertain to his plan of salvation which is to be completed through them for humanity.

When the Creator God offered to make a covenant with the Israelites in Exodus 19:5-6, he offered to make them a nation of priests and a holy people. After Israel accepted the terms and conditions of the covenant God offered them, he gave them laws, precepts, and principles to live by. Later he told them that no other nation had laws as great as or as good as the ones he gave to them.
"Behold, I [Moses] have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do so in the land whither you go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who has God so near to them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call on him for? And what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut.4:5-8 KJV)

But why did God give these laws to this people only? Why didn't he give them to all mankind at the same time? The reason is that God has been using Israel as an example for all of humanity as a witness and a teaching device. He gave them a perfect set of laws by which to govern their behavior. If they had obeyed these laws, they would have been blessed beyond anything any other nation that lived outside of these laws could remotely hope for (Deut.28:1-14).

THE DEFINITION OF USURY

Because the law of usury was given to Israel so that they could be an example of righteous behavior, it is important for the Father's elect to understand this law. Therefore, in order to clarify each scripture containing the English words usury and increase, it is necessary to understand the Hebrew and Greek words from which they were translated:

Usury

The primary Hebrew word translated into the English word usury is nashak, which means bite. The derivatives are neshek, which means interest, and nashak, which is a denominative verb that means to lend for interest.

Nashak (bite)

Whenever the verb to bite occurs in its literal physical sense in the Bible, it has a snake or serpent as its subject. In one case, men who are false prophets are described as biters (Mic.3:5).

Neshek (interest)

The relationship of this noun to the basic verb bite is sustained by its Ugaritic usage (Ugaritic, a Semitic language closely related to Phoenician and Hebrew): the verb bite (of a serpent), the noun bite (interest).

Nashak (usury)

The denominative verb is favored as the correct sense with some translators using bite and others using lend on usury or lend on/for interest.
Increase

The Hebrew word, *tarbuwth*, means *multiplication*. In the context of a loan basically means *interest on money loaned* and is often translated into the English word *interest*.

Tokos

The Greek word *tokos* is derived from the base word tiktto, which means *interest on money that is loaned as a product* (i.e., usury).

WHAT USURY IS NOT

The Hebrew and Greek language leave no room for doubt as to the meaning of the word usury as it is used in the biblical record. It means 'something to be returned with the thing which is loaned'.

Most of the past and current thinking defines usury as excessive interest or an interest that is above and beyond just or legal limits. Although this may be the legal definition of usury today, it is not the definition of the biblical law of usury. The biblical principle of usury has almost nothing to do with excessive interest; it has a far more profound meaning for humanity.

THE YEAR OF RELEASE, LAND REST, AND THE JUBILEE

The Year of Release, the Land Rest, and the Jubilee are just as misunderstood by most professing Christians as the subject of usury. These three periods of time have great physical, spiritual, and prophetic meanings attached to them, and they are extremely important to the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity. Moreover, they have a very direct impact on the meaning of the law of usury.

In Exodus 12:2 God instructs the Israelites: "This shall be to you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you." See also Deut.16:1. This particular month of Abib also began Israel's first year as a nation and was to be used as a starting point from which to calculate all the events God commanded Israel to observe.

THE YEAR OF RELEASE

Every seventh year all debts were commanded to be released (except for those of foreigners). This meant that everyone who was indebted to another person could have a fresh start economically. It meant that a person, because of circumstance or poor judgment, had the opportunity to get rid of economical or physical bondage and put their energy into benefitting themselves or their family.

"At the end of every seven years you shall make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lends ought to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, or of his brother; because it is called the Lord's release. Of a foreigner you may exact it again: but that which is yours with your brother your hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among
you; for the Lord shall greatly bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess it: Only if you carefully hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command you this day" (Deut. 15:1-5 KJV).

Notice the provision in verse 4, which states that when there are no more poor people in Israel, the law of usury is to be suspended. This provision will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

**LOAN DURATION**

In his wisdom, God covers the entire spectrum of the lending process. Understanding human nature far better than the most astute psychologist, God understands the mental and physical burden that the borrower is under. King Solomon was inspired to write: "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Pro.22:7 KJV).

God also understands the greed, power, and oppression factors of one who lends for the wrong reasons. Therefore, he placed limitations on the length of time a person could be held responsible to pay a debt back; this length of time was seven years, and was a great benefit to the lender and the borrower alike.

Although some might disagree with the year of release because they think it is unfair to the lender, it is important to remember that God repeatedly promises tremendous blessings for those who will obey him, and even more blessings if a person obeys with a right attitude.

"If there is among you a poor man of one of your brethren within any of your gates in your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your poor brother: But you shall open your hand wide to him, and shall surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wants. Beware, do not have wicked thoughts in your heart, saying, the seventh year, the year of release, is close at hand; and your eye be evil against your poor brother, and you give him nothing: and he complains to the Lord about you, and it becomes a sin to you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him; because you give to him, the Lord your God shall bless you in all your works, and in all that you put your hand to. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command you, saying, you shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor, and to your needy, in your land" (Deut.15:7-11 KJV Para.)

The law says to lend to the poor; moreover, the law says to lend enough for their immediate needs and beyond. God commands those who follow his way of life to be more than generous with what they loan to a poor person.
God also tells the lender not to worry about getting paid back because of the year of release. He reminds the lender that if he does not lend, it will count as sin to him, but if he does lend to the poor, he will receive blessings for compliance.

**GENEROSITY IS COMMANDED**

When it comes to the needs of the poor and unfortunate, God did not suggest that the Israelites be generous. He commanded them to be generous or be punished for disobedience:

"Beware that there be not a thought in your wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and your eye be evil against your poor brother, and you give him nought; and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin to you" (Deut.15:9 KJV).

**ECONOMIC SLAVERY**

All people want to prosper and live happy, abundant, and successful lives. Although this is the dream of most people, the reality is that things do not always go the way we would like them to, especially in the area of economic desires. Most of the time desires can be coped with rationally, but needs for survival are another matter. When a person's basic needs are not met, all other things take a lesser position. The year of release guaranteed that perpetual monetary slavery would not exist in Israel.

**THE LAND REST**

Every seventh year the land was to rest from intensive agricultural production. Today, most organic farmers and gardeners well understand the benefits of such a land rest. Because the Israelites were basically an agrarian society, the land rest had a profound and dramatic impact on their economy. In the seventh year, there would be no major profits from the land; therefore, it would be very difficult for a person to pay back a debt during this land rest, which is one reason God canceled these debts.

**THE JUBILEE**

The Jubilee Year, which occurred every fiftieth year, ensured that economic equilibrium would be maintained in the nation. All indebtedness was to be released, and all lands were to be returned to their original owners, which allowed the economy to be brought back into balance. By the observance of these laws, the nation of Israel would always have a balanced economy with a relatively debt-free population, which would create the environment for prosperity to flourish.

**WHY LEND SOMETHING?**

Why do we lend something to another person? There seem to be two basic reasons for lending—personal gain and charity.
Personal Gain

To lend something where there is an expectation of a return of whatever was loaned plus something added to it is for personal gain. Whatever the gain is, constitutes a benefit to the person doing the lending.

Charity

To lend something because of an outgoing concern for another's well-being with no motive for gain above the return of the thing lent is done for charity.

The first type of lending is a purely selfish act and the second type is an unselfish act. Of course there can be a blend of both attitudes.

LENDING TO THE POOR BROTHER, STRANGER, OR SOJOURNER

"And if your brother becomes poor, and falls in decay with you [cannot maintain himself with you]; then you shall relieve him: yes, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with you. Take you no usury of him, or increase: but fear your God; that your brother may live with you. You shall not give him your money on usury, nor lend him your victuals for increase. I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God" (Lev.25:35-38 KJV).

In order to gain a clear understanding of this text, we need to know who the brother, stranger, and sojourner are.

BROTHER

The English word brother is translated from the Hebrew word ach means brother, relative, fellow countryman, or a friend. In this verse the inference is that of a fellow countryman who is considered a friend or brother.

STRANGER

The English word stranger is translated from the Hebrew word ger means an alien, sojourner or stranger. Ger refers to someone who did not enjoy the rights usually possessed by a resident. The ger in Israel was largely regarded as a proselyte. The ger had to be present for the solemn reading of the law (Deut.31:12), and a circumcised ger could keep the Passover. The Israelites were not to oppress them and were to love them as they loved themselves (Lev.19:34).

The stranger in Leviticus should not be confused with the stranger mentioned in Deuteronomy 23:20, because the status of these individuals was quite different before God. This will be explained later in this chapter.
SOJOURNER

The English word sojourner is translated from the Hebrew word toshab, which means a sojourner—the temporary landless wage earner who was sometimes referred to as a hired servant. This is in contrast to the term ger, which refers to the permanent resident alien. The toshab could not observe the Passover and their children could be sold as slaves. Although the toshab shared some of the same privileges as the ger, their freedom was not as great.

In Leviticus 25:35-38, the law about lending specifically refers to the poor of Israel. This text is, in part, a summary of the law and it shows a strict prohibition against lending money or food for interest to a poor relative or countryman. This prohibition also included those who were proselytes and those who were under the authority or within the service of an Israelite.

But, why is God so concerned about debt and borrowing? Is there some logical reason why he placed such stringent rules on the lending of property or money to another person? God is extremely concerned about our welfare and the law of usury shows his tremendous love, concern, and compassion for humanity.

AN ATTITUDE

The parable of the wicked servant who would not forgive the debts of one who owed him is an excellent example of an attitude that displeases God.

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened to a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought to him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt" (Matt.18:23-27 KJV).

"But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what you owe. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt" (Matt.18:28-30 KJV Para.)
"So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told to their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said to him, O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you beseeched me: Should not you also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due to him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if you from your hearts you do not forgive every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt.18:31-35 KJV Para.).

LENDING TO AND COLLECTING FROM A FOREIGNER OR A STRANGER

"At the end of every seven years you shall make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor who lends anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, or his brother; because it is called the Lord's release. Of a foreigner you may exact it again: but that which is yours with your brother your hand shall release" (Deut.15:1-3 KJV).

"You shall not lend on usury to your brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent on usury: To a stranger you may lend on usury; but to your brother you shall not lend on usury: that the Lord your God may bless you in all that you set your hand to in the land whither you go to possess it" (Deut.23:19-20 KJV).

This is an example of lending to foreigners and strangers. But why did God allow the Israelites to exact interest from these people and not from an Israelite? It is apparent from the scriptures that, if a foreigner or stranger obeyed God, they could and would receive many of the blessings that the Israelites received. One of these blessings was that they could not be charged interest on a loan of necessity. This blessing came directly because of their obedience to and submission to the law of God. But those who were neither of the nation of Israel nor under the authority of an Israelite could not partake of this blessing, because this blessing came from obedience to God's laws, precepts, and principles.

Citing their deliverance from Egypt, Moses reminds the Israelites, "And you shall remember that you were a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you: therefore I command you this thing today" (Deut.15:15 KJV).

Moses reminds the Israelites that the purpose of God's law is to deliver people from slavery into freedom, just as God delivered them from Egyptian slavery to freedom. The purpose of the law governing interest (and the purpose of the whole law) is to bring individual and national freedom under God's care and rule.
Loans for Charitable Reasons

Should a person keep lending to someone who makes no effort to repay or refuses to work? The apostle Paul was inspired by God to write that if a man will not support his family he is worse than an infidel:

"But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1.Tim.5:8 KJV).

The principle here is that a person who is capable of earning their own way and does not, should not be given assistance until their attitude changes. The scriptures are abundant with examples of what God thinks of a lazy person, and what the end result of physical and spiritual laziness is. But there are those who, because of circumstances and real emergencies, cannot provide for themselves or their families. These are the people who are worthy of loans being given without interest or outright gifts, if their situation warrants it.

Some could say that an unscrupulous person could use the law of usury to take advantage of the lender, which is absolutely right. The lender can be taken advantage of by the dishonest borrower. However, we must remember that the third party involved in the transaction between the lender and borrower is the Sovereign God who knows the thoughts, intentions, and motivations of all people. God inspired the Psalmist to write:

"The wicked borrows, and pays not again; but the righteous shows mercy, and gives" (Psa.37:21 KJV).

Just because a person is poor does not cancel his responsibility to pay back what he owes if it is at all within his power to do so.

FORGIVENESS OF FRAUD

"But brother goes to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because you go to law one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong? why do you rather not suffer yourselves to be defrauded? No, you do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know you not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? . . ." (1.Cor.6:6-9 KJV).

God wanted Israel to prosper and to be an example to the other nations around them. He wanted to show, through the example of the Israelites, that obedience to his laws, precepts, and principles would bring tremendous blessings. During the reign of King Solomon, Israel prospered and reached the zenith of physical wealth as a nation. The people were very happy and prosperous as long as they were in obedience to God.
THE PLEDGE OR LOAN COLLATERAL

"When you do lend your brother any thing, you shall not go into his house to fetch his pledge. You shall stand abroad, and the man to whom you do lend shall bring out the pledge abroad to you. And if the man be poor, you shall not sleep with his pledge: In any case you shall deliver him the pledge again when the sun goes down, that he might sleep in his own raiment, and bless you: and it shall be righteousness to you before the Lord your God" (Deut.24:10-13 KJV).

The context of these scriptures is equity and fairness in a specific situation. This text gives instructions to the lender who is for some reason, concerned that the borrower will not repay him or return what is loaned. Therefore, something of value belonging to the borrower is held by the lender until whatever is loaned is paid back or replaced. The lender is not allowed to enter the borrower's home to procure the pledge. This insures the privacy of the borrower and prevents a multitude of other problems which could arise from a concerned lender being allowed to wander around the borrower's home. Moreover, when a lender follows these instructions (the letter of the law), God considers the lender to be righteousness.

"If you lend money to any of my people with you that is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor (usurer); neither shall you lay on him interest (usury). If you take your neighbor's garment to pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down: for that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin; wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he cries to me, that I will hear; for I am gracious" (Ex.22:25-27 ARV 1901).

In this situation, the borrower is so poor that his only valuable possessions are the clothes on their back. If all a person has are the clothes on their back, they are very poor. In fact, they are destitute by all civilized standards. Because of this situation, the lender is even prevented from keeping the pledge overnight. Here, God imposes on the lender the Godly attribute of kindness and mercy. Moreover, God says that, when the lender obeys the injunction, He considers this a righteous act by the lender.

While charity is clearly intended in verses 25-27, charity should not be confused with a gift. Although it is not required, a security pledge can be taken and held during the day to ensure that the borrower will not use it to negotiate a second loan. If the borrower was trustworthy, no pledge would be required. The pledge or security was insurance against failure to repay or to work out the loan. The charity in this case is not requiring the borrower to pay interest on the loan.
Things Not to Be Taken as a Pledge

In the Books of Deuteronomy and Job there are references to situations where the taking of a security pledge constitutes a sinful attitude on the part of the lender.

"No one shall take the millstone or the upper millstone to pledge: for he takes a man's life to pledge" (Deut.24:6 KJV Para.).

"You shall not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge" (Deut.24:17 KJV).

It is wrong to take a pledge of anything someone is using make their living or to sustain their life.

Eliphaz accuses Job of a sinful practice by saying,

"Is not your wickedness great? and your lawlessness infinite? For you have taken a pledge from your brother for nothing, and stripped the naked [the poor] of their clothing" (Job 22:5-6 KJV).

Speaking of the wicked Job says,

"They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge... They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor" (Job 24:3, 9 KJV).

Clearly these scriptures show it is wrong to take certain things as a security pledge or to take advantage of those who are fallen into misfortune.

THE CHARITABLE LOAN

It is easy to understand the implications of the usury prohibition concerning a charitable loan, because the lender faces a sure loss on his loan. He bears the risks associated with loans to the impoverished because he is unable to charge interest and gets his goods returned in the future, and future goods are less valuable than goods in the present. Moreover, the lender must forfeit the use of his goods over time without any compensation. Additionally, during inflationary times, the lender also forfeits purchasing power if it was a loan of money. Therefore, the lender bears several costs of the loan. The lender clearly suffers a loss for the sake of a needy brother. This loss is required by God but it will be balanced by other benefits to the lender.

If one perceives things in a purely physical sense and discounts God's influence, the lender is truly the loser. However, one who lives under God's rule cannot discount his involvement in the charitable loan, because God promises to return more than that which is given:

"He that has pity on the poor lends to the Lord; and that which he has given will he [God] pay him again" (Pro.19:17 KJV).
"He is ever merciful, and lends; and his seed is blessed" (Psa.37:26 KJV).

"A good man shows favor, and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion" (Psa.112:5 KJV).

"Give to him that asks you, and from him that would borrow of you turn not you away" (Matt.5:42 KJV).

"For if you love them that love you, what thank [reward] have you? for sinners also love those that love them. And if you do good to them that do good to you, what thank have you? for sinners also do even the same. And if you lend to them of whom you hope to receive, what thank have you? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk.6:32-36 KJV).

God says it is more blessed to give than to receive, because it shows that one has been blessed with an abundance so that one is able to lend to another, and that one has an attitude of love and self-sacrifice, which is an attribute of God.

LENDING FOR GREED

The fifth chapter of Nehemiah shows that many of the poor Jews had borrowed money to buy food because of a drought and tribute (tax) payments to the king. These people were in such dire circumstances that they even mortgaged their lands and sold their children into slavery to buy food and pay taxes (Nehe.5:1-5).

When Nehemiah heard of this tragic state of events, he became very angry and condemned the lenders for the hardness of their hearts and made them promise to return the pledges to the debtors.

Nehemiah 5:7-13 KJV

"Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said to them, You exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. And I said to them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold to the heathen; and will you even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold to us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.'

"Also I said, It is not good that you do: ought you not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive-yards, and their houses, also the hundredth part
of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that you exact of them.'

"Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as you say. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that performs not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise."

Jeremiah also reprimands his brethren for their persecution of him, and points to his innocence of the crime of usury:

"Woe is me, my mother, that you have born me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor have men lent to me on usury; yet every one of them does curse me" (Jer.15:10 KJV).

Other Mentions of Usury

"He that puts not out his money to usury, nor takes reward against the innocent. He that does these things shall never be moved [i.e., waver, slip or fall]" (Psa.15:5 KJV).

"He that by usury and unjust gain increases his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor" (Pro.28:8).

INVESTMENTS AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

Lending money at a reasonable rate of interest for the purpose of business or trade is different from lending to the poor and needy and it is not forbidden. This kind of lending is an acceptable practice according to Christ.

In Luke 19:12-23, there is a parable in which servants are given charge over certain amounts of money; some were given more and some were given less. The point of the parable is that each person should use what God has given them to produce profits for him. And those who produce nothing will be punished for their lack of effort. Notice what the master says to the servant with the poor attitude in reference to usury:

"You knew that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gave not you my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have received mine own with usury [interest]?" (vs.22-23).

It seems that verse 23 sanctions usury and indeed it does sanction the act of making a profit by wisely investing money in a profit making venture.
Matthew 25:27 shows the same account of this parable, which clarifies the collecting of usury (i.e., interest) is an acceptable practice for the purpose of making a profit. Moreover, the taking of interest in a purely commercial investment situation is nowhere forbidden in the biblical record.

Investments should never be considered an act of selfish lending. Investments are purely a business function, which are made purely for gain of one type or another. There must be a benefit for the lender or there would not be an incentive to make the investment.

THE MONEYCHANGERS AND PROFIT

Moneychangers were in the business of foreign currency exchange at the temple in Jerusalem. This situation came about, in part, because of an incorrect understanding and perversion of a number of scriptures about the payment of the census and temple tax, offerings in currency, and the second and third tithe. During the annual observances and commanded assemblies, Jerusalem was flooded with visiting Israelites and Jews. Because of a belief that only Jewish coins could be offered to God at the temple, the various coins from many lands were converted to the proper coinage by the moneychangers who performed this service at a profit:

"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said to them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves" (Matt.21:12-13 KJV).

What was their crime? Profiting from foreign exchange transactions is an old and perfectly legitimate profession. Why, did Jesus act the way he did toward these moneychangers? The reason almost certainly lies in the location of their tables in the outer court of the temple. It was not the profit making nature of money changing that Jesus was concerned about, it was where the business was being transacted and the manner in which it was being performed that was wrong.

"It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves" (Matt.21:13 KJV).

Making a Profit is Not Wrong

In the parable of the talents (Matt.25:14-30), Jesus teaches his disciples a very important lesson about spiritual growth by using a physical thing (money) as an example. He mentions the existing practice of exchanging one currency for another for a profit, which was purely a business transaction which had nothing to do with making a loan. Moreover, Jesus did not condemn this practice. The lesson he teaches to those who are called to his service is that they must be doing his business while he is in heaven. And if one is timid about stepping out and using his particular God-given talent to do a work for God, that servant should put that talent under the direction of another person so that he will still be able to be a profitable servant.

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Luke 19:11-28 is basically the same parable with the same general theme about being a diligent servant and increasing the gifts God has given. The King James Version uses the word usury, but other versions use the word interest. However, the original Greek word used is tokos, which means *interest on money loaned* (as produce). In no way can the word *tokos* be used to infer anything but a gain above what is originally being submitted in a transaction.

From the biblical perspective there is nothing wrong with making a profit from lending goods or money. However, there is clearly something wrong with profiting from those whom God considers worthy of compassionate treatment.

**THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW**

Jesus taught the same exact thing about usury to his disciples that he had taught as the Creator God to the ancient Israelites. The only difference was that, as the Messiah, he explained the law’s true intent and purpose and magnified it as the prophet Isaiah said he would:

"The Lord is well pleased for his [Christ’s] righteousness’ sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable” (Isa.42:21 KJV).

Notice this magnification of the law of usury in Luke 6:33-36:

"And if you do good to them which do good to you what reward have you? for sinners also do the same. And if you lend to them of whom you hope to receive, what reward do you have you? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. Therefore, you be merciful, as your Father is also merciful” (KJV Para.)

Jesus shows how the royal law of love applies to the law of lending (usury): "You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt.22:39 KJV).

Jesus shows what kind of attitude one should have and what kind of example one should be. He says to be merciful just like God the Father is merciful. This is what the law of usury is about; it is about being concerned, kind, compassionate, and merciful to those who are less fortunate than yourself. The law of usury is encompassed within the royal law of love.

God the Father and Jesus Christ are the personification and perfection of love. The violation of the usury law demands the death penalty because it violates the principle of love. And those who lack this Godly attribute cannot inherit eternal life. Those who will become eternal must have this attribute to become like God, because we will be like him in the resurrection.
"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. . ." (1.Jn.3:2 KJV).

**Love Made Perfect**

"And we have known and believed the love that God has to us. God is love; and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God love his brother also" (1.Jn.4:16-21).

**THE SEPARATION OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS**

Matthew 25:31-46

"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' (vs.31-33).

"Then shall the King say to them on 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 meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me 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 answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you hungry, and fed you? or thirsty, and gave you drink? When saw we you a stranger, and took you in? or naked, and clothed you? Or when saw we you sick, or in prison, and came to you? And the King shall answer and say to them, Verily 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' (vs.34-40).

"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: For I was hungry, and you gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and you took me not in: naked, and you clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and you visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we you hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily 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" (vs.41-46).

In this parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats (i.e., the righteous and the unrighteous), Christ illustrates the royal law of love. He shows that doing good and showing kindness to other humans is the same as showing kindness to him. The bottom line is that Christ equated kindness toward those in need as righteousness and unkindness as evil. Moreover, kindness will be rewarded, and unkindness will be punished.

BUSINESS AND CHARITY

A Christian must understand the distinctions between business and charity. Business involves making a profit for the investor. Charity involves the transfer of scarce economic resources to another with no thought of it being returned (Matt.10:8; Lk.6:35). Business is not charity, and charity is not business. Charity should be carefully administered in a business-like manner with honest accounting and budgeting.

No one should call themselves a follower of Christ and a steward of God's word if one seals off business from charity in an absolute manner. Businesses are supposed to earn profits, if they are to be successful. However, ruthless competition utterly devoid of mercy is condemned by God's word. The fact that Jesus told a rich young man to sell all of his goods and give everything to the poor does not stand as the requirement for every steward.

God may command a person to give up all that they have in order to follow him, but this does not imply that God is sanctioning economic equity among all people or continued economic ruin because of the inability of another person to cope with the challenges of life. God does not want the elect to be morally ruthless in business, nor does he want them to be morally wasteful in charity.

Some say that a follower of Christ cannot borrow because of Paul's teaching in Romans 13:8: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loves another has fulfilled the law." However, by reading the beginning of this chapter, it is apparent that the context of this chapter is being in subjection to civil officials and civil tax laws. The New Testament in Modern Speech translates the first part of this verse as: "Leave no debt unpaid except the standing debt of mutual love. . ." This seems to be the more accurate translation, because it parallels and supports other scriptures which speak of paying one's debts. Paul simply states that it is important to pay debts.

THE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE

"For this, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Rom.13:9 KJV).
"Give to him that asks you, and from him that would borrow of you turn not you away" (Matt.5:42 KJV).

THE ELECT AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Are the elect allowed to borrow money or anything else at interest? Yes, a follower of Christ may borrow at interest. However, the problem arises when one borrows too much and places themselves in debt to the point of being a slave to the lender. Although this is not a study about how to conduct one's financial affairs, it is a good practice when purchasing anything, to obtain total ownership at the outset of the transaction. This releases one from any future obligations and burdens of payment. One must realize that banks are in business to make a profit. They are not charitable organizations; therefore, they have no mercy on those who cannot repay their debt.

Some professing Christian groups who have a legalistic view of biblical law have come to believe that a Christian should not participate in the existing financial systems of this world and that having a checking or an interest-bearing account in one of these institutions is sin. Although there is no doubt that this world's current banking and monetary systems are not operated in a godly manner, from the biblical perspective, no is sin attached to participating in this world's financial system or borrowing money from a lending institution. But, for a Christian to find it necessary to borrow from a secular source because of acute necessity or poverty is a condemnation of those who profess to be followers of Christ, because God's law requires those of the brotherhood to care for their own.

Having a checking or interest-bearing account in no way violates the biblical law of usury. Of course, if one has individual concerns about the privacy of his financial matters and does not wish to be associated with a financial institution that is their business.

THE POOR

Some people think that most poor people are poor because of some fault of their own, which could very well be true in some cases. However, many people are poor, because of circumstances beyond their control, such as the death of the provider, injury, physical defects, job loss, or disabilities. These and many other circumstances beyond one's control can cause a person to be poor or to fall into poverty. A person in such a state must not be shunned or scorned, but should be helped so that they can overcome the situation. The apostle John echoed God's desire for his spiritual children when he said:

"Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers" (3.Jn.v2).
THE LAW OF USURY TODAY?

Does the law of usury apply today? For the answer to this question one must answer a foundational question about the law in general and whether or not one called to be a child of God must obey his laws.

If one believes the Father's elect children are a part of spiritual Israel (Heb.8:8-10; 1.Pet.2:2-5), and that his law is spiritual, as well as physical (Rom.7:12-14), it follows that a law which is not specifically canceled or suspended by God or physical circumstances is still in force and should be obeyed.

Deuteronomy 15:4 states that the law of usury will be in force for Israelites until there are no more poor among them. Are there still physical and spiritual Israelites who are poor? Yes, there are!

When a contention arose among the disciples about what they considered a waste of valuable ointment with which a woman anointed Jesus, he said, "For the poor you always have with you; but me you do not always have" (Jn.12:8 Para.). Because Jesus said the poor will always be with us, will this law ever be canceled? It will be canceled, but before its cancellation the whole world will go through some very traumatic events spoken of in the Books of Daniel and Revelation.

THE CHRISTIAN POSITION ON USURY

True Christians are aliens, strangers, and sojourners in this world. A true Christian is not of this world or its systems—economic, political, or otherwise. The elect are of the Family and Kingdom God and must be separate from this world's corruptness.

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Am.3:3). Can the Father's elect enter into the corrupt practices of today's society and take advantage of the poor? No! If one wants to please their heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, this is not acceptable. Therefore, one cannot make a loan to a poor brother in Christ and attach interest to it. It would be far better to make a gift of the loan if possible.

For a true Christian to loan money at interest to a poor person or a person in need is breaking the royal law of love and the law of usury in both the letter and the spirit of the law. The law of usury was not written for a society devoid of God's law. It was written for a society of kings, priests, and a holy people who have and exhibit godly characteristics of love and compassion.

THE LAW OF USURY TO BECOME OBSOLETE

When there is no longer a need for a law, it becomes obsolete. This is what was referred to in Deuteronomy 15:4: "Except when there are no more poor among you." There will no longer be a need for the law of usury when all of humanity have had their opportunity for salvation and the Kingdom of God rules over humans who have been made into spirit-beings:
"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said to me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said to me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

(Rev.21:1-6).

CONCLUSION

It should be obvious from this study into the law of usury that the God family is extremely concerned about all of humanity—rich or poor. Moreover, our heavenly Father is mostly concerned about our spiritual well-being. Physical objects are secondary; they are as temporary as we are. The things of concern are those that can be taken into eternity. And these things are spiritual in nature; they are godly character, attitude, and love which can only be acquired through the practice and the internalization of God’s laws, precepts, and principles.

The law of usury is actually about building the godly character trait of concern and love for others. Moreover, God makes the following promise to those who build godly character:

"For 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; Isa.64:4).

God the Father offers everlasting, abundant life, and more to those who love, respect, and obey him. The choice is yours. Choose life!

By B. L. Cocherell

b4w15
The vast majority of professing Christians today believe the Bible teaches monogamy as the only acceptable form of marriage and that polygamy violates God's law. But, is this what the Bible teaches or is this just a popular opinion?

Within both secular and biblical history and up to this present day, there are people entering into both monogamous and polygamous marriages for economic, cultural, and social reasons, as well as political alliances, procreation, sexual lust, and true love.

This chapter is not intended to compare the merits of either of these types of marital relationships, but it is meant to clarify the legality of polygamy from the biblical perspective and answer some conceptual questions about the polygamous marital relationship.

Is Polygamy a Sin?

In order to determine if polygamy is a sin from the biblical perspective, one must first know what sin is and is not. The following scriptures show how sin is defined in the Bible:

"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.).

"Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Blessed is the one not condemning himself in what he approves. But the one doubting, if he eats, he has been condemned, because it is not of faith—and all that is not of faith is sin" (Rom.14:22-23 Para.).

"Therefore, to anyone knowing to do good, and not doing it, it is sin to him" (Jms.4:17 Para.).

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 that define how people should live and worship God.

The law reveals the standard of behavior with which all must comply, and its perfect justice system demands the execution of all law-breakers (Rom.3:20; 6:23). The law only determines guilt or innocence; it does not have the ability to restore harmony between God and humans.

God's law is perfect. Its precepts, principles, and value judgments are empirical and do not depend on human validation.
No Law, No Sin

In his letter to the saints at Rome, the apostle Paul explained, "sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom.5:12-13 KJV).

Is there a law in the Bible that prohibits polygamy? No such law is found in the biblical record. And where polygamous relationships are noted, there is nothing negative said about this form of marriage. However, there are many laws noted in Bible which regulate the polygamous marriage and there are many scriptures which clearly show polygamy does not violate God's law.

Polygamy Is Not Adultery

God's law dictates that sexual relationships between men and women is only sanctioned within a marital relationship. Sexual relationships between men and women outside of marriage falls within one of three broad categories: adultery, promiscuity, and rape.

Lawful polygamy is not adultery; it is a marital relationship which is sanctioned and governed by God's law. Adultery is the result of a husband or a wife breaking the marriage contract. Adultery is an illegal relationship with someone other than the person to whom one is married. According to the letter of the law, polygamy is not adultery because there is a marriage agreement in place between the husband and each wife.

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb.13:4 KJV).

POLYGAMY, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

In order to show the validity of polygamous marriages for the elect of God under the gospel age agreement, it is necessary to review what the biblical record says about its practice before the advent of Christ, during the early church era, and after Christ returns.

Polygamy Before Christ

Before the advent of Christ, there are dozens of examples of men marrying and being married to more than one wife at a time. The patriarchs Abraham and Jacob are examples of righteous men who had several wives in order to father male heirs.

Abraham's Wives

Abraham had two wives and one concubine Keturah who later became his wife after Sarah died (Gen.25:1; 1.Chron.1:32). His first wife, Sarah, gave her servant Hagar to him as a wife to bear his children (Gen.16:1-4).
It is important at this point to understand that, in ancient times, when a man had more than one wife or wives and concubines, these wives and concubines were segregated by position and authority within the husband's family. The first wife held the highest position and it was to her firstborn son that the husband's inheritance was given. The husband's concubines were true wives, but subordinate to the first wife.

Although it is difficult for some people to accept the premise that one person can own another person as property, this is nevertheless a fact of history and a perfectly legal biblical concept with its own set of rules which must be followed about the treatment of such individuals. Sarah had the legal right to give her servant Hagar to her husband as a wife to bear his children, because her servant was her property to manage as she saw fit. See Gen.16:1-16.

Although the child born to Sarah's servant was not her genetic offspring, the child was legally hers. Moreover, the child would have received an inheritance as the firstborn son if Sarah had not given birth to Isaac.

Jacob's Wives

Jacob whom God named Israel had four wives. His first two wives were Leah and Rachel who were sisters. Leah gave Jacob her servant Zilpah to be his wife and bear his children. His second wife Rachel gave Jacob her servant Bilhah to bear his children. From these four wives, the twelve patriarchs of the twelve tribes of national Israel were born. See Gen.30:1-10; 35:23-27.

Here we see a situation similar to that of Abraham and Sarah in that Leah and Rachael owned female servants whom they gave to their husband Jacob as wives for the purpose of bearing children.

Gideon's Wives

Gideon who judged Israel for many years and obeyed God's instruction to lead Israel out from under the oppression of the Midianites had many wives and at least one concubine:

"And Gideon had seventy sons which he fathered: for he had many wives. And his concubine that lived in Shechem also bare him a son, whom he called Abimelech" (Jdg.8:30-31 Para.).

A Warning to Kings about Wives

God knew that, after entering the promised land, the Israelites would want to imitate the nations around them and be governed by a king. So before the Israelites entered into the promised land, they were given specific instructions about the placing of a king over them (Deut.17:14-19). One of these instructions prohibited such a king from having many wives. Some believe that this instruction prohibited polygamy; however, it was a preventative measure to keep the king from being adversely influenced by his many wives — "Neither shall he multiply
wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (Deut.17:17). King Solomon is an example of a man who allowed his wives to influence him into turning from God. See 1.Kgs.11:1-8.

Israel Wanted a King

Just as God expected, Israel rebelled against him and the system of priests and judges that he had established to govern them and they wanted to be governed by a king, so God chose Saul to rule over them.

King Saul had many wives and at least one concubine named Rizpah (2.Sam.3:7; 21:11). When Saul died and David assumed rule over Israel, he took the former wives of Saul and added them to the wives he already had (2.Sam.12:8). But the number of wives David had was apparently not excessive, because God said King David (a polygamist) had a perfect heart (attitude) before him. This means that David was in harmony with God's law. See also 1.Sam.13:14; Acts 13:22.

Solomon's Wives

"But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the Lord said to the children of Israel, You shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in to you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1.Kgs.11:1-4 KJV)

Solomon was not criticized or condemned for having hundreds of wives and concubines; he was criticized and condemned because of the kinds of wives he chose, his departure from God, and his idolatry and worship of false gods.

Polygamy and the Early Church

There is very little mention of polygamy in the New Testament, but there are a number of teachings and clarifications which can be of assistance to a polygamist.

Avoid Fornication

Some people view Paul's instruction to the Corinthians about the avoidance of fornication as proof that only monogamous marital relationships are sanctioned for the elect:

"Now concerning the things that you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1.Cor.7:1-2 KJV).
When Paul's letters to the Corinthians are studied, it is clear that there were major problems with marital relationships, adultery, promiscuity, and incest within the congregation. Here, Paul is addressing the problem of sexual urges and promiscuity. He is merely saying that, in order to avoid these sexual pressures, men and women should enter into a marital relationship.

FORBIDDEN SEXUAL RELATIONS

There are a number of laws set forth in both the Torah and the New Testament which deal with the issue of incest and monogamous and polygamous marriages. Although these laws may seem archaic to some, they are principles which must be practiced in order to receive the blessings promised through them.

In Leviticus, chapters 18 and 20, there is a long list of prohibited sexual relationships, all of which apply to monogamous and polygamous marriages.

Leviticus, chapter 18, begins with the Creator God reminding the Israelites of his sovereignty over them and instructing them not to practice the ways of the Egyptians or the people of Canaan. Because the Creator promises life (salvation) to those who practice his law, it is clear that the laws prohibiting adultery and promiscuity still apply today.

"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, I am the Lord your God. After the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, you shall not do: neither shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall do my judgments, and keep my ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God. Therefore, you shall keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a person practices, he shall live in them: I am the Lord" (Lev.18:1-5 KJV Para.).

Forbidden Behavior

The original language of the following verse leaves no doubt that the Creator gives very specific instructions prohibiting adulterous and promiscuous behavior with close relatives:

"None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nudity: I am the Lord" (Lev.18:6 KJV).

The English word uncover in verse 6 is translated from the Hebrew word galah, which means to denude (especially in a disgraceful sense). From the context of verse 6, it is clear that the Hebrew word galah is being used to describe prohibited sexual relations between close relatives.
Within the following verses, there are references to a person's complete biological relatives, relatives one step removed (e.g., a half-sister), and relatives through marriage (e.g., stepsister, aunt, uncle, mother-in-law).

**Father, Mother, and Wife**

"You shall not uncover the nudity of your father, or the nudity of your mother, she is your mother; You shall not uncover her nudity. You shall not uncover the nudity of your father's wife: it is your father's nudity" (Lev.18:7-8 Para.).

There are three individuals noted in verses 7 and 8 with whom you are not to have sexual relations: Your father, your mother, and your father's wife.

The English word *mother* in verse 7 is translated from the Hebrew word *em*, which in this context means a mother, whereas the English word *wife* in verse 8 is translated from the Hebrew word *ishshah*, which means a woman.

The Hebrew words *em* and *ishshah* make a clear distinction between the mother and the wife, thereby indicating that the one spoken of as the wife is not the mother, but is another woman (i.e., a wife). This wife could be the father's only wife who is not the person's mother or one of the father's wives who is not the person's mother.

The willful violation of this law by both individuals required that the death penalty be administered to both of them:

"Cursed be he that lies with his father's wife (ishshah); because he uncovers his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen" (Deut.27:20 KJV).

"The man that lies with his father's wife (ishshah) has uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be on them" (Lev.20:11 KJV).

**It Is Your Father's Nudity**

Leviticus 18:8 tells us that if a person has sexual relations with their Father's wife (not the person's mother) it is the same as having a sexual relation with their own Father. This is because the father and his wife are as one flesh (Gen.2:24; Matt.19:5); therefore, a sexual relation with the wife is the same as a sexual relation with the husband.

**The Sister and the Daughter**

"The nudity of your sister, the daughter of your father, or the daughter of your mother, whether she be born at home, or born abroad, even their nudity you shall not uncover" (Lev.18:9 Para.).

Verse 9 prohibits a sexual relationship with a person's biological sister or half-sister.
It is important to remember that, when a man and a woman marry, they become as one flesh (Gen.2:24; Matt.19:5). The person prohibited from sexual relations in verse 9 is the child of the father and the mother; therefore, this person is genetically linked to the daughters of both parents, whether they are a biological sister or a half-sister.

Deuteronomy, chapter 27, verse 22 states, "Cursed be he that lies with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen."

A Sister

"The nudity of your father's wife's daughter, begotten of your father, she is your sister, you shall not uncover her nudity" (Lev.18:11 KJV Para.).

Because the English word wife in verse 11 is translated from the Hebrew word ishshah (i.e., a woman), this seems to be a prohibition of a sexual relationship with a person's half-sister.

"And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nudity, and she see his nudity; it is a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people: he has uncovered his sister's nudity; he shall bear his iniquity" (Lev.20:17 KJV Para.).

This law prohibits a man from having sexual relations with a biological sister or a half-sister from either his father or his mother. This law also applies to marital relationships, whether monogamous or polygamous. The English phrase cut off is translated from the Hebrew word karath, which is a primitive root meaning to cut off, down or asunder and by implication it means to destroy or consume. Moreover, it seems that, in the context of verse 17, the death penalty is to be applied to individuals participating in these forbidden sexual relationships.

Two Sisters

A man cannot be married concurrently to women who are sisters.

"Neither shall you take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nudity, beside the other in her life time" (Lev.18:18 KJV Para.).

Prior to the laws given to national Israel, marriage between a man and sisters was not prohibited. Jacob married Leah and Rachel who were sisters. However, after the nation of Israel was formed, this type of marital relationship was prohibited. We are not told the reason for this prohibition, but Lev.18:18 indicates that it was to avoid strife and competition between siblings within a family unit.

A Sister-in-Law

"You shall not uncover the nudity of your brother's wife: it is your brother's nudity" (Lev.18:16 KJV Para.).
Leviticus, chapter 20, tells us the punishment for the willful violation of this law is that the couple remain childless. Of course if the brother is dead the woman is free to marry again, because the death of either spouse nullifies the marital agreement:

"If a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless" (Lev. 20:21 KJV).

How the required punishment for the violation of this law was administered is lost in antiquity; however, in the Talmud Mas. Yevamoth 55a there is a lengthily discussion which basically says that, if the offending parties had children prior to the violation, the violators would see these children die during their lifetime, but if they did not have children prior to their violation, their union would not produce children.

A Granddaughter

"The nudity of your son's daughter, or of your daughter's daughter, even their nudity you shall not uncover: for theirs is your own nudity" (Lev.18:10 KJV Para.).

Verse 10 prohibits a person from having sexual relations with a granddaughter.

A Biological Aunt

"You shall not uncover the nudity of your father's sister: she is your father's near kinswoman. You shall not uncover the nudity of your mother's sister: for she is your mother's near kinswoman" (Lev.18:12-13 KJV Para.).

Verses 12 and 13 prohibit sexual relationships with a person's biological aunt. Leviticus, chapter 20, tells us that the willful violation of this law requires punishment:

"You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, nor of your father's sister: for he uncovers his near kin: they shall bear their iniquity (i.e., the consequence or punishment)" (Lev.20:19 KJV Para.).

An Uncle's Wife

"You shall not uncover the nudity of your father's brother, you shall not approach to his wife: she is your aunt" (Lev.18:14 KJV Para.).

The law prohibits a sexual relationship with a person's biological aunt by marriage and equates such a sexual relationship the same as a sexual relation with the uncle. Leviticus, chapter 20, tells us the punishment for willful violation of this law is that the couple will die childless:
"If a man shall lie with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness: they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless" (Lev.20:20 KJV). See Talmud Mas. Yevamoth 55a for an explanation of the administration of punishment for violating this law.

**A Daughter-in-law**

"You shall not uncover the nudity of your daughter-in-law: she is your son's wife; you shall not uncover her nudity" (Lev.18:15 KJV Para.).

The willful violation of this law by both individuals required that the death penalty be administered to both of them as noted in Leviticus, chapter 20:

"If a man lie with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death: they have wrought confusion; their blood shall be upon them" (Lev.20:12 KJV).

**Three Generations**

"You shall not uncover the nudity of a woman and her daughter, neither shall you take her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nudity; for they are her near kinswomen: it is wickedness" (Lev.18:17 KJV Para.).

The English word take in verse 17 is translated from the Hebrew word *laqach*, a root word that can mean to take (in the widest variety of applications). For example, to receive, to acquire, to buy, to bring, to marry, and to take a wife.

Of all of the prohibitions listed thus far, this prohibition most closely points to a restriction dealing with a polygamous marriage, because it seems to prohibit concurrent sexual relations with three generations of women of the same family line, (i.e., mother, daughter, granddaughter).

**Two Wives and the firstborn Son**

"If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son is hers that was hated" (Deut.21:15 KJV Para.).

The English word two in verse 15 is translated from the Hebrew word *shenayim*, which means two or twofold. The English word wives in verse 15 is translated from the Hebrew word *ishshah*, which in this context means a woman (opposite of a man) or a wife (woman married to a man).

The two Hebrew words *shenayim* and *ishshah* document that the practice of polygamy was a legal form of marriage at the very beginning of Israel as a nation. Verses 16 and 17 address the inheritance issue about the husband's firstborn son of the wife that he does not love:
"Then it shall be, when he makes his sons to inherit that which he has, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he has: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (Deut.21:16-17 KJV).

There is no condemnation of a polygamous marriage in this law. The law just clarifies the issue about the inheritance to be given to a firstborn son.

A Wife and Her Mother

"And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you" (Lev.20:14 KJV).

This law prohibits a man taking a woman and her mother as wives. Violation of this law required that the man and both women be executed by fire.

Deuteronomy, chapter 27, verse 23 says, "Cursed be he that lies with his mother-in-law. And all the people shall say, Amen."

SPIRITUAL LEADERS

The biblical record shows priests and prophets of ancient Israel to be monogamous, having only one wife at a time.

While polygamy is not forbidden or condemned in the teachings of the New Testament, there are instructions which prohibit the spiritual leadership of congregations from having more than one wife, which shows the church conforming to preexisting biblical law about the marital status of spiritual leaders.

The following are the apostle Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus about the number of wives men who are ordained into the ministry of the church are permitted to have:

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach" (1.Tim.3:1-2 KJV).

"For this cause left I you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed you: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly" (Tit.1:5-6 KJV).

Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus reveals that polygamous marriages were common within the congregations of the elect at that time. These instructions would have been unnecessary if only monogamous marital relations were permitted within the church.
The reasons for this prohibition should be obvious considering the time and effort required to carry out the responsibilities of one who is called to lead and care for the elect in the capacity of a spiritual leader.

**POLYGAMY AND PROPHECY**

The prophet Isaiah recorded many things which will occur before and after Christ returns. One of the things he recorded shows that polygamous marriages will be practiced after Christ returns:

"And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach" (Isa.4:1 KJV).

Prophecies show that, before Christ returns, the earth's population will be greatly reduced. Isaiah's prophecy shows there will be a tremendous imbalance between the numbers of men and women able and willing to marry. The number of women who desire marriage will far exceed the number of eligible men. These women will want children, companionship, and a sexual relationship, so they will be willing to be a part of a plural marriage to fulfill these natural human desires.

**Forbidding to Marry**

"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; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1.Tim.4:1-3 KJV).

Paul's prophetic warning has come true. There are many who have departed from the faith and teach things contrary to God's laws, precepts, and principles. It is interesting to note that forbidding to marry is one of the things that these evil people will teach. Although "forbidding to marry" clearly includes the teaching of celibacy as a requirement to live a pious life or to serve as a spiritual leader, it could also include teaching that polygamous marriages are forbidden.

Polygamy was practiced without criticism before the advent of Christ and was regulated by many laws about fair and equitable treatment of wives and children, succession of heirs, and distribution of inheritances. Additionally, polygamy will be practiced after Christ returns according to the prophecy of Isaiah.

**OBJECTIONS TO POLYGAMY**

Many people who profess to follow biblical teachings object to the practice of polygamy and attempt to alter the intent and meaning of scripture in favor of their own tradition, culture, personal belief, or bias. The following section examines some of the scriptures people use in an attempt to prove that polygamy is not a marital option for the elect today.
The One Man One Wife Rule

Many cite the example of Adam and Eve as the basis for their belief that it was God's original intent for marriage to be a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman:

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen.2:23-24 KJV).

Although it is clear the Creator only made Adam one wife, this fact does not establish a one man one wife rule. Genesis 2:23-24 is only a statement of fact; it does not establish monogamy as the only valid marital state.

One Flesh

Because Genesis 2:24 says: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (KJV), some assume this is proof that polygamous marital relationships are sinful. However, the assumption that being one flesh is confined to the marital relationship between one man and one woman is inconsistent with the teachings of the apostle Paul:

"Don't you know your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a whore? God forbid. What? Don't you know that he which is joined to an whore is one body? For he says that two shall become one flesh. But he that is joined to the Lord is one" (1.Cor.6:15-17 Para.).

Clearly two becoming one flesh is not limited to one man and one woman, nor does it place limits on the number of women a man can have as his wives. The one flesh concept and its reality in the physical world applies to any sexual relationship between a man and a woman. If this were not so then Paul's analogy would not make sense because even a married man can have sexual relations with a woman who is not his wife. Although Paul is using this analogy to explain a spiritual concept, his use of this example seems to indicate that a man can become one flesh with more than one woman.

The Pharisees' Question:

"The Pharisees also came to him to test him. They asked him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause? Jesus replied, Haven't you read, that at the beginning he made them male and female, And he said, For this reason shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cling to his wife: and the two of them shall be one flesh? Therefore, they are no more two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together no man should separate" (Matt.19: 3-6 Para.).
The question put to Jesus was not about monogamy or polygamy; the question concerned divorce and remarriage. It was a question of law (i.e. God's law about marriage) and specifically the portion of this law which dealt with the cancellation of the marriage contract.

"They then asked him, Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He said to them, Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to put away your wives: but this was not allowed at the beginning. And I say to you, Whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery: and whoever marries her which is divorced commits adultery." (Matt.19:7-9 Para.). See also Mk.10:1-12.

Jesus explains that the reason the Creator God allowed Moses to sanction divorce was because of the hardness of Israelite men's hearts. He also says that the law did not allow for divorce when marriage was established at creation.

It is important to understand that God makes the rules about human behavior and that he has the authority to alter these rules as he sees fit in order to fulfill his plan for humanity and to accommodate the human condition.

Jesus who was the Creator God and law-giver before he became human, clarified and modified the law of divorce when he said that the only valid reason for the cancellation of a marriage contract is fornication (which includes adultery). Jesus also explained that those who remarry after an unlawful divorce commit adultery (a violation of God's law). See Matt.5:31-32; 19:3-9; Lk.16:18.

Polygamy and Problems

Many people feel that, even though polygamous marriages are not condemned in scripture, there are many scriptures showing that adultery, incest, jealousy, hatred, bitterness, unhappiness, and immorality are associated with polygamy. Therefore, they believe that polygamy must not be the most desirable relationship to enter into. The problem with this argument is that the scriptures also show the same kind of problems within monogamous relationships.

King David

There is no doubt that king David who was a man greatly beloved by God (1.Sam.13:14; Acts 13:22) had many wives and concubines (2.Sam.5:13).

Many people point to his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba as a condemnation of polygamy. However, an honest review of this account does not show any condemnation of polygamy, but it clearly shows that David had committed adultery with Bathsheba before he murdered her husband:
"I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had not been enough, I would have given you even more. Therefore, why have you despised the Lord's commandment and done evil in his sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon" (2.Sam.12:8-9 Para.).

Nowhere in the account of this event or in any of the accounts of David's life is he ever condemned for having too many wives or concubines.

The simple truth is that polygamy creates no more of an environment or opportunity for adultery, incest, jealousy, hatred, bitterness, unhappiness, and immorality than monogamous marriages. The problem is not with monogamous or polygamous marriages; it is with the ability of men and women to live within God's laws which regulate marriage.

The Ideal Marital Relationship

Because Genesis 2:24 says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh," some people feel that, in the beginning, monogamy was the ideal marital relationship between a man and a woman. However, nowhere in scripture do we find the polygamous marital relationship shown to be inferior to a monogamous relationship.

The scriptures are very clear about what the ideal marriage relationship should be. The scriptures also tell us how to accomplish this ideal. However, an ideal marriage has more to do with one's attitude and behavior than whether the marriage is monogamous or polygamous.

When speaking of the ideal in a marital relationship, we should consider that each individual has different needs, desires, and circumstances. Jesus said that remaining unmarried is the ideal for some who have been called to salvation during the gospel age (See Matt.19:12). And the apostle Paul said that the ideal for him was to remain celibate, but for some it is better to marry than to lust. Paul does not say whether the marriage should be monogamous or polygamous:

"I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift and another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion (i.e., lust)" (1.Cor.7:7-9 NIV).

Clearly, what is ideal depends on one's needs, attitude, and personal circumstance.
THE EXAMPLE

Many well intentioned individuals believe that, although polygamy is not a sin, it should not be practiced in this age because many people have strong feelings in opposition to it. The problem with this belief is that it is conceptually incorrect. The reality is that people in general hate the things of God, oppose almost everything that is of God, and hate those who practice God’s truth. See Jn.15:18-19; 17:14-17.

If one truly believes they should not practice some of God's law in order to be an acceptable example to the unconverted then which of God's laws should a true follower of Christ cease to practice to avoid offending the unconverted? Should one cease to practice the Sabbath, start eating unclean foods, or begin to practice adultery in order to appease the unconverted? Obviously, one should teach and practice all of God's law as an example to the world. We should not be ashamed to stand solidly behind the biblical practice of lawful, polygamous, marital relationships as described in the biblical record.

Clearly, if someone is intending to enter into or already is in a polygamous marriage, they should be concerned about the effect this type of marriage will have on their walk with God the Father and Jesus Christ, as well as the example being set to others in the Father's family and the unconverted. However, these considerations must be viewed sensibly and realistically in the light of all scripture about God's law.

CIVIL AND CRIMINAL LAW

Some people use the argument that Romans 13:1-6 instructs the elect to obey all of the civil and criminal laws where they live. Therefore, one should not practice polygamy because many civil laws prohibit it.

Although being subject to constituted authority and paying various monetary levies imposed by civil governments is the subject of Romans 13:1-6, we must view what is said in the light of other scriptures which clearly show God's law takes precedent over laws devised by people. An example of a civil law that violates God's law is the law in many western countries which requires people to swear an oath to tell the truth in a court of law. Obviously, if we follow God's law about swearing and oaths (Matt.5:33-37; Jms.5:12) we cannot obey this civil law.

When we practice the law of God, whether it involves the Sabbath, child rearing, marriage, the swearing or taking of an oath, or any other of God's laws, if these laws are in opposition to the civil laws where we live, we must deal with this situation as instructed through the word of God:

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be you therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And you shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles" (Matt.10:16-18 KJV).
Although a polygamous marriage does not violate God's law, it may be a violation of the civil and criminal law where we live. Therefore, if anyone desires to engage in a polygamous marriage, they must be careful not to become entangled in the civil laws governing the area where they intend to live. If the practice of polygamy violates the civil and criminal law where a person lives, there are basically three options: 1) Do not practice polygamy; 2) Relocate to a geographical location where there are no civil laws prohibiting polygamy; or 3) Be prepared to defend their right to practice polygamy.

THE MARITAL CONTRACT

Today, most people who profess to follow Christ have a very limited understanding of the marital contract and the instructions about marriage contained in the Bible. This fact is substantiated by the extremely large numbers of dysfunctional families and divorces within the professing Christian community. The following section is an overview of some of the basic elements of monogamous and polygamous marital contracts as set forth in the Bible.

Property and Choice

In many male dominated cultures (historically and today), a man's children and wives were and are considered his property. In many cultures, children have no say in choosing their husbands or wives.

The Bible clearly shows that both men and women were often given into marriage without their consent. This was the case with Abraham's son Isaac and his wife Rebekah. Abraham sent his trusted servant to his brother Nahor to acquire a wife for Isaac, and Nahor sent his daughter Rebekah (who he had with his concubine Bethuel) with Abraham's servant to become Isaac's wife. See Gen.24:1-67.

The reason for mentioning this is to show that God allows for cultural and traditional standards and philosophies to be imposed in forming marital contracts if these contracts do not violate his law or if the individuals which are to be married do not resist the specific marital agreement.

The Contract

An essential part of any marriage is the marriage contract. And as with any contract, the marriage agreement has terms and conditions. One of the first things to understand about a marital relationship is that, whether it is a monogamous or a polygamous marriage, it is governed by God's law of marriage and these laws govern every critical aspect of the marriage relationship from beginning to end. Once one enters into a monogamous or a polygamous marital relationship, divorce is not an option; marriage is intended to be for life unless the relationship is broken under the terms and conditions set forth in God's law about marriage.
Jesus Christ who was the Creator God and law-giver allowed Moses to sanction divorce among the Israelites because of the hardness of the Israelite men's hearts. However, Christ who is the mediator of the new covenant has clarified and modified the law of divorce that he allowed Moses to sanction.

Now the only valid reason for the cancellation of a marriage contract is fornication (which includes adultery). See Matt.5:31-32; 19:3-9; Lk.16:18.

The Monogamous Contract

When two people enter into a marital relationship with the understanding that it is to be a monogamous relationship and then bind themselves to this agreement, this relationship comes under the terms and conditions set forth in God's law for such a relationship. Neither party can alter the agreement without dire consequences. The agreement can only be terminated by the death of either party, fornication, or adultery as set forth in God's law.

The Polygamous Contract

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The following are some of the major problems with the way polygamous relationships are practiced today:

• A marriage that begins as a monogamous relationship, but becomes polygamous because of the insistence of one of the partners over the objections of the other partner results in adulterous relations between the husband and the other wives.

• The husband takes two living sisters as wives or a wife and her daughter as wives. Neither of these relationships is allowed under the law given to national Israel governing polygamy. See Lev.18: 17-18; 20:14-17.

While it is true that some men and women who are practicing polygamy are living in an adulterous or an incestuous relationship in violation of God's laws that govern marriage and sexual relationships, this does not mean that all polygamists are living in sin.
One Woman, Two Husbands?

Some might think that, because God's law allows for a man to have more than one wife under certain circumstances, women can also have more than one husband. Paul says the following in his letter to the congregation at Rome about God's law and its relationship to the Father's elect children:

"Brethren don't you know, (I'm speaking to those who know the law,) that the law has dominion over a person as long as they live? For the woman which has a husband is bound to her husband by the law as long as he lives; but if her husband is dead, she is not bound to him. Therefore, while her husband is alive if she marries another man, she is an adulteress: but if her husband is dead, she is free from that law; so that she is not an adulteress, although she is married to another man" (Rom.7:1-4 Para.).

The principles of the marital relationship set forth in the biblical record clearly forbid a woman to have more than one husband at a time.

Should Everyone Practice Polygamy?

Obviously the practice of polygamy is not for everyone, because not all men or women are comfortable with this concept or practice. Not all of the patriarchs or great men and women of the Bible practiced polygamy, and there is no instruction urging men and women to do so. Clearly, for individuals who adhere to biblical law, a monogamous or polygamous marriage is a personal choice.

Can entering into a polygamous marriage be a mistake? Absolutely it can. It can be a mistake just as being in a monogamous marriage can be a mistake. Although God's law allows polygamous marriages, it may be more prudent and practical to remain celibate or enter into a monogamous relationship in some circumstances. However, once one is married, one must obey God's laws which govern marriage in order to live righteously before God.

Concerns and Problems

May people feel that, because of the number of family members involved, a polygamist will have more family and marital problems than a monogamist. Although this can be true, it is not necessarily the rule, because family and marital problems are dependant on many factors other than numbers.

More than one wife in a family could very well have many benefits over a monogamous marriage. In a polygamous marriage, wives can share the domestic duties, childcare, provide a greater financial base, and provide more stability and help during times of illness and death than provided by a traditional monogamous family structure. These and many more benefits can be realized if everyone within this marital relationship diligently follow God's laws in attitude and behavior.
A Good Wife Or Good Wives?

There are many scriptures which speak about the benefits a good wife can provide and the admiration and honor such a woman should receive. The following are a few of the things said about a good wife:

"Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor of the Lord" (Prov.18:22 KJV).

"House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the Lord" (Prov.19:14 KJV).

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that makes ashamed is as rottenness in his bones" (Prov.12:4 KJV).

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies" (Prov.31:10 KJV).

People who oppose polygamy and use these scriptures in support of monogamy forget that the man who was inspired to write about the virtuous wife was Solomon who had hundreds of wives and concubines.

It is difficult to believe that a polygamous family would be less happy or financially worse off than a monogamous family. The argument that polygamy causes strife and poverty may sound good in theory, but falls short in practice for those who are obedient to God's laws about attitudes, behaviors, and work ethic.

SUMMARY

Today, both monogamous and polygamous marital relationships suffer from people's perverted view of what marriage should be. There is no doubt that many polygamous marriages are beset with adultery, incest, jealousy, hatred, bitterness, unhappiness, and immorality. It is little wonder that, when polygamy is viewed and evaluated as it is practiced by most people of the world today, it comes up short of the ideal for the marriage relationship. But, so do most monogamous marriages.

God instituted marriage as a part of his master plan for humanity and his laws about marriage only recognize it as a single institution. Although God's law does not divide marriage into monogamous and polygamous classifications, his law does speak to each of these marital conditions and the interpersonal relationships within each.

Beliefs and Feeling

Most people base their morality and beliefs about marriage on their cultural tradition along with past and current theological philosophy, rather than the clear fact of scripture. However, it is an undeniable biblical fact that both monogamous and polygamous marriages were engaged in by righteous men and women.
If we truly believe what the Bible teaches about the marital state, then we cannot ignore what it says about polygamy and must admit that God sanctions both monogamous and polygamous marriages as being equally valid.

All Scripture

Some people feel that polygamy may have been acceptable anciently, but it is no longer valid today because we live in a different age under different circumstances. This argument may sound good in theory, but it is without merit, because it is in opposition to Paul's instruction to Timothy about the validity of all of the word of God for his elect children:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That God's people may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2.Tim.3:16-17 KJV Para.).

Clearly, "all scripture" includes laws which sanction and govern both monogamous and polygamous marriages.

The fact is that polygamy is noted throughout the biblical record as an approved marital state. If God had intended for there to be only monogamous marriages, he would have reflected this in his law for human behavior. But, in God's law we see terms, conditions, and rules set forth for both polygamous and monogamous marriages.

Polygamous marriages are not sinful, wrong, or less than the ideal; they are what they are. They are relationships sanctioned by God which can lead to much happiness and prosperity if the participants truly follow God's laws for such relationships with righteous attitudes and behaviors.

Those Seeking Truth

Anyone who is truly seeking truth cannot ignore the many references to lawful polygamy throughout the Bible and the important lessons taught through this marital relationship. Moreover, we are obligated to embrace those of the elect who have determined that this type of marital relationship is the one that is best for them.

By B.L. Cocherell
Whether or not men and women should wear head coverings as a part of the worship system given to the early church and what the appropriate hair length is for men and women are not insignificant issues. These issues were important enough for Paul to discuss in a letter to the Corinthian congregation. And these issues were significant enough for his comments and instructions regarding them to be included in the biblical record for our edification.

The problem in attempting to understand the issues Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is that we do not know exactly what was being taught or believed in Corinth about being covered or uncovered while praying or speaking under divine inspiration or the proper hair length for men and women. Because we lack background information, we can only view Paul's comments and instruction in the context of him correcting a false teaching or belief and establishing oral law for us to follow.

Although we are many centuries removed from the fount of knowledge that flowed within the early church, we do have a written record of things which are important for us to understand about how to worship and serve the Father as his royal household and his holy nation of kings-priests.

Those who diligently searched the scriptures during Paul's day understood what he wrote in his letters (See Acts 17:10-11; 2 Tim.2:15). And we can also understand Paul's comments and instructions if we diligently study the biblical record.

This chapter gives an overview of the context in which the apostle Paul addresses the issues of whether or not it is necessary for men and women to cover their head while praying or speaking under divine inspiration and what the appropriate hair length is for men and women.

**THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH**

Although the Sovereign Father's elect at Corinth were an extremely dynamic group with many spiritual gifts, they were also a group with many problems, as evidenced by Paul's reprimands to them and his reference to a letter they had written him which included a question about marriage (See 1 Cor.7:1-17). It is also likely that they asked a question about head coverings in this same letter, because Paul also addresses this issue in his reply.
After Paul's greeting, 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 their lack of spiritual maturity as a group, but this does not mean that they were not true Christians. Clearly, the majority of the Corinthian church were the Father's elect children, but they had a major problem in understanding how to conduct themselves and were truly babes in the faith. See 1.Cor.3:1-2.

Paul's first letter to Corinth shows that the majority of those in the church at Corinth were cliquish, carnal, immoral, unloving, poorly versed in the scriptures, and undisciplined in worship.

Paul reprimanded the Corinthians for envy, arguing, jealousy, immorality, incest, lawsuits, drunkenness, conceit, lack of Christian love, carnal mindedness, desecration of their bodies (i.e., the Father's earthly temples), 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. It is in this context that Paul provides instruction regarding head coverings.

In order to begin to understand Paul's comments and instructions on head coverings, it is necessary to understand certain facts about authority, functions, responsibilities, and the organizational structure of the early church.

A Different Agreement

The Sovereign Father's earthly children have a different agreement with him for their salvation from the agreement national Israel had with the Creator God, as well as the agreement Israel will have after Christ returns. Because God the Father's earthly children are of a completely different nation and priesthood, the apostle Peter wrote the following about the status of those called to salvation during this gospel age:

"You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1.Pet.2:5 KJV).

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an 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).

Although the Father's earthly children receive some of the same benefits promised to national Israel for obedience to his law, they are citizens of a completely different nation and are not subject to exactly the same rules and laws that governed national Israel. The apostle Paul said the following about the elect's citizenship:
"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body . . ." (Phil.3:20-21 NIV).

The Father's earthly children owe their allegiance and obedience to the laws of a different nation because they are not of this world, but are of the heavenly realm. Christ said the following about the elect's earthly status:

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of this world, and I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you" (Jn.15:18-19 Para). See Rev.18:3-4.

Jesus was not speaking philosophically to his disciples about their earthly status, he was referring to their status as members of his Father's earthly family and their heavenly status as if it were already a reality.

The Father's children should always remember that they are very different from other humans who have only the spirit of man dwelling in them. The Father's children have his spirit dwelling in them and are not human like other humans, because they are of the Father's new creation. A child of God is actually a member of his divine and holy family, and a being that did not exist in the physical or spiritual realms before Christ. Because those of the new creation are intrinsically holy, they are held to a higher standard and are subject to a higher order of law than that of ancient Israel. See 2.Corr.5:17; Eph.2:10; Jms.1:18.

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, Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatever 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.). See also Matt.16:18-19.

There are many scriptures showing the apostles using their authority to make decisions regarding the written law. The apostles also had the authority to establish oral law which was just as binding on the Father's earthly children as the written law, because these men were setting in Christ's seat of authority over the Father's holy nation during their lifetime, just like those who sat in Moses' seat of authority over national Israel. Acts 15:1-41; 1.Corr.5:3-6; 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. All one has to do to find this structure is to carefully search the scriptures.

Leadership of the Church

Because some might think the apostle Paul's instructions regarding head coverings and hair length is just his opinion and not a law to be practiced by the elect, it is important to reference several texts which clearly show his authority to establish law and policy within the church.

In his letter to the evangelist Timothy the apostle Paul gives the following clear instruction to women and the church as a whole:

"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to usurp the authority of a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and transgressed. But women will be saved through childbearing (Gen.3:15), if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with self-control" (1.Tim.2:11-15 Para.).

Paul's instruction regarding men's authority within the Father's earthly family of king-priests was a reminder to Timothy of an existing law which was to be practiced and enforced within the congregations over which he had jurisdiction.

To the congregation at Corinth Paul wrote the following regarding the problem of some women speaking out during formal congregational assemblies while men were addressing the congregation:

"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).

Paul backs up what he says by calling on the authority of the law. What law was he referring to? He was referring to God's law that sets forth the responsibilities and functions of men and women. God's law has never allowed women to assume a position of spiritual leadership above that of a man. This law does not speak to the intellect or the worth of an individual, but to function and responsibility within the theocratic system through which God governs his people. Women within the Sovereign Father's earthly family of king-priests are only inferior in organizational authority not in status as a king-priest within the Family.
Equality

During this gospel age of salvation, God the Father calls both men and women to share equally as participants in his earthly family and holy nation of king-priests:

"For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.3:26-29 KJV).

"Likewise, you husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1.Pet.3:7 KJV).

Although men and women have equal status in the Father's earthly family, there is a clear distinction in their functions and responsibilities within in the organizational structure of the church and within the family unit.

Before we can understand what Paul is saying about men and women having their heads covered or uncovered, we must first understand that, although the agreement between the Sovereign Father and his earthly children contains some of the same basic elements as the agreement between the Creator God and national Israel, the two agreements have many profound differences. The following are several of these differences:

1. Although there are differences in function and responsibility between men and women, both are equally kings and priests within the Father's holy nation. See Gal.3:26-29; 1.Pet.3:7.

2. Both men and women have equal access to the Sovereign Father and each can perform the same spiritual sacrifices. See Rom.12:1; Heb.13:15-16.

3. Although certain portions of the letter of the law do apply to the Father's earthly children and must be strictly obeyed (e.g., Sabbath observance), the Father's children must apply the spirit of the law to their practice of these laws. This elevates the letter of these laws to their intended meaning and purpose and fulfills the example of Christ in magnifying the law and making it honorable. See Isa.42:21.

While speaking to the Romans about the goodness of God's law, the apostle Paul wrote, "For we know that the law is spiritual" (Rom.7:14).
No Short Answers

There seems to be more than one subject addressed in 1.Corinthians 11:1-16 and the text is complex, so there cannot be simple, short, or straightforward answers to the many questions raised by Paul's comments and instructions in this text.

When reading 1.Corinthians 1:1-16 in the Textus Receptus, there is still much about praying, prophesying, head coverings, and hair length that remains open for interpretation, because no historical or biblical references are available that clearly define hard and fast rules about the traditions and customs of that time regarding these issues. Moreover, during this age, we are centuries removed from the culture of that day and the actual circumstances surrounding the specific controversy Paul was addressing. Additionally, it is not entirely clear if Paul is addressing a single custom or several different issues in this text. Therefore, in order to gain some understanding of Paul's comments and instructions about head coverings and hair length while praying and speaking under divine inspiration, it is necessary to broach many other subjects which will help clarify what Paul intended to convey as law, policy, and practice regarding head coverings and hair length.

Revealed Knowledge

It is important to understand that much of what Paul wrote in this letter to the congregation at Corinth regarding rules on head covering and hair length cannot be found in the canonized Torah. Much of what Paul wrote is revealed knowledge, which he passed on to them and subsequently to us through the canonization of the New Testament. See. Rom.16:25; 1.Cor.14:6; Gal.1:9-12, Eph.3:1-5.

"Be you followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you" (1.Cor.11:1-2 KJV).

The English word ordinances in verse 2 is translated from the Greek word paradosis, which means a precept; specifically, traditional Jewish law. But in verse 2, paradosis refers to Paul's teachings about the Sovereign Father's truth.

In Paul's opening comments about head coverings, he praises the Corinthians for practicing what he had already taught them. This tells us that the controversy over whether or not to wear head coverings as an act of worship and service to God is something new among the elect at Corinth since Paul's last communication with them.

"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1.Cor.11:3) See also Eph.4:15, 5:23; Col.1:18.
The English word *head* in verse 3 is translated from the Greek word *kephale*, which means head. It is used here as a metaphor to indicate the authority of one individual over another and as a reminder to the Corinthians of the line of authority as it pertains to the Father's heavenly kingdom and his earthly family of king-priests.

God the Father is Sovereign over all things and Christ sits at his Father's right hand in authority over all that is his Father's, including his earthly family of king-priests. Within his earthly family, men sit in positions of authority and leadership over women.

Paul uses this same metaphor of the head being a symbol of authority in his letter to the Ephesians regarding a wife's subordinate position to her husband in the family structure:

"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing" (Eph.5:22-24 KJV).

Men being given the leadership position over women within the church and within the family structure has nothing to do with the inherent value of either sex, but it has everything to do with an organizational structure deriving its origin from the experience of Adam and Eve in the garden. Eve disobeyed the Creator's instruction not to touch the forbidden tree or eat its fruit, and then she convinced Adam to do the same. As a part of her punishment, she and all women thereafter were placed under the authority and leadership of men.

By defining the established line of authority and leadership as dictated by God's law, Paul leaves no doubt that what is to follow has to do with authority, leadership, and the respect for this authority and leadership.

**MEN PRAYING OR PROPHESYING**

"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head" (1.Cor.11:4).

Paul states the fact that a man who prays or speaks under divine inspiration with his head covered dishonors his head.

There are four important issues to be considered in verse 4: Praying, speaking under divine inspiration, the covering of a man's head, and the dishonor of his head.

**Praying and Prophesying**

The English word *praying* in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word *proseuchomai*, which means to offer prayers to God (i.e. worship, supplicate).
The English word *prophesying* in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word *propheteuo*, which means *to foretell events, speak under inspiration, or exercise the office of a prophet.*

**Private or Public Context**

The usage of the Greek words *proseuchomai* and *propheteuo* do not indicate whether or not the prayer or the inspired speaking is private, public, or in the formal setting of the assembled elect. However, from what Paul wrote in 1.Corinthians, chapter 14, about how the elect should conduct themselves within their congregational meetings, it seems that his comments and instructions about head coverings apply to public and congregational meetings. Moreover, Paul's inclusion of the act of prophesying in this topic clearly places prophesying in a public context, because it is an act of revealing information to others, it serves no purpose in a private setting.

**Head**

The English word *head* in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word *kephale*, which means *the head*, literally, figuratively, or metaphorically.

The first use of the Greek word *kephale* in verse 4 identifies a man's physical head as the point of origin from which dishonor is initiated while he is praying or speaking under divine inspiration. The second use of *kephale* in verse 4 metaphorically refers to Christ who is in authority over every man in his Father's earthly family.

**Covered**

The English word *covered* in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word *kata*, which can mean *down* (prepositionally or in time or place) or in composition *kata* can denote *being under or underneath.*

Could Paul have meant that a man should not bow down his head while praying or speaking under divine inspiration?

There is an account recorded in John 11:41 in which Christ lifted his eyes toward heaven to give gratitude to his Father. There is also Christ's parable in Luke 18:13 of the contrite publican asking forgiveness and feeling unworthy to lift his eyes toward heaven, yet he was justified in God's eyes. However, while it is a show of respect to bow one's head, these two accounts prove that it is not absolutely necessary to bow one's head while speaking to the Sovereign Father. Therefore, what seems more likely in the light of what Paul says in the rest of his comments on this subject is that the word *kata* in verse 4 conveys the meaning of a man's head being covered while praying or speaking under divine inspiration.
Dishonors

The English word dishonors in verse 4 is translated from the Greek word *kataischuno*, which means to shame down, i.e., disgrace or (by implication) cause one to blush.

The Greek words used in the context of verse 4 clearly show that a man who covers his head while praying or speaking under divine inspiration dishonors Christ who is in authority over him.

Christ the Head of Man

Verse 3 is the key to understanding exactly whom Paul is referring to as being shamed or disgraced by a man covering his head while praying or speaking under divine inspiration.

Paul said, "I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ." The word head in verse 3 clearly shows Christ as the authority over all men, including men in his heavenly Father's earthly family. Therefore, we can assume that Christ is the metaphorical head who is shamed or disgraced (i.e., shown disrespect) by a man covering his head while he is praying or speaking under divine inspiration. But, what is it about the act of a man covering his head while praying or speaking under divine inspiration that causes a man to shame, disgrace, or be disrespectful to Christ?

Authority

Man is next in the line of authority under Christ within the Father's earthly family of king-priests and man is the authority figure in the husband-wife relationship. The man's uncovered head while praying and speaking under divine inspiration in public is symbolic of this line of authority. A man should not have his head covered because he is a direct representative of Christ within the congregation and the family unit.

When a man has his head covered while praying or speaking under divine inspiration it is a sign that he rejects Christ's authority over him and his authority under Christ. It shows an attitude of disrespect for Christ and the line of authority within the congregation and the family.

Although a man in the Father's earthly family is a king (and so is a righteous woman), Christ is superior to both and must be respected as such.

WOMEN PRAYING OR PROPHESYING

"But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaved" (1.Cor.11:5).

In verse 5 as in verse 4, Paul states a fact. A woman who prays or speaks under divine inspiration with her head uncovered dishonors her head.
Some believe that the performance of prayer and prophecy in public is the exclusive domain of men, but this belief is in error. There are numerous accounts in the biblical record of women praying and speaking under divine inspiration in public.

The record of Hannah (Samuel's mother to be) at God's Tabernacle at Shiloh and her prayer for God to allow her to bear a son reveals that early in the history of Israel women were not prohibited from praying aloud, silently, or publically where God had placed his name and presence. See 1.Sam.1:1-15.

There are six women recorded in the Bible as being prophets of God before Christ's birth. Plus, the New Testament records that the evangelist Philip had the four daughters who prophesied and conveyed the information they were given as a function of their priestly duties within the church. See Ex.15:20; Jdg.4:5; 2.Kgs.22:14; Neh.6:14; Isa.8:3; Lk.2:36; Acts 21:8-9.

Nowhere in the teachings of Christ or the Apostles do we find a prohibition against women praying or speaking under divine inspiration. In fact, on the first Festival of Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Christ, there seemed to have been a one time event of an open display of both men and women exercising the office of a prophet and speaking under divine inspiration in public (Acts 2:1-18). Regarding this event, the apostle Peter referenced the prophecy in Joel which says, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28 KJV).

Paul's comments and instructions about women prophesying is clearly in the context of divine revelation to them and their function as a king-priest within his Father's family, because elsewhere Paul states that women must keep silent during formal assemblies of the church (1.Cor. 14:34-35) and that women are not permitted to teach or to usurp the authority of a man. (1.Tim.2:11-15).

Gift of Prophecy

The gift of prophecy is given to both men and women for use within the Father's earthly family for the edification of its members and in order to carry out the work of the church (See Rom.12:1-6; 1.Cor.12:1-31, 14:1-4; Eph.4:11-16). The gift of prophecy is not a gift to be exercised in private; otherwise, it is without benefit or purpose. Therefore, the performance of this function by a man or a woman necessitates speaking aloud to other people.

Women with the gift of prophecy are not prohibited from exercising their gift, because they are acting under the direction of the holy spirit and derive their authority to prophesy from Christ who is head of the Church. However, they must voice their gift within the structure noted by the apostle Paul in chapter 14 to prevent chaos during congregational assemblies.
Paul's instruction for women to keep silent must be understood in its context and in the historical setting of the day. Moreover, it must also be understood in the context of 1.Cor.14:29-33 and 40 of this same chapter:

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let others judge. If any thing is revealed to another that sit 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 of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. . . . Let all things be done decently and in order." (KJV Para.)

Verse 29 instructs others who are prophets or speak under the inspiration of the holy spirit to analyze what is said in the light of the Father's truth to determine its validity. See also 1.Thes.5:20-21.

It is evident that a woman's silence within a congregational assembly could not be total, because if women were not allowed to speak in a congregational assembly, Paul's statement of fact and his commentary and instructions in 1.Corinthians11:5 about women praying and speaking under divine inspiration would be meaningless.

Although Paul instructed women to keep silent in the assembly (1.Cor.14:34), this does not preclude a woman from praying and speaking under divine inspiration when permitted by the male leadership within a formal assembly of a congregation.

**Priestly Function**

It is evident that, under the Creator's agreement with ancient Israel, women were neither allowed to participate in priestly functions nor will they be allowed to participate in these functions under the new agreement with national Israel after Christ returns. However, under the Sovereign Father's agreement with members of his earthly family and holy nation of king-priests, both men and women must perform priestly functions:

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a purchased people; that you should show forth the praises of him who 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.).

Whether man or woman, the recipient of divinely given insight or prophecy should also have the spiritual insight to determine when, where, and to whom they must reveal the information received.

**The Woman's Head Uncovered**

"But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaved" (1.Cor.11:5 KJV Para.).
In verse 5, the first instance of the English word *head* is translated from the Greek word *kephale*, which Paul also used in verses 3 and 4 to describe a man's head and to describe Christ as the authority over the Father's earthly family. Therefore, it seems logical that the usage of *kephale* in reference to the woman's head and the head that she dishonors by praying or speaking under divine inspiration with her head uncovered is meant in the same physical and metaphorical context as used in verses 3 and 4.

The English word *uncovered* in verse 5 is translated from the Greek word *akatakaluptos*, which means *not covered* or *without a covering veil* (i.e., unveiled).

Although verse 5 seems to suggest that women must be covered at all times when praying or speaking under divine inspiration, this seems highly unlikely because Paul's instructions are clearly in the context of a formal assembly of the elect.

The English word *head* in verse 5 is translated from the same Greek word *kephale*, which means *the head*, literally, figuratively, or metaphorically.

The first use of the Greek word *kephale* in verse 5 identifies a woman's physical head as the point of origin from which dishonor is initiated while she is praying to the Father or conveying divinely given insight or prophecies to others.

Following is a much better English translation of verse 5:

"But every woman who prays or speaks divinely inspired revelations with her head uncovered dishonors her head: just as if she were shaved" (1.Cor.11:5 Para.).

Christ is in authority over all men and men are delegated authority over women; therefore, it seems the authority figure being dishonored is man who is the head of woman in respect to the church and the husband-wife relationship. However, this is not what Paul meant.

Again, verse 3 is the key to understanding exactly who Paul is referring to as being dishonored by a woman's head being uncovered while she is praying or speaking under divine inspiration. Paul wrote, "I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man" (1.Cor.11:3).

Although men are in a position of rulership over women and a woman praying or speaking under divine inspiration with her head uncovered would show disrespect for men's authority, it is not men who are ultimately shown disrespect in the Father's family by the woman's uncovered head. It is Christ whom the Father has placed in authority over his earthly family, so it is logical that the woman dishonors Christ, because he is in authority over both men and women in the Father's holy nation in which women are also king-priests. See Gal.3:28; 1.Per.3:7.
Shaved

The English word *shaved* in 1 Corinthians 11:5 is translated from the Greek word *xurao*, which basically means to shave the hair.

Paul says that, if the woman is not covered while she is praying or speaking under divine inspiration, it is the same as if her head is shaved (i.e., as if she is bald). But why?

Whatever custom Paul was referring to, it is clear that a woman's failure to wear a head covering while praying and speaking under divine inspiration is analogous to her being bald.

Some historical records show that the shaving of a woman's head during Paul's time was a shameful thing, because it was a punishment for whoredom or adultery and only prostitutes would be seen with their head uncovered.

In the context of Paul's commentary, for a woman to have her head uncovered or to have her head shaved bald while praying and speaking under divine inspiration is obviously not a good thing and it is not proper decorum for a woman who is a king-priest in the Father's earthly family.

"For if the woman is not covered, let her also be sheared; but if it is a shame for a woman to be sheared or shaved, let her be covered" (1 Cor. 11:6 Para.).

The English word *covered* in verse 6 is translated from the Greek word *katakalupto* and means to cover wholly (i.e. to veil). Because the word *katakalupto* can only mean to cover up or to veil, Paul's meaning regarding a woman's head being covered while she is praying or speaking under divine inspiration is clear; her head must be covered. But, what must it be covered with?

Paul says if a woman prays or speaks under divine inspiration with her head uncovered, her hair should be sheared. The English word *sheared* in verse 6 is translated from the Greek word *keiro*, which means the cutting of the hair short as in the shearing of a sheep (See Acts 8:32). After he says that a woman should have her hair cut very short if her head is not covered, he adds the qualifying statement: "But if it is a shame for a woman to be sheared or shaved, let her be covered."

The English word *shame* in verse 6 is translated from the Greek word *aischron*, which means a shameful thing (i.e., lack of proper decorum). Paul's use of the word *aischron* reinforces the fact that it is a shame for a woman to have her hair cut very short or shaved off. Therefore, if this is the condition of a woman's head, she must have her head covered while praying or speaking under divine inspiration.

A shaved head is one with no hair, while sheared hair leaves some hair exposed on the head, but the hair is very short and masculine in appearance. The context of verse 5 and 6 makes it clear that neither condition is proper decorum for a pious woman.
"For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man" (1.Cor.11:7 KJV).

The English word *ought* is translated from the Greek word *opheilo*, which can mean figuratively, *to be under obligation, must, or should*. Paul's use of *opheilo* leaves no doubt that a man's head should remain uncovered while he is praying or speaking under divine inspiration, because he is the image and glory of God.

Man is the image and reflection of God in that man was created to reflect God's likeness and personage to the degree that he identifies God as his Creator. Woman is the reflection of man to the degree that her creation directly points to her origin, which is man. It is also with and through man that the woman identifies God as her Creator.

The uncovered head of a man while praying or speaking under divine inspiration reflects his role in relation to God and the relationship intended between man and woman.

"For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man " (1.Cor.11:8-9 KJV).

Paul again speaks to the issue of the relative status between men and women within the human family and clearly delineates that the line of authority flows from man to woman as set forth by the Creator at the beginning of human history—Man was created first, then God created the woman to be man's companion and helper.

Not knowing the exact details of the controversy within the congregation at Corinth over the issue of head coverings leaves us to make many assumptions; however, it is evident that this controversy concerned the showing of proper respect for the established authority within the Father's kingdom and earthly family.

"For this reason ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels" (1.Cor.11:10 KJV Para.).

Paul began his comments and instructions about head coverings in verse 3 with a summary of the line of authority as it pertains to the Father's heavenly kingdom and earthly family of king-priests. Paul then continues this overriding theme through verse10.

The primary aspects of authority Paul speaks to are submission to authority and the respect for authority within the structure of the Sovereign Father's kingdom and earthly family. Therefore, his reference to angels who are God's servants continues this line of thought to its logical conclusion.

The word *ought* communicates an obligation for women to have their head properly covered when they pray or speak under divine inspiration.
The English word *power* is translated from the Greek word *exousia*, which can mean *force*, *capacity*, *competency*, *freedom*, or (objectively) *mastery* (concretely) *magistrate*, *superhuman*, *potentate*, *token of control*, or *delegated influence*.

The meaning of *exousia* in verse 10 can be determined by the context of the issue at hand, which is authority and the obligation of men and women to show submission to authority by the uncovered or covered head. For a women to pray or speak under divine inspiration with her head uncovered would be a show of disrespect to the constituted authority over her.

The significance of a woman having her head covered while praying or speaking under divine inspiration is beyond mere custom, which is revealed by the otherwise puzzling phrase *because of the angels*. But why would the lack of a woman having her head covered affect angels?

Rebellion

Satan rebelled against God's authority and led others to also rebel. Therefore, angels are particularly sensitive to issues about submission to authority and the delegation of authority. Because one of the responsibilities the elect will have in the Father's heavenly kingdom is rulership of angels (1.Cor 6:3) and because of the elect's current responsibilities as members of the Father's earthly family and holy nation, it is essential for the elect to set a proper example of obedience to authority before those whom they will rule.

A pious woman who properly covers her head in conformity to the law of worship and service before God exhibits her role in the established line of authority and her submission to and respect for the constituted authority over her. Likewise a pious man also exhibits his submission and respect by having his head uncovered.

"Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God" (1.Cor.11:11-12 KJV).

From what Paul says in verses 3 through 10, there can be no doubt that a man should not have his head covered while praying and speaking under divine inspiration, but a woman should have her head covered.

After clearly defining who should and should not wear a head covering while praying and speaking under divine inspiration, Paul begins to summarize his comments and instructions by adding several additional clarifying comments.
Paul departs from the custom of the day regarding a woman's show of submission to and respect for the authority over her by saying that men and women are unified in the Lord. In saying this, Paul expresses the fundamental principle that the sexes, although different physically, are equal in God's eyes. Although the Creator God placed men in a leadership position over women and women in a complementary and supportive role, both are equally heirs of salvation, both are king-priests in his family and holy nation, and both are subject to the authority and rule of the Father and Christ.

Under the authority of Christ, the pious man's uncovered head while praying and speaking under divine inspiration reveals his leadership position, and the woman's covered head while praying and speaking under divine inspiration demonstrates her submission to authority within the Father's earthly family.

**Judge For Yourselves**

Paul instructs the Corinthians to decide for themselves whether or not it is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered:

"Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God uncovered?" (1.Cor.11:13 KJV Para.).

Paul does not mention the issue of speaking under divine inspiration as he did previously. Perhaps he omitted this because it is an issue he is going to address later in his letter (which he did in chapter 14). Whatever his reason for only addressing prayer, it does not alter his summary and resolution of the issue regarding the wearing of head coverings.

**Men and Women's Hair Length**

Paul continues his instructions about proper conduct and decorum while engaging in prayer and speaking under divine inspiration by appealing to the elect's understanding of what constitutes the natural order of things and stating facts about men and women's hair lengths and a woman's head covering:

"Does not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame to him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering" (1.Cor.11:14-15 KJV Para.).

Paul's discussion of the natural order of things elsewhere in his letters suggest that he is referring to the natural and instinctive sense of right and wrong that God has placed in the spirit of men and women, especially with respect to gender differences and sexuality.

**A Sign of Masculinity and Authority**

Men and women were created with intrinsically distinct characteristics, which causes males and females alike to instinctually avoid doing anything that labels them as the opposite sex. To do otherwise violates the intrinsic nature of masculinity and femininity.
The apostle Paul warned the Corinthians, "Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived: neither fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, or extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1.Cor.6:9-10 KJV Para.).

One reason for a man to have short hair is to distinguish him from a woman. Although a man with short hair can act effeminate, a man with short hair cannot be easily mistaken for a woman because there is nothing soft or effeminate about the appearance of a man with short hair.

The blurring or the elimination of the distinction between men and women violates the principles of God's law regarding the maintenance of a distinction between the sexes:

"The woman shall not wear that which pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deut.22:5 KJV Para.).

The violation of God's various laws about making a distinction between the sexes has brought great sorrow and misery on both men and women and society as a whole.

An indication that all men will be required to keep their hair an appropriate length after Christ returns is found in a prophecy regarding the priesthood who will officiate in the temple to be built in Jerusalem:

"Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll their heads (i.e., cut their hair)" (Ezk.44:20 KJV).

The exact meaning of "poll their head" is lost to us, but the consensus of rabbinical thinking is that it refers to cutting the hair so that the ends of one row of hair lay alongside the roots of the next. See Nedrim 51a, Sanhedrin 22b.

A Woman's Long Hair

A Woman's long hair is her glory; it gives her a particular beauty. Its abundance, texture, or color is less important than the fact that it is long. King Solomon expresses the characteristic beauty of a woman's long hair in Song of Solomon 4:1; 6:5; 7:5.

Paul said a woman's hair is a glory to her, so why would Paul give instructions to cover her glory? The answer is that he did not give an instruction for women to cover their hair while praying or speaking under divine inspiration.

In his comments and instructions about a woman's head coverings in verses 6 and 7, Paul used the Greek word kataluptos, which is a generic word for covering. But, when he refers to a woman's long hair as a covering, he uses the word peribolaios, which is a different word with an entirely different meaning.
When Paul said, "her hair is given her for a covering," he meant that her hair is given instead of a covering.

The two English words for and covering are translated from the Greek words ἀντὶ and περίβολαιον, which mean respectively instead of or because of and something thrown around one, i.e., a mantle, veil: a covering thrown around, or a wrapper.

A woman's hair is her covering, so to shave it off or wear it short like a man, violates the natural order. It is natural for a woman to have long hair. It is unnatural for her to have short hair like a man. For the pious woman, her long hair is her covering and evidence of her humility and willingness to submit to the authority of her heavenly Father, her Savior, and man.

God purposed that a difference between a mature man and woman be distinct and readily apparent to the observer. Paul's point is that the way men and women wear their hair is an indication of whether they are abiding by the created order. For a woman to dress and look like a man is inappropriate, because it removes the distinction God has established between the sexes.

A woman's long hair provides her a covering while she is praying or speaking under divine inspiration. Her hair should be of sufficient length to distinguish her as female. In other words, the length of her hair should be feminine, not masculine in appearance.

"But if anyone seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God" (1 Cor. 11:16 KJV Para).

When Paul says "we have no such custom," he invokes the authority of the apostolic office and then reinforces his resolution of this issue by stating the fact that none of the other congregations of the elect have this custom.

It is important to note that Paul refers to the practice of covering the head while praying or speaking under divine inspiration as a custom. Customs are not biblical law unless they are so stated as obligatory.

If a man covers his head while praying and speaking under divine inspiration, he is depicting himself as a woman which is a disgraceful act. Conversely, if a woman prays or speaks under divine inspiration with short hair or a shaved head, she violates the natural order established at creation and is therefore being disrespectful to Christ and men alike.

Paul's comments and instructions should affirm the participation of women in prayer and speaking under divine inspiration in the church. Their contribution should not be slighted or ignored. Nevertheless, women should participate in these activities with submission to male leadership. Moreover, their hair should be long enough to make their gender obvious and they should wear clothing appropriate for their gender as well.
What we know for sure is that, during Paul's time, allowing women to pray or speak under divine inspiration was an entirely new concept and teaching, which was a deviation from Jewish custom, but does not conflict with biblical law.

Both men and woman serve as king-priests in the Sovereign Father's earthly family. Both are under the same overall rules of conduct; both must offer the same physical and spiritual sacrifices, but they just have several different functions and responsibilities.

Obedience to the instructions of the apostles is not optional for members of the Father's earthly family. These instructions must be complied with in order to maintain a righteous lifestyle:

"But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (2.Thess.2:13-15 KJV).

Paul makes essentially the same point again in 1.Cor.14:37-38:

"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" (1.Cor.14:37 KJV).

Head Coverings

Some professing Christian groups require some sort of head covering while participating in formal worship. Most of these groups cite the apostle Paul and historical customs as the authority for their practice.

Although different cultures during different periods of history have required the wearing of head coverings for religious and secular purposes, there does not seem to be any historical evidence to prove beyond doubt that it was customary or mandatory for all men or women or to wear head coverings or veils during Paul's day.

Generally speaking, both married and unmarried women appeared in public with their heads and faces exposed as shown by the absence of such coverings in sculptures and paintings of these people.

Law

Although there are many references in the Talmudic writings and Jewish tradition to the mandatory covering or veiling of a woman's head in public and in respect to prayer and worshipful situations, these have no force of law for the Father's earthly family of king-priests, because this tradition is not biblical law.
No specific law can be found in the biblical record requiring men and women to wear a head covering while worshiping or serving God, other than the requirements for the priesthood of ancient Israel and the future priesthood which will serve at the temple in Jerusalem after Christ returns to establish the kingdom of God on earth. See Ex.29:5-9; Lev. 8:9; Ezk.44:15-18.

**Jewish Faith**

There is little doubt that, historically and traditionally, those of the Jewish faith practiced the covering of the head when practicing formal worship of the Creator God. However, the example of Mary wiping Jesus' feet with her hair would seem to indicate that it was acceptable at that time for a woman to expose her hair to others. If it were unacceptable during Jesus' day for a woman to have her head uncovered as a general practice, Mary's action would not only have been an affront to Jesus and his host but also to the disciples and other guests. But, her action was apparently not a problem. See Lk.7:36-50.

**SUMMARY**

None of the things Paul speaks to regarding head coverings or hair length are temporary or culturally limited, but pertain to the conduct of God the Father's earthly children during this age of salvation.

The apostle Paul made it very clear that no custom existed within the Sovereign Father's earthly family which supported whatever was being taught or believed regarding men and women having a covered or uncovered head while praying or speaking under divine inspiration or in regard to the length of a man or a woman's hair (1.Cor.11:16). Additionally, the biblical record clearly states that those who truly worship and serve the Sovereign God must not add to or take away from what has been written in the biblical record:

"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor remove from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut.4:2 KJV Para.). See also Rev.22:19.

The following summarizes the important issues Paul addressed in regard to a pious man and woman's covered or uncovered head while praying or speaking under divine inspiration, as well as the length a man and woman's hair.

- Men are not to pray or speak under divine inspiration with their head covered.
- Women are not to pray or speak under divine inspiration with their head uncovered.
- A man's hair must be short enough for a man to be easily recognized as a man.
- A woman's hair should be of sufficient length for a woman to be easily recognized as a female.
If a woman is bald or cannot grow hair of sufficient length, it seems appropriate for her to wear a wig of sufficient length or a covering when praying or speaking under divine inspiration and to distinguish herself from a male.

Logic dictates that what the apostle Paul wrote about men being uncovered and women being covered while praying or speaking under divine inspiration and hair length for men and women are laws which must be obeyed by members of the Father's earthly family as part of a righteous lifestyle.

Obedience to the laws the apostle Paul established for the elect on this issue is important because obedience in the letter and the spirit of these laws is an indication of our attitude toward the authority of our heavenly Father, Christ, and the apostles. Moreover, obeying these laws expresses our belief that the God-given roles, functions, and appearance of men and women are different.

One very important difference noted by the apostle Paul was that the man must have his head uncovered while speaking under divine inspiration, because he is a representative of Christ. But, the woman must have her head covered, because God placed her in a state of subjection to the man after Eve disobeyed the instruction not to touch the forbidden tree or eat its fruit Gen.3:16).

"Does not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame to him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if anyone seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God" (1.Cor.11:14-16 KJV Para).

By B.L. Cocherell

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE BEARD LAW

Why did the Creator God require the Israelites to practice many seemingly unnecessary and unimportant rituals and laws and what do these physical laws have to do with your salvation or the building of spiritual character? Moreover, what benefit do these laws bestow on those who practice them? The answer is that these laws show the Sovereign Father's earthly children how be holy and practice holiness. These laws also define the holy attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics that holy people must have in order to live and maintain a holy lifestyle:

"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:1-2 KJV).

The Israelites were to be a holy people because God had separated them from among the peoples of earth in order for them to be his kingdom of priests and his holy nation, which would 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 the Lord your God am holy," he did not expect them to become holy as he is holy in the spirit realm of existence (i.e., 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. No instructions were given to the Israelites about 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. See Ex. 19:5-6.

The apostle Peter wrote the following to all who have been called to salvation during this gospel age and desire to live a life in harmony with their heavenly Father and his son, the Savior of mankind:

"Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the favor that is brought to you by the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, do not pattern yourselves after the ignorance of your former desires. But as he who has called you is holy, so you be holy in all manner of behavior; Because it is written, You be holy: because I am holy" (1.Pet. 1:13-16 Para.).
This instruction is clear. Those who are members of the Father's earthly family must be holy as he is holy. The only way to accomplish this and practice a holy lifestyle is to first know and understand what it means to be holy. In order to acquire this spiritual knowledge and understanding, you must be a willing, dedicated, responsible, and teachable student of the Father's truth and way of truth. You also must be willing to learn the laws which teach holiness and then put these laws to practice in your life.

THE BEARD LAW

The law requiring men to wear beards was one of the many laws that the Creator God gave to Israel which had to do with holiness.

Leviticus 19:27 and 21:1-5 are the only two texts which give clear instructions about the wearing of a beard by Israelite males of the general population and by the Levitical priesthood. The following are the specific prohibitions and requirements of this law:

- Israelite males are prohibited from marring the corners of an existing beard.
- A Levitical priest is prohibited from shaving off the corners of an existing beard.

All other references about the beard have to do with control of infectious disease, ritual purification, various prophecies, and events which mention the beard in the context of an object lesson.

There is little doubt that most adult males of ancient Israel and the Jews of Christ's time wore full beards in compliance with the law regarding beards noted in Leviticus 19:27 and 21:5. And there is no doubt that Christ and the apostles of the early church also wore full beards in compliance with this law.

The apostle James directed the following comments to the early church in order to remind them that they should not forget who and what they are and what is required of them:

"But you are doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, they are like a man seeing his natural face in a glass: For he sees himself, and goes his way, and quickly forgets what he is. But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, they being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this person shall be blessed in their deed" (Jms.1:22-25 KJV Para.).

What is it about a man's face that would cause him to reflect on who and what he is and what is required of him? If he wore a beard in compliance with the holiness code, he would immediately be a reminded of his obedience to God and his ways.
Although what James wrote does not prove that all men of the early church wore full beards, it is certainly an indication they did; otherwise, it is difficult to determine the meaning of the reference to a man's face reminding him of what he is and what is required of him.

Today, some people teach that in order for an adult male to be in good standing with God he must be bearded, but is this true? Is it mandatory for men to wear beards during the gospel age of salvation, just as they did under the first covenant with national Israel? If it is mandatory for men to wear beards, what is so important about a beard that the Creator God placed a law about it in his holiness code?

Because we are so far removed from the original giving of the law to national Israel at Mount Sinai, the brevity of the scriptures regarding the beard, and the difficulty in deciphering the various meanings of Hebrew words used to define this law, it is difficult to determine the exact application of this law.

**Biblical Law and Holiness**

If the law regarding the beard does apply during the gospel age of salvation, adult males of the Father's earthly family who are capable of growing beards should wear a full beard, because they have an understanding of both the letter and the spirit of this law—not because of peer-pressure. In order to determine whether or not adult males under the gospel age agreement are required to wear full beards, we must search the scriptures to see if other biblical laws, concepts, or principles give insight into the reason the Creator issued a law regarding a man's beard and the application of this law under his agreement with national Israel.

The first instruction about the beard is found in Leviticus, chapter 19, which contains a list of laws that were to govern the Israelite's behavior as the Creator God's representatives on earth. Each of these laws is meant to reflect God's character, his goodness, and his intended way of life for humans. The Israelites were to practice and maintain God's righteous and holy ways in order to prosper and show the distinct difference between God's way of life and mankind's way of life. Moses is told to speak to the whole nation of Israel in Leviticus 19:1-2 and give them God's laws:

> "And the Lord spok e to M oses, saying, S peak to all th e congre gation of th e children of I srael, and say to th em, Y ou shall be h oly: f or I th e Lord yo ur G od am h oly" (KJV).

Therefore, it is clear the instructions regarding beards applied to all adult Israelite males and is a part of the terms and conditions of the covenant between God and national Israel.
To All Adult Israelite Males

"You shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shall you mar the corners of your beard" (Lev. 19:27 KJV).

The word corners is noted in the instructions for both the head and beard. Perhaps, understanding the instruction about the hair on the head would help us to further understand the instruction about the beard. Does "not round the corners of the head" mean not to alter the ends of the hair, thus prohibiting cutting off the hair or trimming the length of the hair or does it mean not to alter the outline of the hair on the scalp?

The Head

The English word round in verse 27 is translated from the Hebrew word nagaph which is a primitive root, meaning to strike, to strike off; with more or less violence (beat, fell, corrode); by implication (of attack) to knock together, i.e. to surround, to go around, to enclose, to compass, to round circulate, to make round, or to round off:

The English word corners in verse 27 is translated from the Hebrew word peah, which can mean mouth in a figurative sense, or a corner, an edge, a side, a quarter, a direction, a region, or an extremity.

We know from the scriptures that it was acceptable and prudent for men to cut their hair (See Num.6:5; 2 Sam.14:26; Ezek.44:20; 1 Cor.11:14); therefore, the Hebrew word peah in verse 27 must refer to the outline of the hair on the scalp (i.e., the confines of the hair on the skin, not the hair length).

The instruction "not round the corners of the head" may have been a prohibition against shaving the hair on the head in the fashion of the ancient Egyptians and other cultures who cropped their hair short or shaved it to form a circle, which was a part of the worship of their gods. These types of haircuts may also have been prohibited because they disfigure a man who is made in the image of God and therefore is a show of open contempt for God and his creation.

The Face

The second part of this instruction is "neither shall you mar the corners of your beard." The English phrase "mar the corners" in verse 27 is translated from two Hebrew words shachath and peah. Shachath can mean to decay, (i.e., to cause ruin, cast off, corrupt, destroy, or mar). Therefore, we know that the beard is not to be disfigured or destroyed.

As with the hair on the head, in order to clearly understand this instruction, we have to know what "the corners of a beard" are. Does "the corners" of a beard mean the ends of the beard, thus prohibiting trimming the length of the beard? Or does it mean not to alter the outline of the hair on the skin of the face?
From the many meanings of the word *peah*, it could be assumed that a priest was prohibited from trimming the length of his beard. However, it seems logical that, if this were what was intended, a Hebrew word that clearly indicated the end or termination of something would have been used. One such word could have been a derivative of the Hebrew verb *qasa*, which means cut off. The Hebrew words *qsat*, *qaseh*, *geseh*, and *qasu*, derived from *qasa* in noun form, express a termination point of a thing, such as a border or a coastline or the tip of a rod.

Because the Hebrew word *peah* used in verse 27 does not clearly define the totality of the beard and is the same word used to define the limits of the hair on the head and no Hebrew word is used in verse 27 to define the length of the beard, it seems logical to assume that the corners (i.e., the *peah*) of the beard refers to the hair on the skin of the face, not hair length.

Based on the context in which both Hebrew words which define what was not to be done to a man's beard the following assumptions can be made:

- The instruction is speaking to an existing beard and something that is not to be done to it.
- As with the hair on the head, beards do not have corners, beards are naturally rounded to the contour of the face. Therefore, the Hebrew word *shachath* indicates the edges of an existing beard on the face are not to be altered. In other words, the hair on the skin of the face is not to be shaped into an unnatural configuration.
- The instruction in verse 27 is not speaking to the removal of the beard, because if it were, there would be no reason to mention the *peah* (corners) of the beard in a context of altering a beard. Therefore, a more correct translation of the instruction "neither shall you mar the corners of your beard" would be "neither shall you destroy the edges of your beard."

It is clear from the instruction in verse 27 that a prohibition against disfiguring the beard is contained in this law, so the following can be assumed thus far in the analysis of this law:

- Israelite males of the general population are prohibited from altering the outline of an existing beard on the skin of the face.
- Israelite males are not prohibited from shaving off their beard.
- Israelite males are not prohibited from trimming the length of the beard.

Although the law does not clearly state that all adult Israelite males must wear beards, the biblical evidence clearly shows that this was the case. The record also shows that it was a disgrace for an Israelite male to have his beard disfigured or shaved off for reasons other than those specifically granted within God's law or required by God for a specific reason.
Although there is no clear instruction that required Israelite men to continually wear a beard as is required of the Levitical priesthood, what is clear is that, if a man wears a beard, he must wear a full beard and he is prohibited from altering the outline of the beard on the face as a repetitive routine practice. See Lev.19:27.

The Levitical Priesthood

The second instruction about the beard is found in Leviticus, chapter 21. This whole chapter contains various instructions to the priesthood about their conduct and things they must avoid and not do in order to remain in a condition of ceremonial purity. In verse 1, Moses is told to speak specifically to the priesthood and in verses 4-5 the priests are prohibited from shaving their beards and intentionally scaring their skin by cutting it:

"And the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the priests the sons of Aaron . . A leader shall not defile himself among his people to pollute himself; they shall not make baldness on their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh" (Lev.21:1; 4-5 KJV). See also Lev.19:27-28; Deut.14:1.

The application of the law of beards for the priesthood in Leviticus, chapter 21, is firmly attached to the issue of defilement. Leviticus 21, verses 4-5 prohibit a priest from defiling himself by doing certain things, such as making bald spots on his head, shaving off the corners of the beard, or cutting his skin, which the societies around them did in mourning for their dead. The English word defile in verse 4 is translated from the Hebrew word chalal, which means to bore, and implies to wound or to dissolve and figuratively to profane or defile.

Leviticus 21, verses 16-23 further confirm that a priest is to be perfect physically in order to officiate in God's sanctuary. All of the things mentioned in this chapter to be avoided by a priest had to be avoided in order for him maintain his ceremonial purity and to reflect godly character in the performance of his priestly office.

The English word shave in verse 5 is translated from the Hebrew word galach, which means to be bald, to shave (off), to lay waste. The instruction is clear—a Levitical priest is prohibited from "shaving off the corner of his beard."

The English word corner in verse 5 is translated from the same Hebrew word (peah) used in Leviticus 19:27 regarding the general adult male population and the beard; therefore, we can assume that the prohibition is the same.

What is clear in the instruction to the priesthood regarding the beard is that the Creator God considered a priest defiled and unfit to serve as a priest if he altered the outline of the hair on his face.
The biblical and historical records clearly document that Israelite priests wore full beards, and Psalms 133:1-3 confirms that Aaron who was the first high priest of Israel wore a beard in compliance to the holiness code:

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment on the head, that ran down on the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (KJV).

The following seem to be logical assumptions about a priest and his beard:

- He is prohibited from shaving off the corners of an existing beard.
- He is prohibited from altering the outline of the hair on his face.
- He is required to wear a full beard.

Israel, a Kingdom of Priests

"Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation . . . " (Ex.19:5-6 KJV).

The Creator God chose Israel to be his personal representatives on earth; they were to be a nation of priests to be examples and teachers of his holy way to the rest of mankind. Therefore, they were not to mimic the religious practices of the nations around them, which is evidenced by his following three instructions:

"And the Lord spok e to Mos es, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, I am the Lord your God. After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein you dwell, shall you not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, shall you not do: neither shall you walk in their ordinances" (Lev.18:1-3).

"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 are not snared by following them, after that they are destroyed from before you; and that you inquire 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; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What ever thing I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add to it, nor diminish from it" (Deut.12:29-32).

"When you are come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations" (Deut.18:9). See also Jer.10:2.
Some biblical scholars suggest that the only purpose for a law about wearing the beard was to differentiate Israelites from other peoples. This reason seems unlikely given the context in which the law is set forth and the instructions the Creator gave to the Israelites not to mimic the religious practices of other nations.

A more plausible reason for prohibiting Levitical Priests from shaving portions of their heads and beards is that it was common for the priests of false gods to shave their heads and beards as a part of their religious practice. Also, many priests of religions in opposition to the true God cut and fashioned their hair and beards in a certain way as a part of their superstitions, religious practices, and worship of their gods.

Because both Leviticus 19:27 and 21:1-5 prohibit an adult male Israelite from altering the outline of his beard, most likely the law regarding beards has something to do with a prohibition against practicing religious rituals of other nations and the defilement of a man's natural form, which adversely impacts his relationship with God.

Because all Israelites were to be part of a kingdom of priests (Ex.19:6) as the Creator's representatives to the world, another reason for the requiring all Israelite men to wear a full beard was probably to distinguish them from the pagan nations around them and to identify them as a nation of priests who served the Creator God.

NATIONAL ISRAEL

The new covenant with national Israel will not be fully ratified until Christ returns and gathers the tribes of Israel into a new nation under his rule, so the law regarding wearing a beard is still in force for all adult Israelite men who claim to remain within a covenant relationship with the Creator God.

UNIVERSAL APPLICATION

Some assume that because the law regarding beards is stated twice, both references are intrinsically tied to each other in application (i.e., the law is to be universally applied to all adult males). However, this is not the case, because the priesthood is directly addressed with a rule specific to them. Perhaps the reason the law is stated twice is to clarify the difference in application between the general population and the priesthood.

RITUALS AND THE LAW

Consecration of the Levites

"God spoke to Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and cleanse them: sprinkle the water of the sin offering on them. And they shall shave all their flesh with a razor, and shall wash their clothes and clean themselves" (Num.8:5-7 Para.).

In the initial consecration of the Levites, all the hair was to be removed from the man's flesh, which includes the head and face.
The Nazarite Vow

"God spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the Israelites, Say to them, When a man or woman makes a Nazarite vow to dedicate themselves to the Lord . . . . During the time of the vow no razor shall come on their head. That one shall be holy until the vow to the Lord is completed. That one shall let the locks of the hair on their head grow during their separation to the Lord" (Num.6:1-5 Para.).

Although the law regarding beards is silent about males under a Nazarite vow, it seems logical to assume that, because no razor was to touch the head during the performance of a Nazarite vow, an Israelite male who was required by law to wear a beard would not shave it off for the duration of the vow (See Num.6:2-21).

EXCEPTIONS TO THE LAW

Under the following circumstances a man could shave off his beard without violating the law:

- Infectious Disease
- Skin Infection
- Leprosy

Leviticus, chapters 13 and 14, explain what to do in cases where there is an infection in the skin under the hair, on the head, or under the beard and how to perform the purification rituals after a person has been cured of leprosy.

"If a man or woman has a sore on the head or under the beard; the priest shall examine it, and if it appears to be more than skin deep and the hair in it is yellow and thin, the priest shall pronounce that person unclean and has an infectious disease on the head or under the beard. But if it does not seem to be more than skin deep and there is no black hair in it, then the priest is to put the infected person in isolation for seven days. On the seventh day the priest is to examine the sore, and if it has not spread and there is no yellow hair in it and it does not appear to be more than skin deep, the infected person must shave all the hair except for the infected area, and the priest is to keep him in isolation another seven days" (Lev.13:29-33 Para.).

"But it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off; and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean" (Lev.14:9 KJV).

Although these two instructions are speaking to the control of an infectious disease, they do show there are circumstances where it is necessary to shave off a part or all of the beard.
Israelite Men

Israelite men of the general population of national Israel are permitted to shave off an existing beard for a legitimate reason other than personal preference. See Lev.13:29-33; 14:9; Num.6:1-5.

Levitical Priests

A Levitical Priest is permitted to shave off his beard for a legitimate reason other than personal preference. See Lev.13:29-32; 14:9; Num.6:1-5; Ezra 9:1-3; Ezk.5:1-4.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST A FULL BEARD

This section reviews some of the popular arguments for and against wearing a full beard.

Made in God's Image

Some people believe the following are the two most compelling arguments in favor of men wearing a full beard:

1. God created man in his own image; therefore, God must also have a beard and men should wear beards in order to reflect God's image.
2. Jesus Christ reflected God's will in his life and because Jesus wore a beard, men should wear a beard in order to follow his example.

Made in His Image

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen.1:27 KJV). See also Gen.9:6.

Is a physical man a true physical reflection of what God looks like? If we want to know what the Sovereign Father and Jesus Christ who was the Creator God (Jn.1:1-3; Heb.1:1-3) look like in their glorified form, we need to review what the apostle John was told to record about the appearance of Jesus in his glorified form.

"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 I turned to see the voice that spoke to me and I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like the Son of man . . . His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters . . . and his appearances was as the shining sun . . . and he said to me, do not be afraid; I am the first and the last. I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore . . ." (Rev.1:10-18 KJV Para.).
"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things says the Son of God, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass" (Rev.2:18 KJV Para.). See also Rev.19:11-13.

John says that Jesus Christ has bright, white hair, eyes like fire, feet the color of hot, liquid brass, a voice like rushing water, and a radiant sun-like appearance. Because Jesus is the express image of the Father according to the writer of the Book of Hebrews (Heb.1:1-3), we can assume that God the Father looks similar to his firstborn son. Obviously, physical men do not look or sound like John's description of Jesus Christ in his glorified form.

The Heavenly and The Terrestrial

While speaking to the Corinthians about the resurrection to immortality, the apostle Paul explains the following differences between the heavenly realm and terrestrial composition of humans:

"There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1.Cor.15:40-44 KJV).

In verse 44, Paul explains that there are two types of bodies which can be inhabited by a spirit-being; one is physical and the other is spiritual and these bodies are different in glory and power.

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul [a human]; the last Adam was made a living spirit [a spirit-being]. However, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1.Cor.15:45-46 Para.).

In verse 45, the English word soul is translated from the Greek word psuche, which means breath or by implication a living sentient being. The first man was created as a physical being with a sentient thought process.

In verse 45, The English word living used to describe the last Adam as a spirit is translated from the Greek word zoopoieo which means to (re-)vitalize (literally or figuratively).

"The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthly: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1.Cor.15:46-49).
In verse 49, the English word *image* is translated from the Greek word *eikon*, which means *a likeness*, i.e., (literally) *statue, profile*, or (figuratively) *representation, resemblance*. Humans in their physical form only bear a slight resemblance to the Sovereign God and the Creator God.

**Jesus the Image of God**

Some people assume that what Jesus and Paul said in the following statements proves by inference that God the Father wears a beard:

Jesus tells Philip that "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father?" (Jn.14:9 Para.).

This seems to say that Jesus looked exactly like God the Father; however, the English word *seen* in verse 9 is translated from the Hebrew word *horao*, which means *discern* or *perceive*. Jesus was talking about the Father's character, not about his physical appearance.

Paul wrote to the elect at Corinth, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2.Cor.4:4 NIV).

In verse 4, the English word *image* is translated from the Greek word *eikon*, which means *statue, profile, likeness, representation, or resemblance*.

A careful analysis of verses 1-6 clearly shows that the context is spiritual knowledge and understanding about the good news message of Christ and the salvation offered through him by the Sovereign Father; it is not about the physical appearance of Jesus. Therefore, the Greek word *eikon* in verse 4 is meant to convey a sense of the glory of Christ as a representation of God the Father's message to humanity.

The apostle Paul shows that, before becoming the Messiah, Jesus was a god-being who gave up his immortal existence to become a physical man:

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil.2:6-7 KJV).

In verse 7, the English word *likeness* is translated from the Greek word *homoiooma*, which means *resemblance, made like to, likeness, shape*, or *similitude*. Jesus not only took on the physical nature of man but also the outward physical appearance, which is very different from the outward appearance of a god-being, as recorded in the Book of Revelation.

The Creator God became human in every aspect. He bore the image of a physical man, but now he bears the image of an immortal spirit-being in the likeness of his heavenly Father.
Although there are some similarities between the outward appearance of man and God, man is not an exact representation of the outward appearance of God. Moreover, there are no scriptures that clearly say that the Creator God had a beard or that the Sovereign Father has a beard. Just because men have beards does not prove that God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ have beards. The fact is that there is no scriptural proof that god-beings grow or wear beards.

The Express Image of God

"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).

The English phrase express image in verse 3 is translated from the Greek word charakter and in this context means an exact copy or (figuratively) representation.

JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Some people say that the account of Joseph in Genesis 41:14 proves that men have the discretion to be clean shaven and remain beardless:

"So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh" (Gen.41:14 NIV).

The Hebrew word for shaved in verse 14 is galach, which means to be bald, to shave (off), to lay waste.

It was the cultural practice of the Egyptians during Joseph's lifetime to shave the entire body, including the head and face. It was also a practice for those who were considered to have paranormal abilities, such as the Egyptian priests, to have their entire body including the head and face shaved at least three times a week. Although unprovable, it is likely that Joseph shaved his entire body, including his head and his face, before presenting himself to interpret Pharaoh's dream.

There are three facts which must be considered if one is to use this text to show that wearing a full beard is a personal choice for adult males of the Sovereign Father's earthly nation of king-priests:

1. Beards are not mentioned or alluded to in this account.
2. This event happened before the laws for national Israel (including the law about beards) were given to them.
3. Joseph's shaving seems incidental to the main events surrounding verse 14, none of which condone or condemn the shaving of the face.
Did Jesus Wear a Beard?

There are two compelling arguments indicating that Jesus wore a full beard. The first argument is the prophecy which speaks of his torture prior to his crucifixion and his willingness to be humiliated by allowing his beard to be defaced:

"I offered my back to the beaters, my cheeks to those who pluck; I did not hide my face from being humiliated or spit on" (Isa.50:6 Para.).

The Hebrew word for *pluck* in verse 6 is *maw-rat*, which in this verse means *to make bald*.

The second argument is that Jesus was a Jew of the tribe of Judah and was therefore subject to covenant law. The New Testament clearly records that Jesus did not sin; therefore, we know he obeyed all covenant law which pertained to him, including the law requiring Israelite men to wear a beard.

The historical evidence indicates that most devout Jewish men of Jesus' day wore a full beard. Jesus would have worn a beard, not because it was a social custom of the time, but because it was a law which must be obeyed in order to live a pious life in obedience to the holiness code for Israelite men. Moreover, Christ came to magnify God's Law, which included the law requiring beards. See Isa.42:21; Matt.5:17-20.

CUSTOMS AND SYMBOLISM

In many ancient cultures, as well as national Israel, the custom of wearing a full beard or shaving it off was symbolic of many profound physical and spiritual concepts and principles. This section discusses concepts and principles surrounding the wearing of a beard in ancient cultures.

Insult and Humiliation

After the death of the king of Ammon, King David sent some of his servants to Ammon's son Hanun to show his respect and comfort him. But, thinking David had sent these men as spies to invade and conquer his country, the king had his men shave off half the beard of each of David's servants, cut off their clothes to the buttocks, and then send them away. See 2.Sam.10:1-5; 1.Chron.19:1-5.

Perhaps, King Hanun's advisors suspected David's servants were spies because they had not shaved off their beards and all or part of the hair on their heads as an act of mourning for the dead, which was done in many ancient societies. But, David's servants could not do this because of the law prohibiting shaving off the beard and cutting or shaving of hair as an act of mourning. See Deut.14:1-2

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The defiling of these men's beards was a show of disrespect and contempt for David and his men. In order to save his servants from further embarrassment, David told them to stay in Jericho until their beards had grown, before returning to him. This insulting act along with other events eventually led to war between David and the Ammonites.

This account shows that it was humiliating to have one's beard defaced and it was a sign of disrespect for someone to deface a man's beard.

**Disappointment, Sorrow, and Shame**

When Ezra the priest heard that many of the Levites, priests, and leaders of Israel returning from exile had participated in the religions of the lands wherein they were taken as captives and had taken wives from among the people they were forbidden to marry, Ezra showed his great disappointment, sorrow, and shame for what these people had done by fasting and pulling out hair from his head and beard.

"After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, 'The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.' When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled" (Ezra 9:1-3 NIV).

This shows a priest who was prohibited from shaving off his hair and beard, pulling some of it out as a sign of great disappointment and sorrow for the sins of these Israelites.

**Covering the Lip and the Beard**

Ezekiel, chapter 24, shows that, because of their sins, the people were instructed not show any outward signs of mourning, such as covering the lower part of the face. But, they were only to sigh in silence when the temple in Jerusalem, which was the people's most beloved object, was destroyed:

"The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food [i.e., food of mourners]. So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded" (Ezk.24:15-18 NIV).
"And you will do as I have done. You will not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food. You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or weep but will waste away because of your sins and groan among yourselves. Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens [when the temple is destroyed], you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord" (Ezk.24:22-24 NIV). See also Mic. 3:5-8.

The English phrase "the lower part of your face" in verses 17 and 22 is an interpretation of the Hebrew word shapham, which means the beard (as a lip piece) or beard (upper lip), and is taken from the word sepheth, which connotes the idea of a termination (the lip as a natural boundary).

Apparently it was the custom at that time for a person to cover the lower part of their face as a show of sorrow and mourning. This instruction prohibited the covering of the beard as a sign of sorrow or mourning because the punishment was just and deserved and the people were to acknowledge their guilt and punishment in silence.

Mourning

In the context of Leviticus, chapter 21, verses 1-6, it could be assumed that a part of the reason for the prohibition against shaving part of the hair on the head or any part of the beard from off the face in mourning was to prevent the priesthood from mimicking the religious practices of other nations around them in mourning for their dead.

In Deuteronomy, chapter 14, verses 1-2, there is a specific command not to cut oneself or shave off some hair on one's head in mourning. Although this instruction does not mention the beard, it does show a prohibition against this type of mourning.

In Jeremiah, chapter 41, verses 4-9, there is an account of men coming from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria with their beards shaved off, their clothes torn, and self-inflicted cuts to their flesh, which was all in violation of the holiness code. These men came with offerings and incense intending to offer them to God; however, all but ten were killed. Although this account does not give the exact reason, perhaps they were killed because they attempted to access the house of God in a defiled condition.

Kissing of the Beard

"And Joab said to Amasa, Are you in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. However, Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he stabbed him with it in the fifth rib . . . " (2.Sam.20:9-10 KJV Para.).
Although this scripture does not say that Joab actually kissed Amasa's beard, historical records show that this was a custom of many ancient societies, including Middle Eastern societies. It could have also been a custom during King David's time for men to kiss the beard of another man when greeting him in order to show affection, friendship, or respect. This event tells us that, at this time in history, men allowed their beards to grow at least a few inches long; otherwise, Joab would not have been able to grab Amasa's beard and hold onto it while stabbing him.

Kissing the beard to show affection, friendship, or respect seems to have also been the custom during Christ's lifetime. This might have been the greeting that Simon the Pharisee refused to give Jesus as he entered his house (Lk.7:39-45), and it is likely the type of kiss with which Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus (Matt.26:47-48).

The apostle Paul instructed the congregations of Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonika to greet each other with a holy kiss. For men, this kiss would have been the traditional kissing of the beard as was done anciently.

PROPHECY, PUNISHMENT, AND THE BEARD

There are many prophecies that tell of God's judgements regarding the wicked (both Israelite and non-Israelite) and the punishment he will pour out on them because of their wickedness. Because wearing a beard is part of the holiness code and the beard symbolized so many honorable things, God often used the act of cutting off or pulling out the beard as symbolic of his utter contempt for wicked behavior and the severity of the punishment he was going to bring on evil people.

Ezekiel

God told Ezekiel to shave his head and beard and divide the hair into three measures to represent the three types of severe punishment he would bring on the inhabitants of Jerusalem for their rebellion.

"Take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of the hair with fire inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind. For I will pursue them with drawn sword. But take a few strands of hair and tuck them away in the folds of your garment. Again, take a few of these and throw them into the fire and burn them up. A fire will spread from there to the whole house of Israel" (Ezk.5:1-4 NIV).

It is important to note that Ezekiel was not only a prophet but also a priest who was prohibited from shaving the hair off his head or shaving off his beard. The shaving of his head and beard was a clear sign to everyone who came into contact with him that something was very wrong. This account also shows that a priest could remove his beard in order to fulfill a higher purpose.
Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah told king Ahaz that, because of the house of Judah's rebellion, God's judgment and punishment would come like a razor against the land of Judah:

"In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired [Assyria], namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard" (Isa.7:20 KJV). See also Isa.7:10-25.

With the symbolism of shaving off the hair of the head and beard, God foretold, through the prophet Isaiah, that he will humble Moab by destroying their nation:

"An oracle concerning Moab: Ar in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night! Kir in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night! Dibon goes up to its temple, to its high places to weep; Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba. Every head is shaved and every beard cut off. In the streets they wear sackcloth; on the roofs and in the public squares they all weep, prostrate with weeping" (Isa.15:1-4 NIV). See also Jer.48:35-38.

TRADITION AND THE ORAL LAW

Although the Torah is silent about many questions regarding wearing a beard, Jewish tradition and the oral law, which was interpreted and administrated by the priests of ancient Israel and later by the rabbis, has much to say about the maintenance, trimming, and removal of the beard.

The Talmud regards the beard as "the adornment of a man's face" (BM 84a), and a man without a beard was compared to a eunuch (Yev. 80b; Shab. 152a). Young priests whose beards had not yet grown were not permitted to bless the people (TJ, Suk. 3:14, 54a).

Mas. Nega'im, chapter 10, of the Mishnah states, "What exactly counts as the beard? The hair from the joint of the jaw to the thyroid cartilage."

NATIONAL ISRAEL AND THE ELECT

Because the scriptures describe the elect as spiritual Jews (Rom.2:29), the Israel of God (Gal.6:16), and priests of God (1.Pet.2:9), some people assume that the elect are subject to all the laws given to national Israel through Moses; however, there are major flaws in this assumption. The following are three of those flaws:

1. The elect are the Sovereign Father's holy nation of kings, priests, and ambassadors who are under the administration of his Son Jesus Christ; they are not kings and priests of national Israel.
2. Although the agreement between the Sovereign Father and the elect contains many of the same terms and conditions of the first and the second agreement with national Israel, there are major differences between the two agreements with national Israel and the agreement between the Father and his earthly children. See Heb.8:6; 2.Pet.1:4.

3. The edict of Acts 15 regarding the law of circumcision and the Law of Moses clearly shows that these laws are administered differently under the Sovereign Father's gospel age agreement with his earthly children. See the edict in Acts 15.

A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

Some people believe that a full beard is an outward sign of a covenant relationship with God; however, circumcision was the only physical sign of the covenant specifically commanded for all Israelite males under the first agreement with national Israel.

Under the agreement between God the Father and the sons of his new creation who are his holy nation of kings and priests, there is no requirement for a male to wear an identifying mark of this agreement. See Rom.2:28-29; Gal.5:6.

Although the law about beards has to do with holiness, nowhere is a full beard referred to as a mark which must be worn to show one's covenant relationship with God the Father.

THE SOVEREIGN FATHER'S ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

The requirements for a Levitical priest to wear a full beard is clear; however, men of the Sovereign Father's priesthood are not Levitical priests.

Although the Sovereign Father's earthly children are a royal priesthood, they are neither a part of the Levitical priesthood nor given any of the authority, functions, or responsibilities of the Levitical priesthood. But, the elect are not exempt from the holiness code as it applies to them in the letter and spirit of the law. The apostle Peter said the following about the Sovereign Father's earthly children:

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you should show forth the excellence of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1.Pet.2:9 KJV Para).
The royal priesthood that Peter speaks of is composed of both males and females and is a completely different priesthood from that of the Levitical Priesthood. The Sovereign Father's earthly children are in fact his personal priesthood and temples on earth (1.Cor.3:16-17). Moreover, this priesthood has a different ministry from the Levitical priesthood who ministered to physical Israel and it serves in a much different capacity from the Levitical priesthood. Therefore, the law regarding the beard cannot apply in exactly the same way to a male priest of the Sovereign Father's royal priesthood as it did to the Levitical priesthood.

**Justification and the Sacrificial System**

The Father's elect children are justified (i.e., made innocent) through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. So, the elect are exempt from the laws pertaining to justification through the rituals of the sacrificial system, as required under the Creator God's agreement with national Israel.

Although the Father's elect are exempt from many of the laws the Creator gave to national Israel, the beard law is not one of these exemptions, because this law is neither tied to the law of justification nor is its practice dependant in any way on the rituals of the sacrificial system.

The apostle Peter wrote the following about the duty of the Father's earthly children to be holy:

"Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which has called you is holy, so you be holy in all manner of behavior; Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy" (1.Pet.1:13-16).

The beard law is found squarely in the midst of laws that define and govern holy behavior and is outside of the laws pertaining to justification through the rituals of the sacrificial system. Therefore, there is nothing in this law which would nullify its practice by adult men of the Sovereign Father's holy nation during the gospel age of salvation.

As specified in Leviticus 19:27 and 21:4-5, if a man who is one of the Father's elect sons wears a beard, the beard must be worn as a full beard and cannot have its outline on the face altered, because the law only allows the wearing of a full beard. The wearing of goatees, mutton chops, moustaches only, or other trimmed facial hair configurations are clear violations of the law regarding how a man should wear a beard. There are only two options available under this law—a full beard or no beard at all.
WHY IS THERE A LAW ABOUT BEARDS?

There are a number of God's laws that prohibit defiling, defacing, or destroying the body. Some of these laws concern cutting your own flesh, tattooing the skin, acceptable hair length for men and women, wearing certain types of clothing, and eating animal flesh that is unfit for human consumption. From the context in which the law regarding beards appears, there is no doubt that it fits into the category of laws dealing with defilement of the body. According to God's law of holiness, anything that defiles the body is prohibited. Notice what the apostle Paul says about defiling one's body:

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defile the temple of God, God shall destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1.Cor. 3:16-17 KJV).

The English words defile and destroy in verse 17 are both translated from the Greek word phtheiro, which means to ruin, corrupt (self), defile, or destroy.

Paul's admonition to respect the sanctity of one's body reveals that the holiness code in respect to one's body was still binding on the elect of the early church.

Three uncontested facts are that beards are God's creation (not man's creation), adult male Israelites grew beards as a natural function of their bodily process, and a beard is persistent and will continue to grow in length unless it is shaved off.

REASONS FOR A MAN'S BEARD

There are many reasons that man was created with a beard and many reasons for God placing a law in his holiness code prohibiting a beard's disfigurement. The following are some of these reasons.

A Sign of Maturity

The Hebrew word for beard is zaqan and is related to the word zagen, which is a primitive root meaning to be old. Therefore, the Hebrew word zaqan (beard) not only indicates age, but also is symbolic of age.

In many cultures, the beard is still a symbol of maturity and age. Normally, a boy cannot grow a beard because he has not passed through puberty into manhood. The outward sign that a boy has passed beyond boyhood into manhood is the beard. Although a full beard is a sign of physical maturity and sets adult men apart from boys, the ability to grow a beard or the wearing of a beard certainly does not guarantee emotional or mental maturity.
In many cultures, both past and the present, wearing a full beard conveys far more than the fact that a person is an adult male. Throughout history, the custom of wearing a full, well-groomed beard has symbolized and conveyed many meanings, including maturity, honor, dignity, wisdom, experience, and rank or position in a community.

**A Sign of Masculinity**

The apostle Paul warns about several attitudes and behaviors which will prevent a person from inheriting the kingdom of God:

"Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived: no fornicator, idolater, adulterer, effeminate, abuser of themselves with mankind, thief, covetous, drunkard, reviler, or extortioner, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1.Cor.6:9-10 KJV Para.).

One reason for men to wear a full beard is to distinguish themselves from women. Although a bearded man can act effeminate, a fully bearded man cannot be easily mistaken for a woman, because there is nothing soft or effeminate about the appearance of a man wearing a full beard.

Although most women have facial hair, this hair is normally very thin, soft, colorless, and mostly unnoticeable; however, the facial hair of most mature men is thick and coarse with a pronounced color. Abundant thick, course, colored facial hair is unique to the male. Even a man with soft features who has a short haircut and a full beard can never be mistaken for a woman. Therefore, one way for a man to assert his masculinity is to wear a full beard.

**A Distinction Between the Sexes**

The blurring or the elimination of the distinction between men and women violates the principles of God's law about the maintenance of a distinction between the sexes:

"The woman shall not wear that which pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deut.22:5).

The violation of God's various laws about making a distinction between the sexes has brought great sorrow and misery on men, women, and society as a whole.

God purposed that a mature man and woman be distinct in appearance and distinguishable from one another. A full beard on a man clearly marks the differences between the sexes.
Vanity

Some people feel that the reason for the prohibition against altering the appearance of the beard is that trimming and fashioning the beard speaks to the issue of vanity. Although excessive attention to the design, appearance, and care of facial hair certainly could be attributed to vanity, it is just as true that a fully bearded man could have issues with vanity regarding his beard. However, the context in which the law about beards is given deals with the issues of defilement and holiness, not vanity.

SUMMARY

The wearing of a full beard was no trivial matter for an Israelite male, because wearing a full beard was a constant reminder of his status as a citizen of the Creator God's holy nation. Every pious Israelite also knew that his full beard represented his obedience to God and that to voluntarily deface it was rebellion against God and his law.

The Bible teaches the following things about wearing a beard:

- The law about beards assumes the natural existence of the beard and prohibits its defilement while being worn.
- The wearing of a full beard is evidence of compliance to the holiness code.
- Altering the outline of the beard on the face defiles a man who is set apart for a holy purpose.
- Both respect and disrespect can be shown through treatment of the beard.
- The wearing of a full beard is a sign of masculinity, physical maturity, honor, and dignity.
- To have the beard forcibly removed or defaced can be symbolic of judgement, punishment, disgrace, and humiliation.
- Voluntary removal or covering of the beard can be a sign of emotional distress, disappointment, shame, sorrow, or mourning.

The following facts are some of the most compelling arguments for a man to wear a full beard:

- It is God who placed the beard on man.
- Man was created to grow hair on the face as a natural feature.
- Altering the outline of the beard on a man's face alters his natural appearance.
- Israelite men of the general population of national Israel are commanded to wear full beards.
- Israelite priests are commanded to wear full beards as a part of their vocation.
- Jesus who is the example of righteousness wore a full beard.
- King David who had great favor in God's eyes and is recorded as a man after God's own heart wore a beard in compliance with the law (1.Sam.21:10-13; Acts 13:22).
IS THE BEARD LAW VALID TODAY?

There are many laws noted under the first agreement with national Israel which are not specifically mentioned in the New Testament as being a part of the new agreement established by Jesus Christ; nonetheless, they are a part of its terms and conditions. Listed below are some guidelines for determining whether or not a particular law must be practiced:

- Has the law been canceled or suspended by a direct command of God (i.e., "thus says the Lord," an act of God, or circumstances beyond our control)?
- Has there been a change in the law or the method of its observance? Good examples of this are the Passover observance and the annual festivals.
- Has the need for the particular law been eliminated? For example, the need for a Passover sacrifice has been eliminated, because the sacrifice of Christ now forgives sin and takes away its penalty.
- Has the law been changed so that the physical act or symbolism is no longer required? For example, wearing tassels is no longer required as a reminder of the commandments.
- Is the law made invalid by the new agreement? For example, animal sacrifice can no longer atone for sin or be used for becoming justified to God.
- Is it impossible to perform the act or the law under present conditions? For example, the temple worship system cannot be practiced, because its practice requires a physical temple and a Levitical priesthood to perform its rituals and sacrifices.

Questions and Answers

Q. Isn't wearing or not wearing a beard just a matter of personal choice concerning grooming and appearance?

A. Wearing a full beard is much more than an external matter if it is worn with the knowledge and understanding of the letter and spirit of the law.

Q. Does wearing or not wearing a full beard affect a man's holy status?

A. It depends on circumstances and attitude.

A. If the beard is removed for a reason sanctioned by God or is removed or disfigured through circumstances beyond one's control as was done to king David's servants, one's holy status is not affected because there was no intent to violate the law.

A. WHATSOEVER is not of faith is sin (Rom.14:23).
Q. Is it permissible under the law to trim the beard's length?

A. The only biblical reference that comes close to revealing whether or not it is permissible to trim the length of a man's facial hair is the account of Mephibosheth not grooming his mustache:

"And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had not dressed his feet, nor done his mustache, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king went away until the day he came in peace" (2.Sam.19:24 Para.).

In this verse, the English words dressed and done are both translated from the Hebrew word asa, which means to do, fashion, or accomplish. In a general sense asa often connotes an ethical obligation or something which must be done and sometimes with the emphasis on making or fashioning something. The derivative of asa is maaseh, which means deed or work.

The English word mustache in 2.Sam.19:24 is translated from the Hebrew word sapham, which can mean the lip or a lip-piece. This is important because the Hebrew word for the beard is zaqan, not sapham. Therefore, we know that it is the mustache being referenced, not the beard.

There would be no reason to mention Mephibosheth's mustache in the context of his appearance unless it had something to do with a normal part of personal grooming at that time. Moreover, it seems that the unkempt mustache is only mentioned in order to emphasize Mephibosheth's grubby appearance while he waited for the return of his father.

Some people might not consider the mustache a part of the beard; however, in reality the mustache is an extension of the beard. Because the law about beards prohibits the altering of the outline of the beard, which includes the hair on the upper lip, the usage of the Hebrew word asa in reference to Mephibosheth's moustache and his unkempt appearance and lack of hygiene could imply the work of brushing or dressing the mustache in order to give it a pleasant appearance. It could imply the trimming of his moustache in order to keep it out of his mouth.

I have researched much historical information about the moustache and reviewed opposing opinions of many biblical researchers and Orthodox Rabbis and have not been able to find a consensus of opinion among any of them or a satisfactory historical, Talmudic, or linguistic answer to whether or not the mustache can be trimmed under the law governing how a man should wear his beard.
Because it is unclear what the Hebrew word *asa* means in 2.Samuel 19:24, it seems that this event neither sanctions nor permits the trimming of the mustache; it just shows that Mephibosheth had not groomed his mustache in a presentable fashion in accordance to the customs of that time. It may well be that an authoritative answer to the question will go unanswered until Christ returns, so you must simply follow your conscience in this matter. However, it does seem logical for a man to trim the mustache in order to keep hair out of the mouth.

**EXEMPTIONS AND EXCEPTIONS**

The following are a number of logical exemptions from the law governing how beards should be worn.

**Priesthood and Temple**

No aspect of the law, such as the cleansing of the leper (Lev.14:1-32) or the completion of the Nazarite vow (Num.6:1-21), which require the existence of a temple and the Levitical priesthood can be practiced by the elect or anyone else until these two requirements are in place and functioning.

**No Facial Hair**

Any adult male who cannot grow a beard because of genetics, a medical condition, or some other physical circumstance which prevents him from growing a beard is obviously exempt from this law.

**Beards and Personal Safety**

In today's world, there are a number of professions and work situations that make it extremely difficult or virtually impossible to wear a full beard safely, such as a profession that requires one to wear respirators to protect against hazardous vapors or the kinds of work, that require the face to be very close to rotating machinery.

Practicing some professions may, under certain circumstances, exempt a man from having to wear a beard. However, from the perspective of the elect's responsibility to conform to both the letter and the spirit of the law, a decision about whether or not to work at a profession requiring one to be clean shaven is a personal choice. Moreover, one should be convinced in their own mind that they have made their decision predicated on the best evidence available to them, because the principle of having a clear conscience in what one decides to do applies to this issue. See Rom.14:22-23.
Judging Others

All too often people judge other people by appearance. Although a person's outward appearance is sometimes a reflection of their attitude and heart, simply judging a person by their appearance is wrong, because only God knows the true intent of the heart. Wearing a beard does not impart holiness and not wearing a beard does not remove holiness. It is the intentional defilement of the beard that causes a violation of the law and thus produces an unholy result.

Concerning passing judgment (i.e., condemnation) Jesus said, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (Jn.7:24 KJV).

Although the Father's children are his personal priesthood, they are under a different agreement from the one the Creator God had with the ancient Israelites. If a man wears a beard according to the law, it must be a full beard, because to voluntarily deface or pervert the beard is to defile what God has created and brings one under the condemnation of the law. See 1.Cor.3:16-17.

CONCLUSION

The following are strong indications a beard should be worn by men of the Sovereign Father's earthly family of king-priests:

- God created everything for a specific purpose—men were created with facial hair and it is a part of man's nature to grow a beard.
- The law governing beards is found among the laws which prohibit the disfigurement of the body, such as tattooing and cutting the flesh.

The apostle Paul gave the following warning to those who defile their body:

"Don't you know that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God shall destroy that person; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1.Cor 3:16-17 Para.). See also 1.Cor.6:19-20.

Scripture

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2.Tim.2:4-15 NKJV).

"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, throughly furnished to all good works" (2.Tim.3:16-17 KJV).
To what body of scripture was Paul referring? Did the early church study what is commonly called the New Testament? The answer is no! They did not have these writings in the format in which we have them today. The early church studied the law, the prophets, and the writings set forth prior to the advent of Christ, as well as the writings of the apostles as they were made available to them.

Paul also said the following about those who are a part of the Sovereign Father's holy nation of king-priests:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom.12:1-2 KJV).

Although the law about beards is not specifically mentioned anywhere in the writings of the New Testament, neither are many other laws that are without a doubt binding on the elect because they are a part of the holiness code. These laws include the dietary laws about what animal flesh is unfit for human consumption, wearing certain types of clothing, and defacing or destroying the body.

Despite Paul's warning to not be conformed to this world, many of the Sovereign Father's elect refuse to follow his truth and way of truth and allow themselves to be guided by this world's principles and lifestyles.

The following words of King David should be taken seriously by men who seek to please their heavenly Father and come into compliance with his law about the beard:

"The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver. Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn your commandments" (Ps.119:72-73 KJV).

By B.L. Cocherell

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CHAPTER
NINETEEN
ABORTION

For those who profess to believe in the God of the Hebrew Bible and to follow the concepts, precepts, and principles in the Bible, the question of whether or not the abortion of a woman's fetus is murder cannot be answered by science alone, because the question of human life concerns more than the physical body, it also concerns the human spirit. Therefore, the answer to the question of when human life begins is both scientific and theological.

There is no doubt that human life is sacred according the Bible. Through many different concepts, principles, instructions, and laws, the God of the Bible shows that not only is human life is sacred, but also all life must be respected.

There is also no doubt that, at the moment a woman's egg is fertilized by a sperm, a process begins that, if allowed to proceed without interruption, will result in a new and unique individual being born. Clearly, the physical process that results in human life begins at the moment of conception. But, according to the biblical text, does human life itself begin at conception, at some point during gestation, or at the moment of birth when the breath of life enters the lungs?

The point at which human life begins defines whether or not abortion is murder. Therefore, the two questions that must be answered by those who profess to follow the God of the Bible are:

1. What does God consider human life?
2. When does human life begin according to the Bible?

Although the Bible is silent on the subject of abortion, the answers to these two questions can be found in it. Once these questions are answered, whether or not fetal abortion is murder according to the Bible can be determined. Before answering these two questions, it is important to explore several biblical text along with Exodus 21:22-25, which are often quoted as proof that a human life begins in the womb and that abortion is murder:

"If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart [from her], and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay on him; and he shall pay as the judges [determine]. And if [any] mischief follow, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Ex.21:22-25 KJV).
In the first part of this instruction, the miscarriage of the fetus is due to injury inflicted on the woman by someone fighting with her husband. However, the injury does not rise to the level of a capital offence for which the penalty is death. Instead, the injury is determined a civil matter with the penalty being compensation for the miscarriage to be determined by the husband and/or the court.

There is nothing in the language of the first part of this instruction that tells us whether or not the miscarriage results in the death of the fetus.

The second part of this instruction shows that the result of the injury does reach the level of a capital crime for which the penalty is the death of the offending party.

There is nothing in the language of the second part of this instruction that tells us if it is the woman who dies as a result of her injury or if the miscarriage resulted in a live birth and the infant later dies as a result of injuries sustained prior to its premature birth.

Under the laws of restitution and retribution the Creator God gave to govern ancient Israel, a person who wronged another person was to make restitution and just compensation for the damage that was caused. But, in certain situations, such as murder, no restitution could be made, because the lose of the human life cannot be restored or compensated for by the perpetrator. Therefore, the death of the offending party was required—an eye for an eye, a life for a life. See Lev.24:19-20; Deut.19:16-21.

Because we are many centuries removed from the fount of knowledge that flowed within ancient Israel and because there is no consensus of opinion among Hebrew scholars, past or present, as to whether it is the woman or the premature infant who is referred to in verse 23, it is impossible to determine who dies as a result of injury. The only thing we can know for sure is that someone dies as a result of their injuries and that the death penalty is to be administered as punishment.

Exodus 21:22-25 cannot honestly be used to prove or disprove whether or not human life begins within the womb or at birth or that abortion of a fetus is murder.

God Knows Us in the Womb

The biblical record is replete with the names of individuals, such as the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, kings David and Cyrus, Samson, Christ, and John the Baptist, who were predestined to come into existence before their birth and to perform tasks to further the Sovereign God's plan for the salvation of humanity. Because these individuals were predestined to exist and because of the language used in describing them or their prophetic missions prior to their birth, some people believe this is proof that a fetus is a living individual with the spirit of man. The following are two such examples:

"Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15 KJV).
"For you have possessed my reins: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psa.139:13-16 KJV).

On the surface, these scriptures seem to indicate that a fetus is a living individual within its mother's womb with a personal identity. Although the Bible clearly shows that God is involved in the creation of humans, this involvement and the ascribing of a personal identity to a fetus does not prove that a fetus is a living individual with the spirit of man as a part of its composition. Rather, these scriptures just show God's creative process, his control over it, and his ability to intervene in human affairs in order to produce a desired result.

As a proof that life begins in the womb, many quote the following text where the Creator God tells Jeremiah of his being predestined as a prophet:

"Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jer.1:4-5). See also Isa.49:1-5.

Although the Creator God predetermined that Jeremiah would be born and become a prophet before his physical conception, to say that this proves Jeremiah was considered a living entity before his birth is to apply a meaning that is not there. The Creator saying he knew Jeremiah before he was formed and before he was born only proves that the Creator had the ability to predetermine events and cause them to happen, it does not prove a fetus is a living individual with the spirit of man in the womb.

What this and other scriptures with the same tone prove is that some individuals are predetermined to come into existence to fulfill a specific function and responsibility for God as he guides the affairs of mankind in order to work out his plan and purpose for mankind.

John The Baptist

Some people believe the angel's announcement to Zacharias that his son would possess the holy spirit from the womb proves that John the Baptist was alive in the womb. However, the Greek language of this text does not support this belief.
"But the angel said to him, Fear not, Zacharias: for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elisabeth shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the holy spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Lk.1:13-15 KJV Para.).

The English word from in verse 15 is translated from the Greek word ek; a primary preposition denoting a point of origin (i.e., the point from where action or motion proceeds), from or out of a place, a time, or a cause. If the writer had intended to mean that John possessed the holy spirit in the womb, he would have used the Greek word en; a primary preposition denoting a fixed position in a place, a time, or a state of existence.

The Greek language clearly reveals that John did not have the holy spirit in the womb, but received it at birth. But, what was John's state of existence in the womb before birth? The apostle James tells us, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jms.2:26 KJV).

The English word spirit in verse 26 is translated from the Greek word pneuma, which means a current of air, a breath or a breeze; by analogy or figuratively, a spirit. Regardless of whether James was referring to the breath of life or the spirit of man, a human body without both is not alive.

The biblical fact is that human life as God created it does exist without the breath of life and the spirit of man within the human body. It is also clear that the holy spirit does not dwell in a body devoid of the breath of life. Therefore, a logical assumption is that the holy spirit entered John after his birth as a breathing, living person.

The Babe in Elizabeth's Womb

Many quote the following text as proof that a fetus is a sentient individual in the womb:

"And Mary arose in those days, and went to the hill country with haste, to a city of Juda: And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the holy spirit. And she spoke out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of your salutation sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Lk.1:39-44 KJV).
In an attempt to show this text proves the fetus in Elisabeth's womb was a sentient being with the spirit of man, some translations insert the words for joy after the word "leaped" in verse 44 (instead of before it) to show that the fetus was able to perceive and understand what was taking place outside the womb and leaped for joy in response to Mary's salutation.

The English word leaped in this text is translated from the Greek word skirtao; which basically means to jump, i.e., to sympathetically move.

This scripture simply records the reaction of the fetus being stimulated by Elisabeth's emotional response to hearing Mary's greeting and Elisabeth being filled with the holy spirit. There is nothing in this event that indicates a fetus is a sentient being with cognitive ability.

A literal translation of verse 44 is: Lo, for, as soon as sounded the voice salutation of yours in ears mine, for joy leaped the babe in womb my. Interlinear Greek-English Bible Para.

The English word joy is translated from the Greek word agalliasis, which basically means exultation and especially welcome. However, agalliasis is a constructed word found only in the Bible and the early church writings with one other exception as noted in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Volume 1, page 19.

Although the Greek meaning of agalliasis can mean joy, the meaning of agalliasis is more metaphorical and idiomatic than literal and does not in any way ascribe cognitive thought to the fetus in Elisabeth's womb. Moreover, the Greek language in verse 44 can be interpreted to mean the agalliasis was possessed by Elizabeth or the by fetus. The context of Luke 1:39-44 seems to show that the joy being expressed was Elizabeth's, not the fetus'.

The question of whether or not the fetus in Elizabeth's womb (predetermined by the Creator God to become John the Baptist) was a living human (with cognitive thought and the spirit of man) can be answered from the biblical texts which explain what human life is and is not.

**A Quality of Life Issue**

Solomon who was given the gift of wisdom by the Creator God says the following:

"If a man fathers a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years are many, and his soul is not filled with good, and also that he is not buried; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For he came in with vanity, and departs in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he that has not seen the sun, nor known any thing: has more rest than the other" (Eccl.6:3-5 KJV Para.). See also Eccl. 4:1-3.
The English phrase *untimely birth* is translated from the Hebrew word *nephel*, which means *something fallen*. In the context of Eccl.6:3-5, *nephel* clearly means a fetus that fails to become a living person.

Solomon also says the one with the "untimely birth" has not "known anything," which proves that the fetus is not a sentient, thinking person.

Solomon is neither advocating abortion nor attributing sentience or cognitive ability to the unborn; he is just addressing a quality of life issue and a logical alternative by stating a fact of life that it is better for some not to be born than to live a life of extremely poor circumstance.

While lamenting his current situation, Job voiced similar logic to that of Solomon about quality of life issues and life's difficulties. What Job said at the end of a litany of curses he pronounced against the day of his birth is of particular significance:

"Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?" (Job 3:11 KJV).

Although poetic the King James translation of the Hebrew text does not accurately convey what Job said. A more accurate translation would be: "Why was I not dead in the womb or have died at birth."

"Why then did you let me be born? Why did not you let me die at birth? It would have been as if I had not existed, I should have gone directly from the womb to the grave" (Job 10:18-19 Para). See also Job 3:2-4,11-19.

Rather than affirming that a fetus is a viable human life, Job indicates that human life begins at birth.

Although both Solomon and Job advance a strong argument for quality of life being more important that being alive under certain circumstances, neither advocated abortion, both just state a fact. Clearly it is better for some to never be born that to endure a life of misery.

### Innocent Blood

The most common argument that abortion is murder comes from the belief that abortion is the termination of an innocent human life. The following scriptures clearly say that the shedding of innocent blood is a capital crime in God's eyes:

"Cursed is he that takes a reward to kill an innocent person" (Deut.27:25 Para.).

"Yes, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood" (Psa.106:37-38 KJV Para.).
"These six things does the Lord hate: yes, seven are an abomination to him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, . . ." (Prov.6:16-17 KJV Para.).

There is no doubt that the fetus has the potential to be a living individual, however, the assumption that abortion is shedding innocent blood begs the question, Is a fetus in the womb a living individual according to the biblical definition of a living individual containing the spirit of man?

**Biblical Law**

Some people assume there was no need for the Creator God to issue a law about abortion, because it was common knowledge that abortion was a crime against the unborn. This rationale might seem correct, but it has a major flaw in that all aspects of mankind's behavior are either directly covered in God's law or can easily be found in its concepts and principles. This does not seem to be the case with the abortion issue.

None of the scriptures quoted thus far prove that a fetus is considered an individual with the spirit of man residing within it. Therefore, if one is to arrive at the truth about when human life begins according to the Bible, one must follow the principles outlined by the prophet Isaiah and search the scriptures:

"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line: here a little, and there a little" (Isa.28:10 KJV).

**HUMAN LIFE**

Jesus said there are two elements of the human existence and that we must fear God who can terminate both the physical and non-physical elements:

"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* in this text is translated from the Greek word *soma*, which means a physical human/animal body, or corps. The Greek word for *soul* is *psuche*, which means breath, life, or mind. Here, there are two distinct elements of physical and non-physical human life spoken of and both elements can be completely destroyed by God.

Understanding that a human body is only a physical housing through which one can experience this physical realm helps one to understand what human life is and the importance of knowing when life begins and one's responsibility to respect life as God's creation.

**PHYSICAL ELEMENTS HUMAN LIFE**

In order to determine what God considers human life and its life force, it is necessary to review what the biblical record says about the creation of mankind and where this life force resides within the body.
The Breath of Life

"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.).

The English word breath in verse 7 is translated from the Hebrew word neshamah, which can mean wind, vital breath, divine inspiration, or intellect.

The English word soul in verse 7 is translated from the Hebrew word nephesh, which means a breathing creature or animal, vitality, beast, body, or breath. The Hebrew word nephesh literally means a state of being alive.

The Creator formed the lifeless body of the first human out of the elements of the earth and brought it to life by blowing air into its lungs.

The Genesis account of the beginning of Adam's life clearly documents that for a person to be alive they must be breathing. This is clearly the case, because when a person stops breathing all bodily functions begin to shut down, the brain ceases to function, and the body becomes immobile and begins to decay.

The Creator God said this about the breath of life as he was about to destroy the earth in a flood:

"And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die" (Gen.6:17 KJV). See also Gen.7:15, 21-22.

The English word breath and life are translated from the Hebrew words ruwach and chay, which respectively mean wind, life, and a living thing.

The Psalmist wrote the following about the breath of life and the death of a human:

"His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa.146:4 KJV).

"You hid your face, they are troubled: you take away their breath, they die, and return to their dust" (Psa.104:29 KJV).

The Book of Jeremiah records God's condemnation of men who make, worship, and trust in lifeless idols made with their hands:

"Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the carved image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish" (Jer.10:14-15). See also Hab.2:18-19 Jer.51:17-18.
These idols are lifeless, because they are without the breath of life in them.

Clearly, it is a biblical and a scientific fact that it is the breath (i.e., oxygen in the lungs) which begins and sustains the physical life function of an individual after birth. It is also a fact that a lack of oxygen terminates the human life function.

**Life Is in the Blood**

Leviticus, chapter 17, states that the life of a human 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." *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.17:10-14 KJV).

In this age, we can understand the biological implications of this statement. The heart circulates the blood throughout the body, which in turn performs its life sustaining functions. However, circulating blood is of no value unless it is saturated with oxygen in a specific ratio within the blood—no oxygen, no life—no breath of life, no life.

What is it that activates life and is the most essential sustaining force of life from a biblical perspective? It is the breath of life—it is the oxygen in the blood. Without oxygen to saturate the blood, physical, human life cannot exist.

Since life is in the blood, it follows that the sperm and egg are not a human life because there is no blood within them. It also follows that, until the fertilized egg matures to the point at which it has its own independent blood and oxygen supply, it has no independent life as defined by the biblical record. Moreover, the blood and oxygen within a fetus originates from the mother and it is sustained by her life force.

A fetus apart from its mother's sustaining blood and oxygen cannot survive, unless it begins to breathe on its own after leaving its mother's womb. Therefore, logic tells us that, until a fetus is separated from its mother's womb and is functioning with oxygenated blood separate from its mother's womb, it is not physically a viable individual life.

If God had not activated Adam's life functions by blowing air into his lungs, Adam would not have lived. But, is human life no more than an electrochemical 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 mankind? 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 life existence than the rest of creation. But, what is it that makes mankind different? According to the Bible, it is the unseen physical and
spirit elements of the human creation which make mankind different from the rest of creation.

The Spirit Element

There is another element to human life besides the physical body; 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 translated from the Hebrew word *ruwach*, which can mean wind or mind. *Ruwach* does not mean a physical being or a being at all. Rather, it denotes something that is not physical, which in the context of this text, has to do with God's ability to impart understanding to the human mind.

The prophet Zechariah said the following about the creation of the spirit in man:

"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 does not understand or ascribe to the human life function. Nevertheless, the spirit in man is of major importance to human life before and after death.

At the moment the fetus is removed from its mother's womb and inhales the breath of life, it becomes a living spirit housed in a physical body:

"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.).

THE GOD OF SPIRITS

The scriptures show that God formed the spirit that lives within the human body. 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 (Rom.8:14-16).
As Moses and Aaron were beseeching God for the lives of the Israelites, the following was asked of God:

"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.). See also Num.27:16.

The spirit in man is neither an undefinable essence nor is it mysteriously apart from man. The spirit of man is man. The physical body is the habitation of the spirit, which is the conscious element of the human creation.

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 processes cease, the body becomes immobile, all regeneration processes stop, and the body starts to decay). The Bible defines physical death in the same way as science:

"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 that our bodies were made from the elements of the earth and they will return to these same elements after death.

"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; yes, 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 writes 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 between what Solomon said and the scientific definition of death. 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?

Solomon asked the same question many have asked over the centuries about the destination of the spirit in man:

"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.).

The great difference between Solomon and most people is that Solomon knew the answer to his question:

"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. Jesus also understood this:

"Father into your hands I commit my spirit. And saying this, his breath left him" (Lk.23:46 Para.).

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last" (Lk.23:45-46 NIV).

Jesus exhaled his last breath and died. His spirit, which was composed of material from the spirit dimension of existence, returned to God the Father who inhabits the spirit-realm.

THE RESURRECTION OF ISRAEL

Another key to understanding when human life begins is found in Ezekiel, chapter 37. This chapter contains the prophecy of the valley of dry bones, which describes the future resurrection of Israelites who have died throughout the ages.

This prophecy clearly shows these Israelites will not be given a spirit body like those who participate in the first resurrection, but they will be brought back to a physical life as human beings after Christ returns so that they will have an opportunity for salvation under a New Covenant with national Israel.

Ezekiel records the following about the bones of these Israelites:

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up on them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, Prophesy 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 on these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on 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 (i.e., 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 breathe.

In order for these reconstructed bodies to function as sentient beings, the spirit of man must be put back into the body, because the body without the spirit of man is lifeless (See James 2:26). At death, the body dies and becomes useless to the spirit of man that inhabited it.
The Records of the Dead

The Father has 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 mind and essence stored in heaven.

The scriptures tell us there is also a physical record of a dead human being called the rephaim which occupies a place noted in the Bible as sheol (Isa.14:9). The rephaim is not spirit or 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 realm.

Because of the abundance of allegorical and factual references about sheol and the rephaim that occupy it, the rephaim must be the physical record/pattern of each human body.

Logic tells us that, because this record/pattern is invisible yet physical, it must be composed of pure physical energy in one form or another. This invisible yet physical element is the physical record/pattern which 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, but the physical element that is the pattern/record of the individual, remains intact and is stored on earth.

The rephaim, which is the record/pattern of the physical human form, remains on earth because it is a part of this physical realm and cannot enter the spirit realm.

The Resurrection Process

The spirit record of a human is kept in heaven, the physical record is 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.

The resurrection to a physical life as shown in the prophecy of dry bones requires a physical body, oxygen placed in the lungs to bring it to life, and the spirit of man placed back into the body in order for it to function as a sentient human. Again, it is the breath of life that allows human life to begin.

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

While explaining to the Pharisee Nicodemus the change that must take place for a human to become a spirit-being, Jesus used the analogy of the human birth process. It is within this analogy that one can find when human life begins and when the spirit of man enters into and individual.
John 3:3-10 Paraphrased

"Jesus said to him, Truly, truly I say to you, if one does not receive birth from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, How is a man able to be born, being old? He is not able to enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born?" (vs.3-4).

Nicodemus had no doubt that Jesus was talking about a literal birth when the fetus comes out of the womb and becomes a living breathing individual; however, in his mind he could only picture a physical birth. Nevertheless, Jesus was not speaking of a physical rebirth; he was speaking of a completely different kind of birth process:

"Jesus answered, Truly, truly I say to you, If one does not receive birth out of water and spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. That receiving birth from the flesh is flesh; and that receiving birth from the spirit is spirit" (vs.5-6).

Jesus clearly explains to Nicodemus that he is speaking of a birth into the spirit-realm and not a rebirth into the physical world:

"Do not wonder because I told you, You must receive birth from above. The spirit breathes where he desires, and you hear his voice; but you do not know from where he comes, and where he goes—so is everyone having received birth from the spirit. Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things come about? Jesus answered and said to him, You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things" (vs.7-10).

According to what is written in the New Testament, a person receives birth from above when the spirit of adoption enters into them after they have come out of the baptismal water which is symbolic of the death of the old person.

In a physical birth, life apart from the womb begins at the moment the breath of life enters the new born's lungs. If this never happens, there is no live birth in which the spirit of man can inhabit. It is exactly the same concerning being born as a spiritual son in the Sovereign Father's family and Kingdom. If the Father's spirit of adoption never enters into a person, that person is not born of the spirit.

JUDAISM AND ABORTION

For Judaism, the biblical perspective about abortion is reasonably unambiguous in that biblical concepts and principles and rabbinical writings show a consensus of opinion about the status of a fetus. The consensus is that, although the fetus has the potential for human life, it is not an individual; it is considered a part of the woman's body. Virtually, all Jewish authorities agree that abortion is not defined as murder under biblical law.
Although there are many differing opinions expressed in rabbinical writings, such as in the Mishnah and the Talmud, as to the circumstances when a woman has a legitimate reason to have a therapeutic or a non-therapeutic abortion, the consensus of opinion is that, just as one is constrained by biblical law from mutilating one's own body, a woman is not permitted to capriciously abort her fetus as a matter of convenience or as a means of birth control in order to avoid the responsibility of bearing and caring for a child.

Orthodox Judaism's view of the abortion issue is not easy for most people to understand, because it is rooted in both tradition and biblical law and there is no consensus among Jewish scholars and rabbis to establish a single principle by which to determine the morality of abortion. However, much of what is taught by Orthodox Judaism about abortion is based on biblical concepts and logic.

Jewish tradition divides the issue of abortion into four basic categories:

- The legal status of the fetus
- The time the spirit of man is imparted
- The criteria for a therapeutic abortion
- The criteria a non-therapeutic abortion

**The Legal Status of a Fetus**

While recognizing that a fetus in its mother's womb has the potential of human life, Jewish opinion does not consider a fetus to be alive with the spirit of man, therefore the fetus does not have legal standing of its own.

Rashi, a well known 12th century commentator on the Bible and Talmud, states of the fetus "lay nefesh hu—it is not a person." The Talmud contains the expression "ubar yerech imo—the fetus is as the thigh of its mother" (Nazir 51a Talmud). The logic that a fetus is deemed to be part and parcel of the pregnant woman's body is correct because the mother's body sustains the fetus.

**The Time the Spirit of Man Is Imparted**

Because of the many opinions, the speculation, and the disagreement among the various rabbis and Jewish scholars throughout history, the exact moment in time when the spirit of man is imparted and a human body becomes a sentient being cannot be determined from Jewish literature.

The only part of this issue that there seems to be some agreement on is that it is a secret of God which will be revealed when the Messiah comes. Therefore, this issue has little or no bearing in Jewish decisions about abortion.
The Criteria for a Therapeutic Abortion

There are two principles that determine if abortion is justified. The first is that a fetus is only a potential life until it leaves the woman's body. Therefore, it is permissible to sacrifice a potential life in order to save an existing life. The second is that of self-defense. In Jewish law, one is permitted to defend oneself, even to the extent of taking the attacker's life should one's own life be in jeopardy.

The Criteria For a Non-therapeutic Abortion

There are many opinions and much relevant information to be considered that lead to different conclusions about non-therapeutic abortions in the Jewish community. Some of these are as follows:

- A pregnancy that impairs the mothers ability to provide milk to nurse an existing infant that could not survive without this milk for various reasons. This situation becomes an issue of saving an existing child.
- Long term effects of pregnancy to the woman, such as her mental health or a permanent physical disability.
- Adultery, rape, and incest.

The majority of Jewish legal opinion is that abortion is permissible at any stage of the pregnancy if the well-being of the woman is jeopardized. However, the well-being of the unborn child's future after birth is not grounds for abortion. The determining factor to prohibit or permit a non-therapeutic abortion is for the health of the mother, not the fate or condition of the fetus.

Although biblical law is silent about abortion, Judaism seems to have a reasonably clear and balanced biblical perspective about the subject of abortion.

The Pursuer and the Perused

R. Huna summarizes Jewish thought about abortion in which a woman's life is in jeopardy during the birth process:

"A minor in pursuit may be slain to save the pursued. Thus he maintains that a pursuer, whether an adult or a minor, need not be formally warned. R. Hisda asked R. Huna: we learned: Once his head has come forth, he may not be harmed, because one life may not be taken to save another. But why so? Is he not a pursuer? — There it is different, for she is pursued by heaven."

"This refers to a woman giving birth, whose life is endangered. Now, if the fetus put forth any limb but the head, it may be cut off, so as to facilitate delivery, and save the mother. But if his head issued, it is regarded as alive, and the mother may not be saved at his expense. I.e., in seeking to be born, he is as a pursuer endangering his mother's life. There it is different, for she is pursued by heaven" (Talmud Mas. Sanhedrin 72b).
SUMMARY

There is no doubt that murder of another human violates God's law (Ex.20:13) and there is no doubt that God considers the malicious, premeditated taking of a human life to be murder and a capital crime worthy of the death of the perpetrator (Gen.9:6). However, the scriptures clearly indicate that human life begins at birth when the breath of life animates the body and the spirit of man is placed into the body.

One simply cannot prove from the Bible that therapeutic or non-therapeutic abortion is a violation of God's law. What one can prove is that human life is precious and that God does not look favorably on those who treat human life with callous indifference.

Because no direct or indirect law can be cited from the Bible about therapeutic or non-therapeutic abortion, the decision to abort or not to abort should be weighed carefully considering all of the biblical concepts and principles dealing with the sacredness of life and the long term well-being of the woman clearly in mind.

Although abortion is an extremely complex issue, for an adult woman with the indwelling of the holy spirit and the ability to decide, the decision to abort or not to abort is within her authority and is a matter of conscience.

By B.L. Cocherell
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.

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.

SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN AND DOCTRINES OF DEMONS

In the Book of Revelation, there is a cryptic reference to individuals Christ identifies as being of the synagogue of Satan. Additionally the apostle Paul warned the evangelist Timothy to beware of those who would depart from the faith and pay attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. Is it possible that much of what is taught as biblical truth today is not truth, but a clever deception?

This book identifies the Synagogue of Satan and its members and documents a number of popular beliefs held by many professing Christians that are in reality teachings of evil spirits meant to prevent an understanding of true biblical precepts, principles, and laws which if practiced will lead to life everlasting.
BOOK ORDERS AND DONATION INFORMATION

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