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Signed in Blood

After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove, while Paul said in his own defense, “I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against Caesar.” (Acts 25:7 & 8)

Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him (Stephen) speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against* God.” They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law.” (Acts 6:11 & 13)

It all made such good sense. I was very comfortable with my pattern of life, my perspective on God, and the way I would throw Him bones. I knew there was supposed to be more, and that here and there people seemed to have ascended to significance within the kingdom, but how close is the average Joe(anne) supposed to get to Him really? He is too holy. After all, He did end the life of a man for simply trying to stop the tipping Ark from falling over during transport.

On the other hand, the message that had been drilled into me from childhood was one of great simplicity, “Call upon the Lord and be saved!” (Yet another Hebrew Scripture passage.) It was a message of liberty for sure, but it was a program without a schedule. I had developed a “God does not get angry anymore because Jesus died” mentality; along with a “He loves you unconditionally to a fault” perspective. That, of course, culminates in a “His grace sees no sin” understanding. Actually,

that is often the popular message. What a great religion! My God was a great, big, volleyball that never stops smiling, and makes no specific requests of me other than to love Him and my neighbors. As long as I seek the kingdom first, whatever that means, He'll take care of the rest. Deep inside I knew He couldn't be that much of a push over, but I lived as if I sure hoped He was a Wilson.

As I look back at the times that I read certain portions of Scripture in the past, even multiple times, I really have to wonder how it is I missed so much. How could I have seen the words that were right in front of me, but not understood their meaning? But then, I just have to think back to when I was not walking the road that leads to life, even though I knew better, and that's even more amazing. Paul the Pharisee said that we see things sometimes as if we are looking through a dark glass dimly. I'd say that's a pretty good analogy, considering that even though it's dark, when held up to bright enough light it may still reveal a beautiful color. I deduce there to be different sources of that dimness. One source might simply be our mental capacity to understand. We are all born with varying degrees of intellectual capacity, and that plays a role in our ability to comprehend complex matters clearly. (However, only God can judge this justly.) That is not to suggest intellect diminishes overall effectiveness within the Kingdom.

Then there's the education factor. We may have a perfectly capable intellect, but we don't exercise the muscle of our mind and therefore limit ourselves. Yet with Paul, something like scales had to fall from his eyes in order for him to be able to see more clearly, as he was very highly educated. That darkness was more like blinders on a horse, put there by the owner to limit available sight. This is an example of Spirit controlled enlightenment. We can exercise the muscle of our mind, which we should, but the other two factors are out of our control. One may never change much. But the latter, the one that is Spirit governed, that's what we want to consider here.

When it comes to reading the Scriptures, if you should decide to read in a cursory, survey/scan sort of style, as though it was a high-school textbook, most likely you will familiarize yourself with the passages, but not gain much understanding. If you were to read it multiple times, you would likely do more than familiarize yourself, and move into the realm of memorization. However, mortal man must need something more than that to gain enlightenment, for many a man has read the Scriptures and yet heaped destruction upon themselves and humanity, through extreme misinterpretation. Heinous and evil crimes of demonic proportion have been executed by people quoting Scripture to support their actions.

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1st Corinthians 1:18)

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2nd Corinthians 4:3 & 4)

That's pretty easy to understand, being that some of Scripture can be challenging enough to interpret, even as a believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit, being so far removed from its context. An unbeliever has no chance, outside of the Spirit. But how then does the Spirit affect our understanding? Is He just your "gut feeling or instinct"? Can your gut be completely different than someone else's, and you both be right? Remember, I am speaking in regards to Scripture's meaning.

Is it possible that comprehending the Scriptures is not as hard as it is often made out to be, at least to the level that directly affects the quality of your life? Is it possible that the seeds of doubt and discouragement, over our ability to apply it, had been planted in us from early on, and have now grown into a fruitful tree of complacency? How theologically savvy do you think the crowd was, that originally received it? Allow me to contemplate with you.

I am not proposing to think exactly like our Savior, but if I was to use the spiritual insight He has given me, and knowing He wants all men to be saved, I might deduce that the means by which He guides all His children into Truth, would not be way over our heads. Don't get me wrong, I am well aware of the complexities inherent in exegetical research, and various apologetics. But doesn't it stand to reason that if He made us, knowing quite well our human (in)capacities and all, that He would not only give us the road map for life, but a key to understanding it as well? And not only a map for Mensa members, but one that is decipherable by us common folk. Hey, keep this truth just between you and me. We don't want the priests to lose all their power.

Haven't you ever had a moment or two when you had read something in a passage that seemed fairly clear, and then a teacher twisted it all around to mean something completely different? Sometimes it was with good result—sometimes disturbing. Let's think about this again. To whom was the Torah originally given? A nation of scholars, or a mob of simple slaves? As difficult as some study is, some part of it has to be comprehensible by the everyday reader. Knowing something of God, albeit a teensy bit, I would venture to guess it would be the parts that really matter the most. Also remember how it was given. It was just told to them. They didn't all get a copy to read over and over. It really just needed to make plain sense. Even if some things are questionable, wouldn't it also stand to reason that it would be better for us to err on the

side of caution, in an attempt to do the right thing, than to overlook/ignore what the Word says; which would surely result in our doing the wrong? Yet, that's exactly what we see happening all around us.

Isn't it, yet again, a bit paradoxical that we can come to faith in Jesus with the simplicity and trust of a child, but then from that point on we require professorial, rabbinical, and institutional think tanks, assembled to autopsy the Scriptures, to conclude for us the real meanings of 'do' and 'don't do'? Do we need them? Yes. But can they walk our walk for us? No! Is the fullness of the Scriptures beyond our individual understanding? Yes, because they reflect an omniscient God. Yet understanding has to be attainable, or the Bible becomes a prejudiced, exclusive and elitist manual. It has even been suggested that a very complicated, logarithmic software program is required to deduce its hidden treasures. To that I holler, "GARBAGE!" For that would pretty much put anyone but Einstein and Stephen Hawking-types out of contention for salvation.

I believe that all believers can learn, by the Spirit, to comprehend Scripture enough to be empowered to live uprightly, and to reflect our Redeemer; and yet it doesn't have to be the grueling discipline many of us think that it is. God's words are not only for the PhD's and for ThD's among us, to read and regurgitate back to us in a "dumbed down" format. The same Spirit that endued Solomon with great wisdom is the same one that indwells us. He never had a Pentium® processor at his disposal, or even a *Strong's Concordance*. Some of that gift must be accessible to us also.

The first thing we have to do is change our attitudes toward this Book of Books.

You Can Do It!

For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

He (Moses) said to them, "Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, *even* all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess." (Deuteronomy 32:46 & 47)

Somewhere along the line we went from, "You can understand and do!" to "You must have a highly trained graduate, of a most prestigious university, interpret the imbedded coding and reduce it to

mush, so that you can sip it through a straw.” Even worse, the more common message is now, “You can’t do!” Oh really! Tell that to God! Who’s lying here? What can’t you do...not murder, rape, or steal? What then? You can’t avoid yeast for a week, or help your enemy’s donkey out of a pit? What a lovely message the enemy is preaching today: “You can’t do it, so don’t bother trying.” Talk about ear tickling. He either set before us that day a blessing and a curse, or a curse and a curse (Deut. 11:26). He either gave us the choice between life and death, or death and death. Which is it? Oh, that’s right. That message wasn’t for us.

Children of the Father, you most certainly CAN do it, and it would behoove you to endeavor diligently to do so. You CAN live holy lives, pleasing and acceptable to the Lord. It is the *how* and *what* questions, not the *whether* variety, that we need to be answering first. We can obey, because we should obey, because we want to obey, because we love Him—because if we don’t, we’ll die. “The soul that sins...dies!” Loving God with everything within you is not only a principle, but also obedience to a command. Will we blow it? Of course we will. Will we fall short of perfection? That had already been considered from the beginning of time. We can do it. We just can’t do it perfectly. Just because we make a mistake does not mean we should throw our hands into the air and declare, “Forget it! I can’t do it. I quit trying!”

That kind of attitude won’t get you very far in this physical world, and it won’t get you far in the Kingdom either. It is an ignoble, immature, and pseudo-spiritual cop-out at best. Yes, we must depend fully upon our Lord for our salvation, as well as the strength, and wisdom, and power to overcome our circumstances. If we surrender ourselves to our own incompetence, we are in actuality attributing incompetence to Him, to work in us and through us. That is why we can’t give up.

Compounded with the “You can’t *do*” message, has been the “You can’t *understand*” message. Together, they are a recipe for disaster. What really bothers me is that similar to the government’s educational system, much of today’s topical preaching is getting more and more watered down—creeping along the ground in an effort to find a low, common denominator in which to pool. It lies to us about our ability to maturity instead of keeping the bar high, in order to cause us to have to reach. What if we treated Olympic events that way? If the committee noticed there were fewer who could qualify that given year, should they drop the high jump about a foot and see how things go?

After listening to probably thousands of assorted messages, by various ministers from differing backgrounds, and having spoken to several that have confirmed this fact, I know that many are strategically teaching on a third grade level—for fear the average blocked ear won’t be able to handle the loftiness of the wisdom of Scripture (as they interpret

it), causing the ear to leave. I know first-hand that a commonly taught principle in Bible School is, “As soon as you say something in Greek or Hebrew, you’ll lose them.”

If I were you, I wouldn’t consider any lone statement, enough to stake a claim on either, so look at the living evidences. Look at the overall maturity and quality of the fruit being harvested by the modern church growers. People are getting picked before they’re ripe...and then they rot. Fruit needs nourishment, and water. Would it be that much of a shame if someone didn’t instantly and fully understand a pastor’s teaching, requiring them to ask for further explanation? Didn’t we learn to do that in kindergarten? They might have to find someone to elaborate for them, or struggle a bit to get it figured out. So what! Once they do, I’ll bet the meal would stick to their ribs better than if it was day old, spoon-fed, gruel.

Pastors and teachers, you need to start demanding (expecting) more of His (not your) little lambs. This may sound insensitive, but if they don’t want to learn, and you can’t encourage them to, that is not on you! Let them go find a non-teaching church to play “spiritual” in. You leave the flock to recover a sheep, not retain a sheep to sacrifice the flock.

When your physical offspring come to you as children struggling to grasp a concept, do you look at them with sad eyes and tell them, “Sorry, you’re just not up to my caliber,” then neglect them for their ignorance. Of course not! You carefully teach just a bit beyond their understanding, and if you do it right, they learn how to learn, and ask even more questions. A significant reason the average congregant does not know the Word is because its treasures are often kept buried by the very ones they anticipate receiving help digging from. How is it kept buried? When you teach your people that they need you to intellectually intercede on their behalf, and when you teach them not to obey what they do learn, because they can’t! By your doing so, it results in their concluding on their own that they are not competent, so why bother?

A Call to Shepherds If the Staff Fits...

Orators of the gospel, let not these verses be speaking of you:

As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely forasmuch as My sheep became a prey, and My sheep became food to all the beasts of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did My shepherds search for My sheep, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not My sheep. (Ezekiel 34:8)

Wail, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves in the dust, ye leaders of the flock; for the days of your slaughter are fully come, and I will break you in pieces, and ye shall fall like a precious vessel. (Jeremiah 25:34)

You teacher/preachers need to stop leafing through your old collegiate notes and looking for what you think the little people can handle, and keeping the rest for yourselves. The only reason you know anything at all is because you were privileged enough to have *learned* it from someone who *learned* it before you! You weren't born with it. So give it back. Unless of course, your notes were wrong, or you've run your course. It's not as if you have anything truly new.

That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, thus says the Lord GOD, Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat *sheep* without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. (Ezekiel 34:2-5)

Are you afraid that if you preach at a level respecting your flock's ability, they might learn what you know and you won't be needed anymore? Have you run out of material because you are too busy doing 'stuff' that you were not called to do, and have no real time to "study thy *own* self" approved anymore? Are you afraid people will mature so much, that they won't need your council? If you are responsible for spiritually nurturing adults, stop teaching them like they're learning disabled. They can take it!

Jeremiah 3:15, "...and I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

This is what is needed! If you do not have His heart, and/or you are not capable of feeding His sheep, lay down your staff. That's honorable. You're holding back the fullness of His Word, and/or your lack of humility is dumbing down and sickening the flock. You are fulfilling the Great Omission. If this staff doesn't fit you, bless the Lord! But if it does, let Jeremiah's warning to you strike at your hearts and potentially spare you from painful correction. Your job is to bring *His* flock into green pastures...SO THEY CAN EAT! If your *Purpose Driven* Churches are doing something other than spreading the entire gospel, which includes teaching submission to His voice, then you'd better

consider revising your mission statement.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:12 & 14)

Discernment is exactly what we all need, now more than ever. Don't you want your people to have this capability? Then wean your people off your breast and feed them meat so they can develop it! It is not the instructions of God spoken to man that are overly complicated and require systematic theology to comprehend. It is the words spoken by man, on behalf of God, which are so confusing. God says, "Don't steal from your neighbor!" We come along and ask, "What exactly can't be stolen? Who is my neighbor? What exactly is the punishment for that? Will I lose my salvation if I do? Must I confess what I've done? Who is qualified to hear my confession? Do I need a priest? How much time do I have before a confession is invalid? How many times can I expect to be forgiven before I run out of mercy?" The words God spoke are pretty easy to understand. His voice is the one we need to clearly hear and obey, not Wesley's or Calvin's. I believe they have something to offer, but I am not in a covenant relationship with either of them.

I was speaking with a close friend, a contemporary pastor, and he shared with me his acknowledgement that, "the weak area of his church was in its Bible teaching." That struck a chord with me that forever resonates. Churches may have all the "cutting edge" technologies, modern looks and feel, even great numbers and programs, but until the church prioritizes teaching the fullness of His Word as primary, it will forever fall dearly short of His plan. Do you really prefer favoring the attendance numbers, over fearing the potential churn rate?

Pastors/teachers, help your people believe in their capacity to learn, hear (obey), by teaching solid (deeper) truths that are co-witnessed by Scripture and the Spirit, and stop instilling in them that they can't understand (or obey), by not. Of course you should have a new believer's class...a long one. That only stands to reason. Just stop preaching to your whole congregation as if it's one, big "hold on to the faith" pep rally, week after week. The real reason you feel you have to is because the faith you're professing is shaky, which means the faith you're possessing is also.

Your new believer's class is truly where you have the opportunity to improve the next church generation. Teach them the basics, like: how to use a lexicon, how to properly study and interpret Scripture, who they are in the Kingdom, what discipleship is, what sin is, our obligations as children of the Most High, how to actually carry a cross versus just

wearing one, etc. Maybe with true understanding, we will reduce relapsing into the world.

A Warning to Sheep

A popular catch phrase within the church is, “I am not getting fed.” That may be true, but it may also be your own fault. Sheep can be led to green pasture, but they can’t be made to eat! Your pastor/teacher’s duty is to serve you a healthy portion, it is not to force feed you.

If you are fellowshipping in a local body of believers, no matter how impressive the edifice, excellent the child-care, or good the pot-luck food, and they are not teaching you God’s Word, all of it, at a challenging and enriching level (taking you out to pasture), you seriously need to consider finding a new family and shepherd/s. First, though, for the sake of a clear conscience, you should seek to know why there is this problem.

If they tell you it’s because in their experience, people don’t want to hear it, or that much of it is not “relevant”, then you do need to run. That kind of thinking doesn’t come from a competent leader who knows what people need (not want), and probably has nothing left to give. If the teacher’s heart is in the right place, and realizes the weakness, and has tried previously to elevate the content with some resistance, then maybe you should help. Maybe you should start a home study group or mid-week class and stoke the flames.

The Human Factor

Have you ever wondered why it appears that sometimes the Bible seems to be saying something so clearly, but yet it’s not something your leaders believe? Or, vice-versa; it says something different about how to handle something, than the way it’s done? Do you ever think to yourself that you seem to understand the text just fine, but you scratch your head and second-guess yourself because of the contradictory nature of your interpretation, when held against mainstream practices? “But...but...oh well. I guess I just must be missing something, and who am I to argue with the status quo.”

What is discernment for anyway, if not also to help *you* and *I* understand His instructions? There is not a past or present citizen of God’s kingdom who has not had to rely on the Spirit for guidance. That doesn’t mean we always do though. People will lay claim to having been led by the Spirit, and then say or teach something that is completely wrong. We are often far too quick to give credit to our personal interpretation as being “Spirit led”. None of us are above that possibility. Torah does teach that we need at least two or three who agree to establish

a matter (Exodus 23:7). So what are we to do? If highly intelligent and studied people see vastly different things within the same Scriptures, and have debated them since their inception, is it reasonable to believe that we, as average laity, have any hope of getting to the Truth?

Well, the answer is...maybe; and in many cases...sometimes. Here's why though:

1.) We are either too busy or too lazy to study. I'm assuming most readers of this book will be American, so that says a lot. We like to have our coffee weak. We need the air temperature in our churches to be seventy-four degrees, plus or minus two. We think everyone should bathe, dress, and drive as we do. All this is true (ha-ha), but the biggest thing we have against us is our belief that everyone should think as we do. The problem is nobody who wrote any of the Scriptures did any of those things, especially the think part.

2.) We are creatures of habit. That's more than a procedural issue. We just don't like to rock the boat much when it comes to traditional thinking. Claiming the world was round, could once have gotten you killed.

3.) We are intellectually proud and spiritually arrogant. It's our way or the highway from a denominational perspective.

4.) God is Spirit. We are flesh that wants to be like God.

5.) We like to please that flesh, so we interpret Scripture through lenses with pleasing and accommodating color tones.

6.) Every translated Bible, and definitely every commentary we read is influenced by someone's opinion.

7.) Did I mention we are humans? That's clearly our biggest problem.

Unfortunately, that gives us a fairly narrow window of opportunity to get things right. Yet we must work with what we have, mustn't we? So, the logical solution is to purpose in ourselves the willful intent to compensate for these problems. Here are some ways to do that:

1.) Get off our high horse! Learn how other people think, and how they used to think. What was/is the Hebrew mindset? What was/is the Greek? Learn some basic Bible language comprehension. Or, at least familiarize yourself with, and become comfortable using, linguistic aids such as lexicons and dictionaries.

2.) *Practical:* Create new habits. Be willing to try new things. Volunteer for different ministry positions. *Analytical:* Ask questions regarding your church's history and faith practices. Don't accept being a spiritual simpleton. Generate unfamiliar thought by reading material

outside your normal scope. Leave behind your *Left Behind* and try works that are more educational.

3.) There will be no denomination in the Kingdom of God. It's one thing to find a group of believers that think the way you do; it's another thing to be in a group who tells you what to think. Find a helpful study group. And feel free to question. Be no man's mental slave.

4.) Be humble enough to always be teachable, and possibly wrong.

5.) Desire Truth at any and all cost—even if that results in something challenging and superseding a previous understanding. Sometimes the truth is stinging and scary; but only at first, and never forever.

6.) Go Literal! As best as you can, learn to study the Scriptures by referring to the original languages as much as possible. The further you drift from them, as easy as some translations may be to read, what you are reading becomes more influenced by some other group's opinion. Perform a little background study on translations. Get several and compare them. Observe the discrepancies and variances, and work to explain them. Discover who wrote them, when, using what original manuscripts, and for what purpose? As far as commentaries go, sure they help. Just keep in mind that a commentary is an educated persuasion. What is the background of this thinker? Do they have an agenda? To be blatant, if you won't do word studies, you will not mature in your understanding.

7.) We have the Spirit, whose current obligation and delight is to council, comfort, teach, and write God's Word on our hearts. Beg Him, plead with Him to guide you into all Truth. Then, when He does, don't ignore (reject) Him by preferring only interpretations that please your flesh.

8.) Identify and embrace the difference between doctrine (tradition) and actual Scripture. Many would like to think they're one in the same, but they're not. Often times, doctrine is a well-stated argument for why we should not take the Scriptures at face value. Remember, there was one point in history that the doctrine of men was responsible for blocking our access to the Scriptures of God.

What you do with what you know is important. But what's more important is knowing that what you do is right. Discipleship has no room for complacency! Ignorance is not bliss! A man can grab a shovel, with hopes to dig a well to rescue his drought-plagued village. He may relentlessly and ambitiously dig with great aspiration, but if He does so right next to yesterday's dry hole, he is but a valiant fool.

Blindness is Not a Virtue!

I hope you do see things clearly. If you go to a church, Synagogue, or fellowship and you think it's operating perfectly, I would love for you to send me the address because I'll publish a list called, "Heaven is Here: _____!" Who really goes to the First Church of Utopia? That's not what I'm telling you to search for.

"But Love covers a multitude of sins, right? No place is perfect." True, but the "sins" that should be being overlooked are: the wrong chord struck by the pianist, or the papers falling off the podium, or Miss Billwulweaver's heel breaking off as she's dancing in praise, or the temperature being a little too warm or a little too cold. Not the fact that while the minister is speaking, the worship leader is simultaneously "speaking in tongues", through the loudspeaker, without interpretation. Or, that excessive amounts of your offerings are being sent all over the world for foreign missions (and being spent on local materialism), while there are sick people who can't afford their medications right in your own congregations. Or the bishop, who is secretly seeing a local parish's secretary, who knows what her priest is doing with little Johnny, and keeps quiet. Let's not forget the denominations that embrace homosexuality into the anti-ministry. These sins are not meant to be covered up. Some are meant to be exposed, rejected, and corrected! There *is* therefore condemnation for those things which are *not* done in Christ! The adverse must also be true. (Rom 8:1)

If we are not willing to acknowledge these blatant errors, how can we expect to fix the little, doctrinal differences we have? Maybe, if we could get our churches in order, we could alleviate the bottle-neck of extraneous issues that clog our souls up, and don't allow us to flourish in the Word. Since it is hardly going to get better until His return (come quickly!), and since we will not be able to blame our life's actions on anyone else at our Judicial Assessment, we are just going to have to get spiritually fit however we can.

It's one thing to read the Bible; it's another to pay attention to it. Did you recognize the true sins listed in that prior paragraph? Do you know that's because you were hearing the Witness of Truth's voice, echoing off the mountain, resonating into the future and onto the pages of your heart? Actually, you have probably heard it plenty of times, for a variety of concerns; but maybe you didn't have the wherewithal to answer, "Yes, my Lord. I hear!"

Instead, we go to see the prophet and prophetic teams that arrive into town—the ones that have no accountability for what they say—who can just pop into our lives, mesmerize us, and take off as quick. We go to "miracle" crusades because we need some man to tell us what

the Bible says on healing (the man with no professionally documented cases of a miraculous healing), and how big a sacrifice offering we need to give, instead of just reading it for ourselves. How about the revival that's coming next month, from the twelfth to the nineteenth? I'll bet that if you fast that week, and attend every service, you'll hear His voice for sure! But seriously, do you really expect Him to tell you something differing from what He's already been saying for the past six thousand years?

As I imagine you're aware, much of Paul's writings can be easily twisted to one's desired effect. Sadly, this reality is largely responsible for many of our intra-church, factional problems. Unfortunately, those complications are not isolated to intra-church, as they have done their share of damage to the Israel/Christian relationship. After having just taken you through an excursive admonishment on the seriousness of the teaching ministry, we are ready to move forward into even weightier matters, and into the heart of this chapter.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the author spends some time reflecting on the new covenant, as prophesied by Jeremiah, but most have read this through a dark glass because of traditional oversight and bias. I implore you...pay very close attention to this next section. It is complex, and the devil is very much in the details. If you need to read it several times before you are secure in it, do so. To just acquiesce to confusion will be problematic, and a shame. If you can conquer this, prepare to soar.

The New and Improved Covenant

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a **better** covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. (7) For **if** that first *covenant* had been faultless, **there would have been no occasion sought for a second.** (8) For finding fault **with them**, He says, 'BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; (9) **NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE** IN MY COVENANT', AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. (10) 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 MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. (11) AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. (12) FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.' (13) When He said, 'A new covenant,'

He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is **becoming** obsolete and **growing** old is **ready** to disappear. (Hebrews 8:6)

Did you just read that right? Hold on. The first covenant could have possibly been adequate? And this new covenant, the one we are apparently participants in, “is *becoming* obsolete and is *ready* to disappear”? That can’t be right! It must mean the *Old* one is “becoming obsolete”. But that can’t be right either, because that would mean the old covenant had/has not yet fully disappeared. But that can’t be right, because that would mean there are two covenants operating simultaneously. What a covenundrum!

And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee **throughout** their generations for an **everlasting** covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. And God said: Nay, but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an **everlasting** covenant for his seed after him. (Genesis 17:7 & 9)

And He established it unto Jacob for a statute, to Israel for an **everlasting** covenant. (1st Chronicles 16:17)

I let that sound a bit confusing on purpose, so I can show you how easy it is to take some Scripture and send it in two different directions. This is especially capable of happening when it is taken out of context, or when the interpretation conflicts with Scripture given elsewhere. Most of us have all read this and been told, or assumed, Paul was reminding us the old covenant was history, and not in the sense of time.

First of all, no one knows who wrote the book of Hebrews, and it was very likely not Paul. Most scholars agree that the writing style and Greek construction does not reflect his. But even if it was Paul, he sure knew how to confuse an issue (as he was already renowned for, even in his own day; e.g. 2nd Peter 3:16). And second, it seems that one minute a covenant is everlasting, and the next, in Hebrews, it’s obsolete. What singular, “first” covenant is being spoken of anyway? There are several covenants in Scripture, and the first was made with Adam. You obviously have to read this a little more carefully to get to what’s really being said.

Jesus is the mediator of the, “...better covenant built on better promises.” I have absolutely no problem with that. However, “better” does not necessitate *entirely different*. When I read this, being the slightly inquisitive person that I am, I am inclined to ask myself, “What though, exactly are the terms of this better covenant?” Every covenant in Scripture given previously laid out some terms. They were either, “If you

do this, I'll do that." Or they were, "If you don't do this, I'll do that." Or the covenant was simply, "This is what I AM going to do."

The covenants with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David are clearly stated, and as they continue to develop from generation to generation, more and more revelation as to the details of the redemptive plan are discovered. There are other covenants as well; covenants of salt and of peace. We'll not go into those, as they are off-topic for now, but I brought them up for the purpose of further establishing that we can't lump the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures into a singular, contiguous covenant package.

Then, following Jacob, comes the Lord and Moses together, who declare the continuing covenants with even more detail regarding both the stipulations and the promises. As Moses re-teaches Torah again in Deuteronomy to that next generation, even more detail is given. Was it this proclamation that remained intact, until Jesus came along and trashed it; or was it all of them, including the Ten Words, that were cancelled? Did Jesus, in all His actual, infinite wisdom forget to tell us, and left this most crucial detail up to an anonymous author to do it? Strangely, the first time we hear the phrase "new covenant" from Jesus Himself is at His last Passover meal, and all He says about it is that it exists, and that His body is what will be the 'b'rit' (the cutting), and that His blood will be poured out for the remission of sin. How can there be such silence over such an incredibly weighty topic?

Looking throughout the transcribed teachings of the Master's direct words, we find any number of allusions and referrals to events that correspond with aspects of the new covenant, as seen in Jeremiah. Yet, He personally is curiously silent about the particulars of how His forthcoming death was going to affect the system of *worship* Israel had always known. We are able to gather that He would be the first and only atonement offering that was eternally acceptable, with both retroactive and perpetual qualities, more from external commentary than from Jesus Himself. Have you ever noticed that? To me, that just seems odd. Why would Jesus not plainly come out and say, "I am replacing the entire sacrificial system" or, "I am terminating the Levitical system as the new High Priest"? Jesus's atonement is most definitely a very great work, but where and what are the other aspects of this *new* covenant? Let's begin by examining the phrase itself.

Any lawyer will tell you that a covenant is an agreement between two or more parties, and that the terms of the agreement must be clearly specified in advance. Really, what kind of incredibly important, life-altering contract would you sign without reading the stipulations? Another thing any lawyer would tell you is that any time the slightest adjustment is made to an existing contract, a new draft should be drawn up; or, at the

least, adjustments need to be signed off by both parties. A contract with an amendment would be considered a revision. Also, no single party can make an adjustment after the document has been signed, without the other's acknowledgment and/or consent, depending on how it's written. That means that an enhanced version of a previous covenant can retain any given amount of the original and be called "New" or "Better".

In the Hebrew, the word for 'new' is: Chadash (H2319). This word has some controversy associated with it in relation to this very topic, because of the implications inherent with Strong's secondary meaning of: repaired, renewed or restored (H2318). Although it would be advantageous for me to claim that alternate definition, I am going to take the more critical approach and build this exposition on the primary, which is simply: "a new, fresh thing".

What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, **does not invalidate a covenant** previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. (Galatians 3:17)

Yet we are mighty quick to presume a future one does? God's covenants are never anything less than eternal. Not one has He ever reneged on. We're the ones who do!

Let's look at the details of this new covenant. What are the obvious differences? There are, depending on your perspective, about seven major components. For the sake of this current discussion, we will be focusing on five. Let's start with the first three:

1. We have a new mediator; a Great High Priest, in Jesus.
2. The Law (Torah) will be 'perfectly' put into our hearts and minds, more than just being written into stone, and further taught and encouraged by the priesthood. I say 'perfectly', because our obedience to it currently is far from automatic and instinctive. (Psalm 40:8, "I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.")
3. The Torah will be fully known by all, and there will be no more need to be taught it. The Spirit Himself will teach us.

It appears then that the "law-oriented" covenants are still active. The latest covenant is happening and will continue to progress until, "all has been fulfilled." The fullness of it is far from accomplished. The work of redemption was what was being referred to in the words, "It is finished!" not our need for Torah. It then also only stands to reason that a whole lot of the original terms of *the* covenant are still active (e.g. "You shall not lay with the wife of your neighbor." Leviticus 18:20), and therefore are independent of the Temple's or priesthood's state. I want

you to note that this law is located outside the list of Ten in Exodus 20—the reason being that there is no scripturally supportable teaching that the Ten Words are the stipulations of a separate (and depending who you talk to...eternal or temporary covenant) while all the other laws have been abolished.

The First Covenant

...not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:32)

One of the aspects noted here is that it will not be *like* the one made upon exiting Egypt. Technically, there is a separation with distinction between the covenant made at the departure (“the day He took them by the hand”) and the three made at Sinai (about three months later; Exodus 19:1). That difference is seen in the overall quantity and specifics of the information given. It is noteworthy because it is rarely considered, and does create a possible variance in how we could understand this portion of Hebrews.

When this difference is considered, it separates the Passover/Unleavened bread instruction found in Exodus 12, from all the rest of what is asked of us later. The main subject of Exodus 12 is the means of redemption through which the Hebrews would be rescued. The Passover Seder, which acts as the memorial meal for this event, was supposed to be perpetually observed by all generations. The instruction to *remember* the Passover was given at the same time as the instruction to *perform* it was; that first time it was done. It could then be understood that when they agreed to be rescued from slavery, via the blood of the Paschal lamb, they simultaneously agreed to perpetually require the blood of a future one for the same, exact thing.

Obviously, due to the importance of this matter, after that first generation of Israelites died off in the desert, the next generation was reminded of their obligation to this event (Deuteronomy 29), and all the rest of the “Ways of the LORD” (Jeremiah 5:4), by renewing the previous covenants (albeit with some additional commentary) just prior to their entering the Promised Land. Eventually, they reneged on this obligation and symbolically this was, in God’s eyes, from them taking their eyes off their need for a redeemer. Is there a bigger mistake than that?

If this is the context from which the author of Hebrews has chosen to derive his teaching, then the need for a new covenant is more specifically related to Jesus coming and being our Passover Lamb, whose

blood is perpetually applied to the doorposts of our hearts. And if that is true, it would even more clearly support the idea that the new covenant was not instituted to destroy the other, larger areas of instruction later given at Sinai.

If the “first” covenant with the Hebrews is not that isolated in content, and “the day He brought them out” is a figurative phrase encompassing the first couple months of their freedom, then what is being spoken of is found outlined in the book of Exodus, in chapters 20-24, and includes all the instructions that came down from the mountain. When carefully examined, you will find that this contract with the Hebrews was agreed to, both before and after the terms were given. It was originally agreed to without all the details (by faith), and later confirmed with complete, albeit at times progressive disclosure. This is exactly how we still come to faith today! We hear a little bit of the promise. We like what we hear. We accept Jesus as our Savior. We come as we are, and then as time goes on we learn more about our responsibilities (sanctification) as believers. If you put the cart before the horse, the Law would eventually kill you through a works-based salvation attempt.

(Before) Exodus 19:8, “All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do!’ And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.”

(After) Exodus 24:7, “Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’”

After their agreement to the terms, came the ratification in blood:

So 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 in accordance with all these words. (Exodus 24:8)

Sound familiar? Jesus revealed to us the meaning of the blood symbolism seen through the wine, during the Final Seder (Last Supper).

And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:27 & 28)

We must go back to look at something though. It all didn’t go down quite that smoothly. Moses did read the book of the covenant to them; the same one they had agreed to in advance to obey, and re-agreed to. Moses then went back up the mountain for a forty day revelation, and

upon completion received an honorary degree in Tabernacle engineering. What happened while He was up there? Certain people, assisted by the future High Priest himself, Aaron, had already broken the covenant they made by breaking the second commandment.

The result was a severe chastisement. The merciful Elohiym that had just delivered them gave them an accelerated education on taking Him and His words seriously. The Lord then called Moses back up the mountain, and did something that is rarely recognized. He renewed the covenant. He re-inscribed the stone tablets and sent Moses back down to institute the new theocracy and society of Israel. God didn't change the stipulations of this second chance, *renewed* covenant at all. The people broke the covenant, by disobeying the covenant terms. Keeping this in mind, we are ready to look back at Jeremiah's new covenant, as mirrored in Hebrews, looking for the part where it tells us what the problem with the earlier instructions in righteousness were.

8:7, "For if that *first covenant* had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second."

8:8, "For finding fault with *them*..."

Huh, that's strange. I've always been taught the Law was the problem. Actually, it *appears* to be the 'covenant' that had a problem. And what's even stranger is that God would make a faulty covenant. I want you to think very carefully here because if that's true, God really did rescue the Hebrews, to create a nation of them, to damn them in the desert. I told you this wasn't going to be your average book.

What is the fault mentioned here then? One clue is seen in the fact that the word 'covenant' in verses seven and thirteen is in italics. Why? Because there is no 'diatheke' in the original text, following the word *first*. It could easily be assumed, which is the point of the *italics*, that the covenant is what's being considered here. Maybe there is another possibility. And if so, what *first* is in question?

Hebrews 7:28a, "For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak..."

Hebrews 8:1, "Now the main point in what has been said *is this*: we have such a high priest."

Perhaps it is the priesthood being discussed here, and the *first* priesthood was inadequate to affect the heart of man.

We have a constitution and a government, but they are both powerless to make us love America, or its leaders. It goes on to say that the fault was, "found *in them*!" Have you ever noticed that? Is the "*them*"

speaking in reference to the House of Israel and the House of Judah? The “them” mentioned could be either the priesthood or the Israelites, but it is clearly not the covenant. The reason Jesus had to cut a new covenant was not because the perfect Law failed! It couldn’t fail at something it was never intended to do:

Hebrews 7:19a, “for the Law made nothing perfect...”

What was weak in the Law was our flesh! Paul understood this, and agreed with it in Romans 8:3:

“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh...”

Neither the Torah nor His covenants are capable of failing! The LORD’s instructions for His people to live righteously are not faulty. We are! We are the fault! Contrary to modern, traditional thought:

Psalms 19:7, “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”

So then, how can something He made perfect be “growing old”? Isn’t *growing* a present, continuous tense verb? Considering the letter to the Hebrews was written after the atoning blood of Yeshua was poured out, and since we as believers are participants in the new covenant now, how could the author be saying that the new covenant is growing old, or *becoming* obsolete? This text is truly a challenging one to understand, and can’t be if read without focused intent.

The letter to the Hebrews has always been understood to contain difficult material, which is ultimately the reason it was one of the last books to get into various canons. There are some who propose it should never have gotten in at all, due to some of these very issues. I’ll not make that call, but I will confess there are problematic issues that, although great strides have been made to clarify them, most expositors are not on the same page. But if it is to be reconciled, it must be done in light of all the rest of Scripture, both Hebrew and Greek. Perhaps we don’t always know the original intent of the author. Perhaps we can only come real close. In order to attempt to, we may have to think outside the dogmatic box. It’s a lot easier to just pretend things are not what they are, and not deal with them, but I’m not going to let you get away with that here.

For something that was made perfect by God, to then become obsolescent, requires a little contemplation to get a handle on. It can only

be understood with accurate interpretation and context. It is not without precedent, however. Can you think of any examples of things God originally made perfect, that did not remain as such? Sure you can. And aren't we expecting those things to one day be restored again? Keep this line of reasoning in mind as we consider the "better" covenant. If we are going to endeavor to reconcile this passage with other areas of Scripture, we are first going to have to accept the fact that if we can't, then it is not true. So let's try hard, shall we?

Now, what if this text is actually speaking of the *first* covenant, and not the *first* priesthood? Although they are different, because they are so intertwined, thematically, in the end, we will obtain the same result.

Let's imagine you are a homebuyer. You find a house that you desperately want, but you can't quite afford it. You go to your bank and negotiate a hybrid promissory note that requires interest only payments for a ten year timeframe. You accept the terms of the mortgage, sign on the fifty or so dotted lines, and *voila!*—you are the owner of a new home. Nine years go by, and you start coming to the end of that term of your mortgage agreement. Let's say for the sake of argument, from about the ninth year on, a part of your contract is beginning to expire. But it is actually a fully in force, perfectly legal contract, up until the clock strikes twelve at the end of the thirtieth year. Let's try another angle.

You are part of a property investment group. There are ten of you. All of you pooled an equal amount of money together and purchased a speculative parcel of land, in hopes of it becoming a commercially desired plot someday. Amongst your group, you have an agreement which you all accepted, and drew into a contract, which states that every year on such and such a date you will all come together to discuss your investment, and the options that are currently available. The property is owned by the entire group, and that cannot change without a majority vote to sell. Your business agreement states that each and every year a vote to hold or sell must be taken. That is a term that expires and must be annually renewed. Those are examples of perfectly good and active, legal contracts between participants, which still have "growing old" characteristics. Let's call an agreement like that, "The Time of the Gentiles".

There is neither evidence, nor prophecy, anywhere else in all Scripture that suggests any of God's eternal covenants are not just that...eternal. That does not mean that certain terms cannot expire, or that adjustments can't be made; or, and this is where much of the confusion comes from, conditions need to be met. This would not be true however, without disclosure. If that's true (and I believe with absolute confidence that it is), none of the previous covenants were ever cancelled by a following one. The Noahic covenant was not cancelled by the

Abrahamic. The Abrahamic covenant was not cancelled by the Mosaic, and so forth (Galatians 3:17). So, a condition not being met by man, as set forth in the Mosaic covenant (the only conditional covenant given in Scripture), only invokes the “if you/then I” stipulations. It clearly does not cancel the entire covenant, because “they (Israel) did, and therefore He...” quite often happened, with apparent covenant retention.

Whether or not this new covenant is truly brand new, or simply another renewed and improved version, there is absolutely not one comment made by Jesus, or the Father, a prophet or apostle, that instructs us to consider any one of the previous covenants cancelled. To prove this, simply pick any one covenant, cancel it and consider the consequences. It would be nothing less than catastrophic. It would disrupt the whole flow of Scripture—hence our denominational nightmare, and doctrinal incongruence. I personally believe Jesus did “cut” a brand new covenant, through His death, framed around the one Israel had been party to for the previous fifteen hundred years. A fantastic, “praise the Lord” aspect of this new covenant, is found in its similarly unconditional nature.

So, why are we so quick to believe the Mosaic covenant has been put through the proverbial shredder? Why does it grate many of our nerves to think He still wants to guard our lives from pain and sorrow? Pure ignorance. We simply do not understand that the old covenant is only old when the reader cannot read Moses with eyes unveiled. It is old, when Yeshua is not seen in the Torah. It is old, when we have no desire to understand it, or submit ourselves to it, with a heart of love. It is old, when our hearts are hardened towards it. What is done away with in the new covenant is not Moses, it is the veil! Read it again:

But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ (16)...but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (2nd Corinthians 3:14 & 16)

So, in fact, what makes this old covenant, “...not like the one made with Israel, when they came out of Egypt,” is that Israel could break that one; and the new one, once fully engaged, they cannot. The first was conditional, the second is not. Which means that it is not fully engaged until the millennial reign is underway; and even then, it’s only for the glorified. The same “ministry of death and condemnation,” (to the lost), switches modes and becomes a “ministry of righteousness, and transforms us from glory to glory.” Again, let me remind you of the better promises we are considering:

1) The full capacity to be naturally obedient because the Torah is etched by His finger on our hearts of flesh, instead of on tablets of stone, which can be shattered (Ezekiel 11:19).

2) The ritual sacrifices would no longer be necessary because the Perfect Lamb would eventually be slain.

3) We would have a greater High Priest, who is in continual intercession for us at the throne of the Father.

4) The restoration of the land to Israel (Northern and Southern Tribes).

There is something else to see here; something of great significance. This covenant that is *growing* old (because not everyone is in perfect submission to it, or believes in Yeshua) was made with the House of Judah and the House of Israel (Hebrews 8:8). Notice now, this new covenant results with only a House of Israel (8:10). There is no church or religion mentioned. What is that all about?

Say to them, thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand. (Ezekiel 37:19)

5.) The fulfillment of this new covenant will also be seen in the joining of the two houses of Israel. Physical Israel and their fellow sojourners (metaphorically: believing Jews and believing non-Jews), will no longer function as two separate halves of the Kingdom.¹

So, we have ourselves a little issue here, don't we? The details of this new covenant don't appear to line up with our current spiritual state, religious ideology or national identity. And there is another discrepancy. Did you catch it? I planted it. Promise #2 is actually not mentioned at all, but it is often presumed. Actually, contrarily, just a little past the new covenant portion of Jeremiah 31 is the "Davidic line will always sit on the throne" portion of chapter thirty-three. Congruent with that prophecy is the "Levitical priesthood will offer sacrifices continually" portion. We say that Jesus will sit on the throne of David as King of Israel, but what about the sacrifices? Are they actually separable? You should go read it. The prophecy is sworn with the same faithfulness as night and day's continuance. Jesus's sacrifice certainly accomplished something; but apparently sacrifices are about more than just sin. Don't fret; we'll get into that too.

None of these "better promises" appear to demonstrate a complete eradication of any previous promises either. It is a troubling

paradox that the book of Hebrews is both a large foundation stone for the church's theology (which happens to be somewhat antinomian), and it is also very squarely built on traditional, Pharisaical thought. The way Hebrews was written shows us a primary intent of the author was to verify the preeminence of Christ—and rightfully so, when contrasted with an earthly high priest and earthly temple. But it should not be understood as doing so, at the expense of what else this same Christ said when acting as the Word of God, before His incarnation.

The book of Hebrews has other contextual issues which we will not discuss here. Studied individuals are very aware of them. I have no desire to pet that tiger. This is not the time or place for such an exposition. What I have chosen to do instead is draw optimistic conclusions about the writer's intentions, in order to explain certain inconsistencies which have been used to promote the cancelled covenant heresy. So let's move forward.

This portion of Jeremiah is the only reference in the Hebrew Scriptures to the new covenant. There is a portion of Ezekiel regarding the "heart of stone becoming a heart of flesh" which is definitely related, but it is not in the same covenantal structure, nor does it use the label. If this is all we have to go on, it is likewise what we have to base our doctrine on. There is then no doubt that the new covenant has only partially been fulfilled. Are you now beginning to contemplate the ramifications for this fact? Let me remind you again.

What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, **does not invalidate a covenant** previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. (Galatians 3:17)

The earlier and the latter covenants are still functioning; therefore, the "Old" cannot be so quickly shunned or disregarded. Remember, covenant and law are two different things, but the Mosaic covenant would not be a covenant without the Law to define its terms. The covenant is "We will do!" The Law is "what to do". And just like how *some* of that Law is not currently applicable, *some* of the new covenant is not yet visible. This makes perfect sense when you understand that we are continually, and have been from the very beginning, *entering* into it. We are just not there. This is the truest expression of progressive covenant theology!

Likewise, *covenant* and *testament* are also different things. They can both be contracts, but one is in force during the lives of the parties, while the other doesn't become active until a party dies. This latter type of contract is commonly known as a will. In the Greek, the word for covenant is the same one used for testament. This is why in differing

Bible translations the words ‘covenant’ and ‘testament’ are used interchangeably, in Hebrews chapter nine. However, their meanings are not so easily interchangeable. Here is a perfect example of our problem:

Hebrews 9:18, “Whereupon neither the first *testament* was dedicated without blood (KJV).”

Everybody knows blood doesn’t need to be shed for a will to be written. A closer examination of this ninth chapter of Hebrews shows a shift in topics right in mid-stream, from covenant to will, and back to covenant again. If you’re not careful, you’ll miss it. We know this because the author verifies his return to topic in vs. 20, which is being drawn from its original location in Exodus 24:8:

“saying, “THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU.””

Moses was not talking about a will there in Exodus. But clearly, the writer is here:

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid *only* when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. (Hebrews 9:16 & 17, NASU)

The NASU, staying true to its desired literary accuracy and consistency, inserts the word covenant. Obviously, in context, it makes no sense. Nowhere in Scripture has a man had to die to *create* a contract. Keeping all this in mind, we can now see how to make sense of this verse:

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Hebrews 9:15)

It appears that the author understood that Jesus’s death enabled a will to go into effect, where the inheritance is eternal life, for those who sinned prior to His death. The author is speaking of sins committed in the past tense. Then, as is clear by the rest of the chapter, he understands that this inheritance becomes available to all, as the new covenant has been instituted. A new covenant, yes; but not a new testament! Jesus is not going to have to die again, and we are already full heirs. The only semblance that can be made from this author’s wording comes if he is understood to be speaking with a degree of poetic license, because none of the previous covenants given to us are spoken of, or should be

understood as having been intended to be, will become active upon death. If they were, an awful lot of people have received their inheritances inappropriately, and still are. And what happens when that happens? People go prodigal!

What really disturbs me is the fact that the greater part of the church has allowed a very significant portion of its theology and ideology to be built upon this creative analogy, found in an obscure verse, in a very Hebraic letter. THERE IS NO “NEW” TESTAMENT, when understood in today’s contractual vernacular! Hence my use of the preferred terms: *Apostolic Scriptures* or *Greek Scriptures*. And yet, that’s what nearly every single Bible publisher has titled the latter quarter of its textual content. Some may consider this to be insignificant, but when considered in combination with the doctrinal errors associated with “New Testament” era, replacement theology, it is a very big deal. The Bible is one continuous story of redemption and revelation. The Gospels are *testimony* that Jesus is in fact the awaited Messiah. As much as some wish it to be true, it is not two books (one being “archaic”) inside one cover!

The book of Ephesians is often touted by Christian educators as being the book which expresses the new covenant, because it speaks in terms, and is arranged in a format, that allows for this suggestion. But you really have to stretch the intent of the letter. Regardless, if any Apostolic Scripture contradicts Moses, it would have been written by a false prophet and it must be rejected. Therefore, how we go about interpreting and understanding the Letter to the Ephesians must be done in consideration of that fact as well. Whatever the book, whoever the author, no humanly derived, covenantal teaching supersedes this:

When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, **in the latter days** you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you **nor forget the covenant** with **your fathers** which He swore to them. (Deuteronomy 4:30 & 31)

I hope you read that verse and let it sink in. What is the point of remembering a dead covenant?

We are commanded by Scripture to consider ourselves as having been with the Hebrews as they were delivered from Egypt.

When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What *do* the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments *mean* which the LORD our God commanded you? Then you shall say to your son: We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand.’ (Deuteronomy 6:20 & 21)

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:15)

Understanding that these verses were spoken to a mixed crowd of people, the majority of whom were born in the desert, or were just children upon leaving Egypt, let us do that!

We were rescued from slavery and given the hope of a “Promised Land” to look forward to. We (you and I), at some point, stood at the base of Mt. Sinai/Horeb and listened to the thundering of God’s voice as He began to declare the terms of a covenant. After receiving the Ten Words, we couldn’t handle His voice anymore and requested that Moses receive and deliver all other instruction to them himself. Eventually, they all heard them. And as shown previously, they accepted them. Therefore, by proxy, so did we. But what did we accept, and what was its purpose? You did know it was made with you too, didn’t you?

Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God, **and with those who are not with us here today.** (Deuteronomy 29:14 & 15)

Just Believe?

Here is its purpose and what we agreed to: Our Covenant.

See, I (Moses) have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So **keep and do them**, for that is **your wisdom and your understanding** in the sight of the **peoples who will hear** all these statutes and say, ‘surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a **god so near** to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that **has statutes and judgments as righteous** as this **whole law** which I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:5-8) (Original, life-style evangelism.)

But from there (the Promised Land) you will seek the LORD your God, **and you will find Him** if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. (Deuteronomy 4:29)

So you shall **keep** His **statutes** and His **commandments** which I am giving you today, **that it may go well with you and with your children after you**, and that **you may live long** on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time. (Deuteronomy 4:40)

You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. (Deuteronomy 4:2)

Notice, this is not soteriological (salvation-oriented) rhetoric here! The Hebrews agreed to do whatever God says, and that's exactly the same thing we agreed to do (or should have done) when we made our confession of faith and accepted the covenant of Love. This leads me to something else that has to be said.

The Fire Insurance Fallacy

You shepherds out there, whose desire it is to bring in the lost sheep, would you do those same lost sheep a big favor, and determine to tell them what they are actually doing when they walk up to your altars to "accept Jesus!" There are far too many, who are inadequately informed as they, "Call upon the name of the LORD to be saved"; as if that's all there is to it.

You need to teach people that they are entering in to a prenuptial agreement ("For they will be my people, and I will be their God."), and that there are some stipulations (like submission and faithfulness). I'm not suggesting you teach them every commandment there is before they pray the "wretched man that I am" prayer. That would be the undoing of the Acts Fifteen council's verdict, and would be counterproductive to the gospel. But don't lead them on into thinking there is no responsibility upon them, but to "believe". At least tell them they will need to "take up a cross and follow Him." (Do what He did.)

A sneaky, 'get-em-in', raise your numbers gospel is a disservice at the least. It's a future abortion at its worst. His people quickly need to learn that disobedience is as rotten fruit. People need to count the cost, so when they make the decision to invest, they'll not make an early withdrawal and have to pay the penalty. Where in the Scriptures is it taught that we are to make converts? What we should intend to do with those coming to faith is make disciples. One does come before the other, but how long should one remain under the title 'convert'... a week, maybe a month? I see no reason why there should ever be an instance where one coming to faith has not been informed of their essential obligations, prior to their confession of faith, with the exception of death bed ministry. (Which is generally a last ditch effort for hope's sake anyway.)

Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle *fire on My altar!* I am not pleased with you, says the LORD of hosts, nor will I accept an offering from you. (Malachi 1:10)

Apparently, going through the motions is just not good enough! "But I thought that there were no more requirements to our faith but

love? After all, love is the heart of the Torah, isn't it?" Uh huh...but how exactly do you express it? Who is the grand, exalted Pooh-Bah in each local fellowship that gets to dictate the definition of love for that group? Doesn't love also require discipline? Who gets to decide the appropriate action? With God, it's possible to love everyone, granted it might be hard. So why don't we let adult people marry as many children as they want? Jesus never taught we couldn't. What if someone defined love as exterminating abortion doctors? After all, they are murderers, and love would want all those little children to have a chance? Why can't we have sex with animals? Don't we *love* them? Sure, it *seems* wrong, but the Apostolic Scriptures don't specifically say not to! Maybe someone *thinks* it would be an expression of love to the Creator, to adorn His creation (a tree) with ribbons, and bake little cakes to put in their branches, and burn incense as a sweet smell to His nostrils. How much sarcasm must I use before I effectively make my point?

A scripturally undefined system of loving, yields an 'all emotions allowed' religion. A partially undefined system yields denominations. A homosexual person is capable of love, isn't he or she? So let's give them a collar and a pulpit shall we? Why not let pedophiles work in your nurseries? I'm sure they *feel* something they define as love for children. A fundamentalist, polygamist Mormon loves all of his wives. Some people really love the person they are living with, but are not married to. But is that the agape variety, or the eros? Left up to our own devices, we would never create our own Torah of Truth (Malachi 2:6). We would destroy each other in an unbridled game of survival of the fittest and best *feeling* religion.

Thankfully, God, in His providential care, has deemed it wise to give us, in written form, His prescribed way to love Him and to serve Him. It must be found though, from cover to cover. We don't need the Bible to tell us there is a God. We need a Bible to tell us what He's like, and what He expects of us personally. He has also given us His program to run a society in the best way possible, whilst under the curse of the fall. So, let's get back to the requirements.

If Jesus's personal sacrifice has done what other sin offerings couldn't, and through His death has taken upon Himself the sentence due all humanity, for our various forms of rebellion, we can consider those "Due upon Receipt" provisions, "Paid in Full!" But what are the other requirements of our spiritual constitution? How can we know what we are still obligated to? Well, I guess that takes us back to an earlier question. How hard is it to comprehend (obey) the Bible? And I will now add, are we as 21st Century believers, scattered abroad the world, capable of it?

Is it Worthy?

So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as *it is* today. It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us. (Deuteronomy 6:24 & 25)

Now there's a verse that could use to be preached on more often. Do you know why you don't hear that? Because it will mess with Joe preacher's cookie-cutter theology in a way that he's not prepared to deal with. Observing Torah is **good, always**, and will help us **survive**, and be accounted as **righteousness**. There are not two separate categories of *doing* righteousness: an old one for Jews and a new one for Christians. Neither is this suggesting that before Jesus's death, there was a works-based salvation program, as it is generally understood.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Philemon 4:8)

Running Torah through these filters it becomes a lot easier to conclude what is of value to us...all of Torah! Yes, there are things we are not to do, but from all of it is derived priceless knowledge and life-protecting wisdom. In some cases, Torah cannot be obeyed because there is no temple structure. In other cases, Torah cannot be obeyed because the Levitical priesthood is not presiding. You may be thinking, "But we are the new priesthood!" I am speaking in the literal, Aaronic, lineage-based sense that Moses was speaking of. Even though Israel was a "kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6)," not everyone was a Levite. Sometimes, the Torah cannot be fully obeyed because Israel has been scattered. Not all are residing in geographic Israel, and not all men are capable of going there at least three times a year.

So do we throw out the baby with the bathwater and say forget the rest if we can't keep some? Are we believers that the Lord could not foresee these problems? If we are to believe that, we should also ignore the fact that a Mercy Seat perpetually covered over the Law-containing ark.

Haven't you ever noticed that when a situation arose amongst the Israelites, for which protocol wasn't already clearly established in the Law, Moses would bring it before God, in the Tent of Meeting, and He would give instruction as to how to attend to it? An inheritance issue would arise—He would solve it (Numbers 27:1-11). A person couldn't attend Passover for some reason—God would set an alternate date for them

(Numbers 9:6-11). It's not just about the details of the letter. It's about our attitude towards it, and desire to follow it to the best of our ability. That should be our attitude as well. If we can do it, and we don't break Torah in an effort to follow Torah, then we should, especially if its teachings are: true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good report, excellent, and worthy of praise. Now I'm going to pull out the big guns. Theologians out there...Are you ready? Remember how I recently mentioned that we also accepted the covenant?

...that you may **enter into** the covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath which the LORD your God is making with you today, in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to **your fathers**, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now **not with you alone** am I making this covenant and this oath, but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with **those who are not with us** here today. (Deuteronomy 29:12-15)

Okay. What we have here is a portion of Scripture that anyone can clearly see is being given to both the current audience and to all of future Israel, as far into an indeterminable future as can be seen. Before you jump to the conclusion that when Moses said, "Those who are not with us," he was talking about the kids, and the women and such...

You stand today, all of you, before the LORD your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, *even* all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water. (Deuteronomy 29:10 & 11)

...apparently, he was not. Having clearly established that, let us now consider the fact that the following proclamation he was about to make was to be received by both the House of Jacob and those who attached themselves with it. Consider the weight of that reality as you contemplate further the legitimacy of Torah observance today, and as you read this:

So it shall be when (not if) all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind in all nations (not just Babylon) where the LORD your God has banished you, (2) and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, (3) then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. (4) If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. (5) The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your

fathers. (6) Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. (7) The LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. (8) And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. (Deuteronomy 30:1-8)

Let's break this down. Moses knew in advance, and declared to all present and future hearers, that at some time in the future they were going to break their obligations to the covenant they were **entering** into (29:14). This covenant then is renewed with every generation that hears it, and accepts the terms. We enter into this covenant when we come to faith!

When God's long-suffering had been adequately tested, scattering is exactly what happened. Whether you realize it or not, most all believers still are scattered. Even though we are not lost but are found, we still are not home yet. Now read verses two and three again. Remember, Moses is speaking to a future generation. This future people group, in the midst of their scattering (a curse), according to verse five, was going to be a multiple of the current one (which was more than a couple million—a blessing). I would feel comfortable in calculating the current body of believers as a multiple of that crowd. And they were expected to obey, even while in exile.

What did God have Moses declare was going to happen when that crowd found its way back to the land (yet unfulfilled)? God would circumcise their hearts (vs. 6). Isn't that "new covenant" terminology? Jeremiah spoke the same way in chapter four. So, after their hearts have become circumcised, what will happen because of this act? Verse eight tells us, "And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe **all** His commandments which I command you **today**." Looks like we've come full circle, doesn't it? Obedience is required both before and after circumcision! The commandments that were declared that day went far beyond the Ten only, confirming my position there is more we are accountable to. This future group, we of the new covenant, was prophesied here by Moses to begin returning to compliance just prior to the ingathering (vs. 2). Ezekiel is also in complete support of this concept, as seen in chapter 37:21-24.

Before your head starts spinning too fast, I feel that I must reiterate a critical point. Which of you were redeemed by a particular work you did? None of you were! (Ephesians 2:8 & 9) Therefore, it stands to reason that you are not un-redeemed by any particular work either. Non-redemption comes from non-faith. This is no different than it was/is for the Israelites. There was no *single* sacrifice that redeemed them (yet). Likewise, if they missed one, it didn't damn them either; for the annual sacrifice of the Red Heifer (Numbers 19) covered unacknowledged

disobedience for the year. But any Israelite, who thought they could transgress the Torah as much as they wanted, because the next Red Heifer would cover them was a fool and a lost soul. Any Christian who thinks they can transgress Torah all they want because of Jesus's once-for-all sacrifice is no less a fool. Let's take this a step further.

If the Israelites were delivered from Egypt and placed under a salvation-by-works based religious program, they were all damned from the moment they stepped off Egyptian soil. "For the righteous shall live by faith." If they were "saved by works" when the temple was not in operation, it sure would stink to be a firstborn male Israelite, since you were clearly damned at birth. For where was your half-shekel of redemption supposed to go now? Or, who could make the appropriate sacrifices on your behalf? What about the scattered Jews who lived after the Temple's destruction in 70 AD, but never heard the message of Messiah's coming? Just to illustrate how off our thinking has become, can you name one person in the Hebrew Scriptures who is described as having been given eternal life based on their obedience? I assure you; you cannot! No respected sage has ever taught a works-based redemptive program. They may have taught that access to the "world to come" was available through birthright, but never through obedience alone.

The reason that no one can judge your soul is because no one can judge your motivations. Likewise, your "good deeds" don't always prove your heart. No one knows how much Torah you can get away with disobeying, before you cross over to becoming a "Lawless" one. It should be safe to say though, that no son or daughter of the Lord would ever want to find out. It should be safe to say, except it's not true. Many Christian sects, even including Evangelical Protestants, have at times gone to great lengths to see how far they can veer from the written Torah, and still be grafted into the Torah Giver. Not only have they refused to accept much of Torah as relevant, but they have substituted God-spoken Torah with man-designed traditions, and sanctified them instead.

I believe that one's understanding of Torah will play a role in one's ramifications for disobedience (grace abounds), but consider these facts: We have far less excuse for disobedience than any other people group in history. We have more ancient manuscripts and linguistic knowledge than ever before. We have the written accounts of His disciplinary measures. We have the written descriptions of the blessings that are promised to the obedient. We have our Christ's teachings that elevated the requirements of Torah to even greater levels than what most Israelites ever knew (Matthew 5). And, we have modern history to give us valuable hind-sight into the atrocities of misinterpretation. So here is the big question. Do you study Torah and thereby become accountable to it, with the reward of doing so being greater levels of maturity, intimacy, and

perhaps the experience of:

1st John 3:22, “**Whatever we ask we receive** from Him, **because we keep** His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”

...and be considered this:

Now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be **Mine own treasure** from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine. (Exodus 19:5)

...or, do we play the fool and live an ignorant life, while basking in cheap grace; not considering that, “Everyone who does sin also does lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness (1st John 3:4).”

And if any one sin, and do any of the things which the LORD hath commanded not to be done, though he know it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity. (Leviticus 5:17)

May it never be!

Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and He shut up the heaven, so that there shall be no rain, and the ground shall not yield her fruit; and ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you. (Deuteronomy 11:16 & 17)

Does only the “Old God” of the Bible get angry? Some preach yes! The heresy of Marcion still appeals to us. If so, did He love Israel differently than He loves us now? I’m not suggesting there is no forgiveness, but the LORD does discipline those He loves. Why? Because He is looking for a spotless bride; the one spoken of in the book of Revelation.

And the dragon was enraged against the woman, and he went off to make war with the rest of her seed [*fig., offspring*], the ones **keeping the commandments of God** and having the **testimony** of Jesus (12:17).

And in like context...

But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:8 & 11)

Discipline before established boundaries is abuse! The whole point of Torah is to keep us on the narrow path that leads to life. You know...the one that few find. It will keep you from turning to the right or left, and from going off and worshiping other gods. Tell me then, what is the flaw in that? I know if you are reading this book as a believer, your heart is being challenged. I know, because I already believe this, and every time I think about it, I still am stirred as well. We want to be considered obedient children. The Spirit encourages that. If there is a chance I am walking around in willful disobedience without knowing it (paradoxical, but true), I want to seek out this possibility and take it to whatever conclusion I am led to. That is all I am asking you to do.

Here is another means to know how to determine accurate interpretation. When the Lord says something, and anyone else seems to say something that contradicts, the Lord always wins. Keep in mind though, just because the Lord justified the annihilation of a pagan people four thousand years ago, does not mean we are still under Joshua's leadership to do it today. All interpretive teaching must be held up against the light of context. When this is remembered, the difficult passages of the Apostolic Scriptures also become much clearer. It is when we have to jump through hurdles to make them *not* line up with Torah, that we are likely going off into error.

What is left then of the Torah for us to obey? Much! And considering the wonderful promises for obedience, I would get excited about the new possibilities. Wouldn't you like to have new found confidence that you are walking in obedience? If I can show you where to begin, and have it not be a yolk you cannot bear, wouldn't you want all you can get? I am going to answer for you by faith, and give that a resounding, yes! After all, you don't really think intimacy and sanctification comes without some personal sacrifice.

In case you have begun to panic, and have reverted to thinking that the Law requires perfection, slow down and begin to think with a renewed mind. The Laws of Moses are not just a bunch of "don'ts", with death breathing down your neck at every turn. I realize most of us have been made to believe like that. Whether it's the blood of bulls and goats, or the blood of Jesus, blood is always necessary for the propitiation of sin. Nothing new there! What needs to be new though is a clearer understanding within the believing community, that neither sanctification nor atonement is the same as forgiveness.

You have to look past the rust colored patina of the iron rod, to see His loving discipline. The Law never expected your perfect abidance in this life. It just demands it, and anticipates it in the next. Several of those many different sacrifices were the back-up plan, (not in the sense of afterthought), instituted to ceremonially cleanse the flesh, to give you

access to the House of God, where you would there seek your true forgiveness. If you think you have any more license to transgress now, than you did back then, you have completely misunderstood the cross/grace relationship. Haven't you ever wondered why there will be altar service again, and during the Millennial Reign no less.

I will also take some of them for priests *and* for Levites, says the LORD. (Isaiah 66:21)

In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'HOLY TO THE LORD.' And the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the bowls before the altar. Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day. (Zechariah 14:20 & 21)

Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples. The Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, 'Yet *others* I will gather to them, to those *already* gathered.' (Isaiah 56:7 & 8)

Maybe you don't believe that. That's not hard to understand; because to most, the idea of further sacrifices seems irrational and purposeless. Well, of course it does, when we don't fully grasp the program. However, they will no longer be about transgression. Why do you think the book of Acts clearly shows the Apostles continuing in Temple worship long after Jesus's ascension? Why did Paul still speak positively of the Temple service, as a benefit of being a Jew? (Romans 9:4). There is such a lack of understanding. It has been prohibiting accurate doctrinal construction for far too long now. This is an elementary thing, as the writer of Hebrews would call it. And just as the believers in that day were challenged for not going beyond the basics, so do we (two thousand years later) need to heed the same, corrective voice.

Remember my referral to the similarity between Adam's and Jesus's tests in chapter two? When Jesus was "reminded" of His power to transform a rock into bread, what was His response? It was, "Man cannot live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God's mouth." Then He demonstrated for us this truth, by countering the subsequent tests with more statements found in the Hebrew Scriptures. I have a few fundamental questions for you. Where were God's words found at that time? Were they written down somewhere? Was Jesus using sloppy grammar when He chose the word "every" regarding how much we should listen to? Wasn't the benefit of obeying God's *every* word: life, blessing, and protection?

Answering some earlier questions, the reason Jesus didn't tell us He cancelled all the sacrifices and priesthood, is simply because...He didn't! Remember, He is a priest in the heavenly tabernacle, in the order of Melchizedek. If He was a priest on Earth, He would not be a Kohen (Hebrews 8:4). Why? Because He was not a Levite. If He cancelled the entire priesthood model forever, it would mean He also cancelled the kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6), and He lied through Ezekiel, in chapter forty-eight.

Jesus is our Pesach/Paschal Lamb (technically, a type of zeva shelamim) peace offering. His *sacrifice* did not happen to put an end to Grain, Peace, Drink, First-Fruit, or Wave *offerings*. Jesus didn't cancel these! He just could be foreseen in them. Only one of those listed even has to do with sin. Even the topic of sin (Chata) itself is often misunderstood. A good example of this would be that a sin offering was required after a mother gave birth (Leviticus 12). Did the mom do something wrong?

It was our appalling corruption of the temple on earth—the one no longer acting as the image of the heavenly one (Psalm 11:4 & Hebrews 8:5) that caused our loss of it and its operators. (Can't use it right, He'll take it away!) And now, currently, these offerings cannot be properly performed. Even if they could, they would likely be misappropriated by many, just as they were in the past. They would also be condemned by well-meaning believers, in their assumption that Jesus would be offended. When the altar does get rebuilt, I would strongly suggest that believers be very careful not to blaspheme it, out of ignorance.

His Table

The altar is also God's fellowship meal table. Haven't you ever noticed that on it was continually served bread, wine and meat? Look carefully at this portion from Numbers:

Command the children of Israel, and say unto them: My food which is presented unto Me for offerings made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Me, shall ye observe to offer unto Me in its due season. And thou shalt say unto them: This is the offering made by fire which ye shall bring unto the LORD: he-lambs of the first year without blemish, two day by day, for a continual burnt-offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at dusk; and the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a meal-offering, mingled with the fourth part of a hin of beaten oil. It is a continual burnt-offering, which was offered in Mount Sinai, for a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD. And the drink-offering thereof shall be the fourth part of a hin for the one lamb; in the holy place shalt thou pour out a drink-offering of strong drink unto the LORD. And the other lamb shalt thou present at dusk; as the meal-

offering of the morning, and as the drink-offering thereof, thou shalt present it, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. (28:2-8; JPS)

These offerings have nothing to do with covering personal transgression. These were the perpetual, *tamid* (daily) offerings the Lord delighted in. No, I'm not suggesting He has nostrils like a man, or an appetite. I realize that this might be very confusing to some of you, so let's journey down the road a ways.

In the beginning, man walked around with a physical expression of God in Eden. Then, sin came and made our 'togetherness' less physical, and less frequent. For a select few, He came and showed Himself. But that is because few walked uprightly enough, or were directly involved in His plan of redemption enough, to warrant otherwise. God then shows up in even more amazing array. He delivers the Hebrews from slavery, with clear intentions to make a mighty nation out of them. Not only were they to be a great nation, but they were going to be given the land that was promised to Abraham and his children—a land flowing with milk and honey. Further reading into the Scriptures shows us that they were going to be given a very large parcel of land; “whatever place the sole of their feet treaded (Deuteronomy 11:24).” This land would forever be Israel's to inhabit, as long as they remained faithful to the covenants.

Additionally, God wanted to restore the state of our relationship with Him. He wanted to pour His Spirit into the hearts of His people. But due to sinful circumstances, He needed a transportable, external dwelling place. So He gives plans to Moses, and special talents (via the Spirit, by the way) to others, to build a Tabernacle for His presence to be in the midst of His chosen people. The Tabernacle was supposed to be a representative illustration of what He wanted to do in their hearts, and how it was to be done. That lesson is equally valuable for us today. Moses puts out the call for the people to bring the needed materials, “as each man's heart desires,” and the supplies were so abundant that Moses has to order the people to stop bringing stuff. During this desert wandering, God was at first as an angel, and pillars of fire and smoke, but then His Shechinah sat between the Cherubim, and remained there.

For a long time, God remained manifest in the midst of His people. Initially, He was traveling along with them—going before them and revealing His presence often, as they moved into the Promised Land and beyond. God was their General, Husband, Father and King. But sadly, in keeping with their pattern, they rejected His voice at the mountain first, and then later, His personally administered authority. So, God gave them a series of judges, followed by a series of kings, beginning with Saul and then David, and then Solomon. When the people obeyed, they were successful and prospered. When they didn't; well, you know.

God gave the vision to David, but permission to Solomon, to build a temple for a more permanent dwelling place. God obviously still wanted to be with His people, and showed up in style at the conclusion of the dedication. As time went on though, Solomon began to do business with, buy horses from, and obtain women from nations he was specifically ordered not to. Being the leader, the people would follow, and so their hearts went astray as well. Subsequent kings would come and go. Some were good and some bad. All throughout those tumultuous days, He was still right there with them. Prophets needed to be sent to bring people back to His ways, but generations rejected them and so they fell far short. Judgments came. The first temple was destroyed, and the physical expression of God's dwelling place went with it. Sinfulness always results in separation from His presence, but not necessarily His affection.

A second temple was built. God indwelt it again, but the people are short in their faithfulness. Each time the nation was judged, the manifest presence of God became less apparent. At best, man and God came into each other's manifest presence once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and even that eventually ended. More time passes, more judgments come, more temple damage, more dispersion...even less of His presence is evident.

Jesus comes onto the scene, and everything is in shambles. The Temple is filthy. The High Priestly office is now bought and sold. Caiaphas wasn't even a Levite! The Sanhedrin is running the Temple show, but their puppet strings were being pulled by the weighty hand of the Romans. The Law of Moses is not being followed. Behind the veils of the Temple are replacement furnishings now, as everything had been destroyed previously. The Ark was gone, and nobody even knew where it was. (We do! Revelation 11:19.) There really hadn't been a manifest presence in the midst of His people for hundreds of years.² There weren't even notable prophets speaking on His behalf (with the exception of John the Baptizer). The religious ritual of Israel was mostly a façade, and a transparent one at that.

God, in a tabernacle of flesh, comes back into the midst of His people. This time, however, it is not due to our obedience at all, or because He heard our cries from oppression. It was because of the hopeless state of our religion and national soul. We literally couldn't have rescued ourselves if we wanted to, just like in our beginning. There was nobody qualified nor sanctified enough to perform the new covenant's High-Priestly office. So, He places Himself up on the altar and simultaneously became our atonement offering and new High Priest. Then, upon His final breath, The Father tears the veil (His garments) from top to bottom, to express His anguish.

HE DID NOT DO THAT BECAUSE HE OPPOSED THE TEMPLE SERVICE ITSELF! It was, after all, His House. To suggest that is to say He hated being in our midst, being our General, and being our King. Neither did He scourge the merchants who set up shop there because they were charging too high prices. He did it because we perpetually refused His best. We didn't want to hear His voice. We wouldn't obey Him with a loving heart. And quite simply, He couldn't stand being away from us anymore! Remember, it is something desecrating the next temple that is called "the abomination that causes desolation," not the temple itself!

All throughout history, the presence of God has shown to have decreased as His children's sin increased; right up to the point where He was virtually silent. Jesus came and stirred the pot of Israel. But overall, there were few who actually "tasted to see His goodness." About thirty-five years later, the current acting High Priest, Hananiah ben Hananiah (Ananias) had banned all "believing" Jews from Temple access, had murdered the Apostle James, and God had had enough. So He then sends Titus to destroy the Temple one last time. What else could be done? We are the temple now, so He's back in our midst. Our lives are the sacrifices, and our prayers are the incense.

I hope you enjoyed my Stephen-like synopsis. It was a necessary excursus, to give you perhaps a different perspective on how we got here. By chance, did this verse come into your mind during it?

Hebrews 7:12, "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also."

If so, quick thinking! But a change in regards to a specific portion of the law, the laws pertaining to the High Priest, or even the ceremonial, is not a blanket cancellation of a covenant! Remember, adjustments can be made to an agreement without complete dissolution. In the event you felt my little lawyer/contract analogy was creative, and my history lesson educational but not persuasive—back to the Greek we go.

'Metathesis' is the word which has been translated 'change'. Thayer defines it as: to transfer or change. It is the same word used later in Hebrews 11:5 to describe what happened to Enoch when he 'changed' and went up to Heaven. Enoch was not eradicated in the process, nor was the first priesthood, nor was the law. It was adjusted and altered. Even set aside perhaps. The verse, in context, in no way establishes an abrogation of all the Torah. Let me summarize in undisputable terms: When there is no Sinai Covenant in force, there is no more legality. And where there is no Law (where we find God's definition of sin), there can be no transgression. "But if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving

ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1st John 1:8).” Not only that, but where there is no altar, there is no more propitiation.

Those people who suggest that the Temple is somehow in opposition to the Church, or that they’ve swapped places and that is why we no longer have one, have a detrimental flaw in their theology. Why do you think that when He comes to dwell in our midst, He will be ruling from a Temple again, after this world is cleansed and not before? I’ll tell you why. It’s because this time, He intends to never have to withdraw His presence again! I’m sorry, but I can’t wait for God’s presence to be manifest in the Temple again, and if you don’t feel that way, you may need to examine yourselves to see if you are indeed in the faith. The Lord praised David for having the desire for a Temple in his heart (1st Kings 8:18). We should all desire any further manifestation and expression of God we can get! This is what God had to say at the time of the dedication of Solomon’s temple:

Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, ‘I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. (2nd Chronicles 7:12)

For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. (17) As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, even to do according to all that I have commanded you, and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, (18) then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David, saying, “You shall not lack a man *to be* ruler in Israel.” (19) But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, (20) then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. (21) As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, “Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?” (22) And they will say, “Because they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers who brought them from the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them; therefore He has brought all this adversity on them.” (2nd Chronicles 7:16-22)

But, as the infamous, isolated, in-between verse (which is often inappropriately expounded upon because it gets stripped from its context) goes:

...and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2nd Chronicles 7:14)

That Christians can claim this verse as a necessary component and requirement for healing each their own lands, without also acknowledging that “My people” is actually Israel, and that obedience to the Torah is also a necessary component, just goes to show how corrupted our biblical faith has become. If you, Christian, want to lay claim to that verse’s validity, then you must also take blame for your nation’s spiritual deterioration, caused by your responsibility to vs.19.

Everyone should be aware that the Temple is going to be restored in the last days and that initially, during the Great Tribulation, from it the anti-Messiah will rule. Yes, we are metaphorically the temple now, but if we are the true Temple, then it will be through us believers that the anti-Messiah will reign, and we will house the Abomination of Desolation. I personally have a problem with that, unless the abomination is metaphoric for Lawlessness? Additionally, the Temple with its altar will be God’s ownership symbol of Earth. Just like now and just like before, there will be both followers and rejecters of Messiah, even during the Millennial reign (Zechariah 14). The Temple will stand as a witness against rejecters. Reason this out for yourself: If future sacrifices would be such an abomination, why would the anti-Christ cease the service? Wouldn’t it make more sense for him to throw more fuel on the fire?

...who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (2nd Thessalonians 2:4)

The Lord still considers it to be His house! In the book of Daniel, in the ninth chapter and twenty-fourth verse, the future Temple is called the “Most Holy Place”. The reason the Temple is now gone, and His manifest presence (Shechinah) is still cloaked, is the same reason there is war in the land, and Israel (the people) is still scattered abroad. It is because, “we adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them!”

Closing Thoughts

If Adam and Chavvah hadn’t sinned, they and their offspring would have eternally lived in paradise, and in the very presence of the Lord. That was His perfect will.

If Israel hadn’t gone on to sin on a national level, The Lord would have remained present in their midst, and they would have lived in the Promised Land forever. It is conceived by the sages that had they not made the golden calves, God would have dwelled in their hearts in the way He dwelled in the Tabernacle. The Temple then, was actually His next, ‘next-best’ perfect will. This last arrangement though, was Israel’s

last opportunity to have it so good. Unfortunately, they blew it. So from that point on, what you see is God's plan to compensate for our incessant, disobedient behavior. Yes, the Law was given because of sin, but not to punish it! It was given to assist in overcoming it! Please forgive me for how simply put that was.

If He wanted to make life truly impossible for us, by giving us 'Words' we were hopeless to abide by, He would never have given us a means to make restitution and asked us to be perfect (Matthew 5:8; Genesis 17:1). And remember, the law made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:19). What you really have to understand is that it was never meant to. But if it was never meant to, why are we so afraid of it? Why is it nearly universally assumed within modern Christendom that any adherence to it is demanding perfection from it, imposing legalism, and thereby intruding on grace's rightful place? It's quite bizarre.

It is blasphemous to think He gets a kick out of our failure. Unless you were a murderer, sexual deviant, kidnapper or rebellious hater of God, you really had little to worry about, as far as your physical life goes. Scripturally supported capital punishment served as a physical representation of a potentially lethal, spiritual condition. The Torah only spiritually condemns us when we have unrepentant hearts. Even if someone did receive the death sentence, that didn't mean he or she had no chance for forgiveness. The same is true today. "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ." What makes us "perfect" as Jesus requested, is not just found through our righteous works, but also how we respond when we commit unrighteous works.

We, as the Body, need a "Chadash" understanding.