



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

The official newspaper of The Church of God International

Vol. 44, No. 3

“Put on the whole armor of God”

Fall 2023

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An EMP attack could damage or destroy the electronics we depend on over a vast region.

Enduring in Troubling Times

*The doomsday clock is now set at 90 seconds to midnight. This is the closest to global catastrophe it has ever been since its inception in 1947. U.N. Secretary General, Antonio Guterres warned, the world has entered, “a time of nuclear danger not seen since the height of the Cold War.” Is this threat real, or is it **Doomsday Clock hyperbole?***

By **BILL WATSON**

Recently, former President Donald Trump gave a speech at the convention called *The Religious Society of Friends*. It was held in Iowa this year. In that speech he mentioned the world is on a trajectory toward *World War III* if something doesn’t change—and change soon.

When considering the *geopolitical tension* that is being generated between Russia and China, Iran, and North Korea—all *against* the United States—admittedly, it’s quite disturbing. There is a

lot of re-positioning going on militarily, financially, and in technology, especially in Artificial Intelligence (A.I.).

All of us are aware of the proxy war in Ukraine that essentially has about 100,000 U.S. soldiers now stationed in Europe for “*anticipated deployment*” in that war, along with the enormous quantity of munitions the United States is supplying. And if that wasn’t enough, almost \$200 billion in military aid has been sent or promised to Ukraine to fight Russia since this war began.

China continues to harass

Taiwan with military ships and planes that encroach Taiwan’s territory. China has built islands in the South China Sea as military installations for staging weapons and as military platforms to launch attacks when the decision is made to invade. And rumors are floating around that North Korea may be considering using an EMP (*Electro-Magnetic-Pulse*) bomb on an unsuspecting United States.

At present, China also remains determined and committed to dethrone the United States dollar as the world’s

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LOST IN TRANSLATION

By **JEFF FLANICK**

Most people take the miracle of their own existence for granted. Rene’ Descartes famously said “I think therefore I am.” Yet, by what power do we exist? How are we able to think? Bible believers understand it is by the sheer will and desire of the Creator God that anything exists, including themselves. Virtually everyone reading this newspaper can see, hear, and communicate effectively using the language they learned as a young child. We take for granted our ability to communicate and receive information without effort, so much so, we don’t even give it a passing thought. Similarly, we take for

granted the capacity to understand language itself. Our native language is such an integral part of our lives we don’t even realize we are using it, much like breathing or blinking an eye. Language through speech, or the written word is truly a miracle. Making a few sounds or drawing a few “scribbles” on a piece of paper, has the power to transmit a vast amount of information from one person to another. The transmission of information can take place contemporaneously with one individual, or it can be broadcast to a multitude of people across vast expanses of time. The Bible is undoubtedly an example of the latter instance of knowledge transmission.

Many steadfast Christians are guided by the viewpoint that *only* the King James Version of the Bible is a valid English translation of the Holy Scriptures, and consequently, no other version of God’s Word is acceptable. A debate concerning Bible translations is a topic worthy of discussion, however that is not the intention of this article. All English Bible versions available to us today are dependent upon the translator’s adeptness in converting the Holy texts from the original languages into English. Hebrew and Greek texts are the primary sources employed in creating our English Bibles, however some translations may

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“Seed of Satan” Still Slithering

By **MIKE JAMES**

I have recently been made aware of some vestiges of “Seed of Satan” theology within Church of God circles. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this thinking, adherents of this belief think the different races came to us through different original parents. “Seedline” believers think Cain was begotten by illicit sexual activities between Eve and Satan the devil. Cain then became the father of the Jewish people. Some also believe “colored people” were around prior to Adam and Eve. There are some other similar ideas out there.

The doctrine of the “serpent seed,” also known as the “dual-seed” or the “two-seedlines” doctrine, is a controversial and fringe Christian religious belief which explains the biblical account of the fall of man by stating that the serpent mated with Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the offspring of their union was Cain. This event resulted in the creation of two races of people: the wicked descendants of the serpent who were destined for destruction, and the righteous descendants of Adam who were destined for salvation. The doctrine sees human history as a conflict between these two races in which the descendants of Adam will eventually win over the descendants of the serpent.

This idea is almost as old as Christianity. Irenaeus (around AD 180), an early church father, condemned the notion of original sin as adultery between Eve and the serpent in his book *Against Heresies*, as a “Gnostic” heresy (possibly espoused by Valentinus [around AD 100–160]) and the Gospel of Philip (around AD 350). It also appeared in mediaeval Jewish literature, including the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

During the nineteenth century, the serpent seed doctrine was revived by American religious leaders who wanted to promote white supremacy. The modern versions of the serpent seed doctrine were developed within the teachings of British Israelism by C. A. L. Totten (1851–1908) and Russel Kelso Carter (1849–1928). Daniel Parker (1781–

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reserve currency. They are going digital and making arrangements with other nations to pay for goods and services, using the Chinese Yuan (China's currency), rather than converting to US dollars to pay for those goods and services as has been done for so many decades. A *cashless, digital monetary system* is the objective and China is pushing this agenda to replace the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency as their contribution toward the global "Reset of 2030."

They are also aggressively collecting all kinds of data via many sources, be it social mediums, Chinese corporations, or just simply outright flagrant hacking of U.S. secured websites in efforts of spying, espionage, blackmail, and graft for enhancing their A.I. database. China is progressively improving their position and status on the global scene, hoping to become the world's number one superpower, supplanting the United States.

Unquestionably, we are living in some very tumultuous times. And there is a sense of urgency, vigilance, and concern about these growing tensions and nefarious activities that are being conducted by many nations of the world; and that also includes the involvement of the United States.

So the World has Tension?

Clearly, this growing amount of tension around the world is becoming more recognizable as we see changes emerging around us. Interestingly enough, Christians are now asking what we can do to assure *changes for the good*. Should we involve ourselves in some of the *actions* against the "Redefinition & Cancel Culture?"

This is a fair question in today's intense time. Why? Because laws are actually being made that will have a *major negative effect* on our culture in the years to come. These changes often occur very subtly and not surprisingly; they are not necessarily passed by legislators, but rather by Presidential Executive Order [E.O.] on the federal level or by governors on the state level. Unfortunately, many times "the people" are not offered opportunity to vote on these changes—they're just simply *put in place, or mandated*, with very little "fanfare."

As an example, let's take the laws being initiated that *infringe on parental involvement* for school-age youngsters, from elementary to high school, concerning "biological gender dysphoria" that occasionally comes up in the life of a child. These laws are intended to take the parents "out of the loop," *giving the schools authority* to provide counseling, puberty blockers, and to some degree gender transitioning guidance—*WITHOUT THE PARENTS' KNOWLEDGE!* This is unconscionable that the schools can exercise such rights, superseding the parents' right to know, let alone be involved!

Social Services are now legally empowered to remove minor children from under the care of the parents and/or legal guardians if any endangerment of the child's health, safety, or just general well-being is *suspected* to be threatened, without necessarily proof of any jeopardy. Sometimes all



Society in general, but youngsters especially, are being conditioned to accept perversity as normal.

that is needed is the child's accusations and they can be put into the care of Children's Services. Currently, more than 250,000 times throughout the United States, children are removed from the custody of their parents or legal guardians for one reason or another.

What contributes to this frequency of removal is other ancillary circumstances. For instances, as hard as it might be to believe, if Social Services *interprets the poverty* of a family is jeopardizing the safety of the child, they can take action against the parents and remove the children. And sadly, this overreach can be and has been abused (Ref. the links below).

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/17/us-child-welfare-system-harms-families>

<https://www.casey.org/inconsistent-removal-policies/>

In addition, there are other concerns people contend with that affect us with tension that leads to stress. Perhaps, we're concerned about losing our jobs, or have worries about the quality of our food and the growing trend to produce more GMOs. Maybe its meat that isn't meat, or fish and chicken that is listed on the menu as such but is neither fish nor chicken as claimed by the fast-food restaurant.

Many things are changing in and around us and what was once taken for granted to be good is now *suspected* to be bad. What was once thought to be right and normal is now considered *questionable*, with redefinitions or cancelations of what is right and normal. In simpler terms, what was determined to be right is now wrong, and what was considered to be normal is now abnormal (Isaiah 5:20–23). This is not the world many of us grew up in. Consequently, this demands a different approach toward the conditions we face today. There are *behavioral adjustments* that become necessary due to the changing circumstances we, *especially Christians*, face on a

daily basis.

What Kinds of Adjustments?

Jesus Christ warned us that in the later days "the love of many will wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). The reason for this is due to the "iniquity" that abounds! Unfortunately, this refers to the *loss of respect* for the "rule of law," warning us it will deteriorate, and chaos and anarchy will emerge. The Greek word for "iniquity" is *anomia*, and essentially means transgression of law, or wickedness, unrighteousness, but according to a standard—that *standard is God's law*.

Jesus Christ was clear on this matter that regardless of how evil things become, if we are determined to be in

God's Kingdom we must be *committed* to keeping God's law. Notice: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:18–19).

Clearly, according to Jesus Christ, one of our mental and emotional adjustments *involves having a mindset that is dedicated to living according to the law of God*. This is not an easy task. The world is highly influential

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE:
November 15, 2023**

Submissions may be sent to vancestinson@cgi.org

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

3900 TIMMS ST., TYLER, TX 75701

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and plays on our lusts, appetites, ego, vanity, and pride. The apostle John warns us the windows to our minds and hearts is through the lusts of the flesh and eyes and the pride of life—and he goes on to say this is not of the Father (1 John 2:15–17).

So it becomes important we recognize the need to adjust and protect ourselves from what we allow to influence us. We must take precautions on what we embrace as right and wrong, *always comparing* it to the standard of God's law and the example of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, we may find ourselves defaulting to our vulnerabilities and, through toleration, we compromise our values and standards, only to realize over time, incrementally, we've been "hijacked" and are no longer following God's way.

Therefore, it also becomes important we *commit to "watching"* with a *keen sense of awareness*, comparing and assessing how an action or attitude or **whatever it may be** equates to God's way—His laws, His will, values and standards—always keeping in mind and plainly knowing what God expects so we don't lose our way in this material world as iniquity continues to increase and society becomes more like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Notice: "And take heed unto yourselves, lest at any time your hearts [emotions] be overcharged [be burdened, heavy, grievous] with surfeiting [drunkenness, debauchery, gluttony] and drunkenness [intoxication] and the cares [distraction, solicitude, disunite] of this life, and that day come upon you unawares [unexpected, suddenly, non-apparent]. For as a snare [trap, noose, trick] shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch [sleepless, keep awake] you therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:34–36).

Is There any Clear-Cut Instruction for Enduring?

The apostle Paul has some warnings and exhortations for the Christians of his day in Colossi and, *by extension*, to contemporary Christians today. He sets out to encourage us with some simple instruction that is trenchant, yet simple and succinct. Notice his plain statement: "If you be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of

God [have your eyes, your desire, on God's kingdom]. Set your "affection" [Grk. *phroneo*: mental disposition, opinion, sentiment, care, regard] on things above [Godly things, based on God's values] not on things on the earth [the material world]" (Colossians 3:1–2).

This is a very compelling opening to a chapter that is full of instruction on **how to endure** while in an *environment, growing in tension*. Paul goes on to say, figuratively, we are "dead" and our lives are hid in Christ, or dedicated to being Christ-like. And the reason for this, the objective, is: when Christ shall appear at His Second Coming, we too will appear with Him in glory (verses 3–4).

And so Paul proceeds to accelerate with his instruction and becomes very specific about what we as Christians are to do. Notice: "Mortify therefore [subdue, deaden, figuratively be dead to] your members [your nature, the lusts of the flesh and eyes, pride] which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness [physically, or morally], inordinate affection [passion, lust, feelings], evil concupiscence [forbidden desire, or lusts], and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things sake the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience: in the which you also walked some time, when you lived in them" (Colossians 3:5–7).

So, we begin to understand, specifically, just what we are to stay away from and how to go about dealing with the tensions around us. But Paul's not done. Notice: "But now you also put off all these; anger [vengeance], wrath [passionate fierceness, indignation], malice [depravity, wickedness, evil, naughtiness, active malignity], blasphemy [vilification, or speaking evil against God], filthy communication [vile conversation] out of your mouth. Lie not to another [don't make things up, or hold back information], seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man [changed your ways and speech] which is renewed in knowledge [we are studying to learn new ways to be] after the image of him that created him" [learning in particular from the example, the image, of Christ's life]" (Colossians 3:8–10).

Paul makes a point that there is no ethnic bias (some would say racial tension—verse 11) as a result of becoming this renewed person we are learning to become. He then explains just

exactly how to go about doing this. Notice: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; Forbearing [to put up with, bear with, endure, to suffer] one another, and forgiving [grant favor, pardon, or rescue freely, grant gratuitously] one another, if any man have a quarrel [complaint] against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you" (Colossians 3:12–13).

Yes, Paul is giving us *specific instruction on how to reduce tension* in our lives—how to combat the means by which tensions build in our lifestyles that often lead to premature and/or bad decisions. But, he still has more to say as he attempts to make his points about how to live lives of peace and without tension. Notice: "And above all things put on charity [Grk. *agape*—active caring, affection, benevolence, dear love; cf. 1 Corinthians 13], which is the bond of perfectness, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also you are called in one body [the church, including the congregation you attend]; and be you thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever you do in word [speech, conversation] or deed [action, tasks, works, behaviors], do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:14–17).

Paul is making a very distinct point here in Colossians. He is saying this renewed person you are becoming is *representative of Christ in you* (via the Holy Spirit) and we have a responsibility to exemplify Him in all that we say and do! This is a very important realization in one's life—to recognize that we are now carrying a "brand," the **Christ-ian Brand**—a follower of Jesus Christ.

And with that, it becomes important to our lifestyles *we do Him honorably* in our lives. This is why Paul launches into two primary categories of our lives—family and career. In verses 18–22 Paul addresses specifically husbands, wives, children, child-rearing, and employment [servants], and encourages us to keep this in mind: "... whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord [as though you are working for Christ, one on one] and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance [because in the end, God will determine how well you did, which



Loss of a job can be overwhelmingly stressful.

includes what you do privately, when no one is around]: FOR YOU SERVE THE LORD CHRIST" (Colossians 3:23–24).

This is a major point of understanding the "Christian Brand"—that how you live, how you treat your family and co-workers, and others who come into your life—all reflect the "translation" of Christ; but the "factor of translation" is your personal example. This is what Paul is getting at when he says, "for you serve the Lord." All that you do publicly and privately, God is assessing because judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17–19)—we are now *responsible and accountable* for exemplifying Christ in our personalities.

So, with this in mind, it does us well not to be too entangled with the tension of the world. Paul mentions this when instructing Timothy. Notice: "You therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that wars [who is in the conversion process] entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully [there is no cheating, no short-cuts, within the Brand—hypocrisy must be minimized, if not eliminated completely]. The husbandman that labors must be first partaker of the fruits [we must show progress in our conversion by actually making changes from how we were, to becoming Christ-like]. Consider what I say; and the Lord give you understanding in all things" (2 Timothy 2:3–7).

We should keep this in mind that we will be rewarded according to our works (Psalm 62:12; Matthew 6:6, 2 John 1:8; Revelation 22:12; Ecclesiastes 2:10), so it becomes incumbent upon us to abide by the instruction given in Colossians 3. Doing so will enable us to simplify our lives by reducing the tensions surrounding us, thereby helping us to endure through the stresses that may come our way.

So, in summary, keep in mind that God will remember how we lived, and we will be rewarded according to "God's evaluation of our works, our behaviors," not necessarily the behaviors that make us feel good. It's His will in our lives, the Christ-like will that we want to exemplify and embrace. **So in conclusion:** *live your life in a way consistent with how you*



North Korean missile launch



LOST

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examine passages in Aramaic as well. Significant time and cultural differences between the composition of the original texts and our present day create abundant opportunity for error.

Smartling, a translation company, says the following on their website, "Translation demands a deep understanding of both grammar and culture. Translators need to know the rules of a language as well as the habits of the people who speak it...every language sits inside a defined structure with its own agreed upon rules. The complexity and singularity of this framework directly correlates to the difficulty of translation." Specific problems in translating language may involve idioms, translating expressions, compound words, multiple word meanings, two-word verbs, and sarcasm among other issues.

Let's examine just one aspect of the language conundrum, idioms. "It's raining cats and dogs" is an exemplary illustration of an idiom. In 1820, George Cruikshank published an original etching, "Very Unpleasant Weather, or the Old Saying Verified, 'Raining Cats, Dogs & Pitchforks.'" An article published on the internet by the Library of Congress contains many interesting theories as to origin of the phrase without being able to state with absolute certainty its origin. The problem with idiomatic expressions is that words or phrases that are used in a particular situation, meant to convey a very specific meaning, cannot be deduced simply using the meanings of the words that comprise the idiom at face value. Our culture is very familiar with the saying it is "raining cats and dogs," meant to describe an extremely hard rain. Translating the words for rain, dogs and cats into another language would not reveal anything close to a torrential rain. One might be able to speculate it meant your pets got very

wet outside at best. Other languages describe heavy rains as the following: it is raining ropes, buckets, pails, hoses or even chair legs! The importance of context in translation cannot be overstated. Having a deep respect for context, using a conscientiously accurate translation of the Holy Scriptures, is crucial to being able to obtain a competent understanding of God's Word.

One very familiar passage of scripture is found in Matthew 19:21-24:

"Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you; it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

A website called Food for the Hungry has this to say regarding the story in Matthew: "What's immediately obvious is that camels are far too large to fit through the eyes of needles. It's ridiculous to even suggest it. So, what is the meaning of that verse? Was Jesus really saying that rich people can't enter the kingdom of God? Let's look more closely at the passage to see what we can learn.

Camels, Needles, and the Rich

If Jesus was talking about an actual camel and an actual needle, then the rich are in big trouble. Commentaries suggest that He may have been saying something different. The Aramaic word for "rope," *kamilon*, was almost identical to the Greek word for "camel," *kamelon*, which appears in the verse. Some scholars say that the word was misspelled, and so Jesus may have been making an analogy to threading a thick rope through the eye of a needle, not a large animal. In other

words, He may have been referring to something extremely difficult, but not impossible.

Other commentators suggest that, at that time, there was a type of small gate called a needle. Still, others insist that Jesus' statement was as absurd as it sounds, actually referring to our same notions of camels and needles. There are several potential explanations for what camels and needles could have meant in biblical times. However, all of them point to the same lesson: Jesus said that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a rich person to enter His Kingdom. In fact, when the disciples then speculate that no one can be saved, Jesus replies, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). Jesus Himself settles the question: He was intentionally referring to something impossible.

The camel story, and the various theories surrounding it, firmly illustrate difficulties in language, context, and translation. While the exact terminology and particular metaphor Christ used in this conversation may be somewhat cloudy to us today, the overall meaning of the story is easily deciphered by most readers.

Scriptural interpretation can be influenced by the very slightest additions or subtractions of words from the



original text, in its original language. Pastor Murray Palmatier of the CGI Burlington, Canada congregation recently gave an excellent sermon entitled "Works of Salvation," which examined the issue of law versus grace. Murray drew special attention to verse 17 of the first chapter in the Gospel of John.

The King James translates John 1:17 as, "For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Notice the word *but* is italicized, demonstrating it was added for "clarity" by the translators. The website Biblebelievers.com says: "The italicized words in the King James Bible are words that were added by the translators to help the reader. This is usually necessary when translating from one language to another because word meanings and idioms change. So, to produce a more readable transla-

tion...translators added certain words to the Bible text.... Imagine the confusion which would arise if the translators had not used the italicized words...." While translators may have had the best of intentions, there are instances where this "help" can in fact lead to very damaging consequences concerning major doctrinal issues. Advocates who promote the view that grace supersedes the need for repentant believers to follow God's law can use this KJV mistranslation in support of their argument. Placing the word *but* in a sentence negates or cancels everything that goes before it. The word *but* has been likened to a traffic signal, a red light so to speak, that sends out a blinking warning telling the reader to disregard what came before: now here is the *real* message! With this thought in mind, it is plausible to see how John 1:17, as rendered by the KJV, seems to reinforce the idea that the law given by Moses is no longer in force, at least to those having the predisposition of the law having been done away with.

The Berean Study Bible, the NIV and many other versions render John 1:17 as, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." While this translation of the verse appears to be very similar to the KJV, these two

statements regarding law and grace are presented together *without* negation. The reader (without a prior bias) infers there is law, grace, and truth. Grace and law exist together, one does not replace the other as implied by the improper use of the word *but* in the previous example.

Luke 23:43 is a key example of a transla-

tional error that leads to doctrinal confusion. This passage describes the narrative of Jesus talking to the thief on the cross as they are about to die. Most Bible versions translate this verse "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (or something very close to it). Notice the comma after the word *you*. The implication here is that *today*, as in that very day, the two men will be in paradise. This interpretation of the text seems to support the commonly held view of many Christians that when a person dies, they go directly to live in heaven immediately after death. In John 20:17, Jesus asks Mary Magdalene not to touch Him because He had not yet ascended to the Father. Acts chapter one tells us clearly Christ was on the earth for forty days before He ascended into heaven. Scripture clearly proves Christ did not go to paradise on the day He and the thief died on the cross. So, how do we reconcile this?

A better translation of Luke 23:43 is found in "The Scriptures," translated, published, and distributed by *The Institute For Scripture Research*: "Truly, I say to you today, you shall be with Me in paradise." *The Hebraic Roots Bible* (a Literal Translation) renders this passage as: "And Yahshua said to him, Truly, today, I say to you, you will be with Me in Paradise." Don Esposito's footnote concerning this



passage clarifies the matter quite nicely in a way that harmonizes the words of Christ on the day of the crucifixion with other verses we find in the Scriptures, post resurrection. Esposito writes, "The timing of the verse is that Yahshua was speaking to the thief on that day and promising him that sometime in the future he would be in paradise with Yahshua. Yahshua could not have been promising the thief to be in paradise that day as He Himself would be 3 days and 3 nights in the grave."

Like many other groups, Esposito's congregation prefers using the Name Yahshua for the Messiah, rather than Jesus. The translation of names into English is certainly a topic worthy of discussion, including the name of the Messiah. It is important to note that names in the Bible are able to reveal the origin, purpose, traits and/or characteristics of a person. Individuals, as well as various organizations, hold strong opinions as to what names are

"proper" to use in referring to our Messiah and God our Father. There are reasonable arguments on both sides of the issue regarding the use of the historical Hebrew names of our God. It is important to realize God the Father and His Son have *many* names. Christ is called Jesus, Messiah, Savior, the Word, the Good Shepherd, Redeemer, Immanuel, among many other names. Revelation 19:12 (KJV) states, "...and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself." Exploration of this topic is practical, as it is essential to understand all we possibly can regarding our King and Master. Some in the faith have an aversion toward this subject. Many individuals dislike using any other name outside of Jesus to describe the Messiah. I humbly point out (with all intentions, origins, meanings, and conspiracies regarding His name aside) that *those who spoke with Christ in person*; when He was in the temple, ate His last Passover meal,

hung on the cross, or entered the upper room after His resurrection, did not call Him by the name of Jesus in conversation. The Hebrew language of that period did not have the "J" sound; and the letter "J" was added to the English language in the 1500s. With these simple facts in mind, I understand why debates on our Savior's name persist.

For those interested in taking a deeper dive into the subject of how translational issues impact our comprehension of the Sacred Scriptures, please visit the website of the Ancient Hebrew Research Center. Jeff Benner wisely states, "The Psychology of the Ancient Hebrews is very different from our own and when we read the Bible, we must learn to read it from the Hebrew's perspective rather than our own." I highly recommend his article entitled "The Philosophy of the Hebrew Language." You can find the article at [https://ancient-](https://ancient-hebrew.org/language/philosophy-of-the-hebrew-language.htm)

[hebrew.org/language/philosophy-of-the-hebrew-language.htm](https://ancient-hebrew.org/language/philosophy-of-the-hebrew-language.htm).

As disciples of Messiah, we are to be serious students. Using the Holy Spirit, we should study earnestly, devoting the effort required to properly understand the Scriptures. I find referencing various versions of the Bible helpful in discerning difficult ideas or passages. It is quite easy to investigate multiple Bible versions on the internet free of charge using sites like Bible Hub, or Bible Gateway. In our effort to uncover the true meaning and intent of God's Word, we should not put all of our trust into one scriptural resource exclusively. Proverbs 11:14 tells us that "in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

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SEEDLINE

Continued from page 1

1844) was also responsible for reviving and promoting the doctrine among Primitive Baptists. The Christian Identity movement, which branched off from British Israelism, preached the doctrine during the early twentieth century and promoted it within the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, the American Nazi Party, and other white supremacist organizations. The believers in this doctrine use it to justify anti-semitism and racism by claiming that Jews or members of non-white races are the descendants of Cain and the Serpent, who they believe to be Satan, or an intelligent non-human creature which lived before Adam and Eve.

The "serpent seed" teaching comes in several different forms. William M. Branham (1909–1965), Arnold Murray (1929–2014), Wesley A. Swift (1913–1970), and Sun Myung Moon (1920–2012) of Unification Church (Moonies) fame played roles in spreading different versions of the doctrine among members of their groups throughout the twentieth century. Around the world, there are millions of adherents of the "serpent seed" doctrine within Branhamism (followers of "prophet" William Branham) and the Unification Church. In 2000, there were an estimated 50,000 adherents of it within Christian Identity.

One of the more recent intellectual fathers of these ideas is Bertrand Lewis Comparet (1901–1983). Pastor Bertrand Lewis Comparet was a Christian Identity minister and attorney who graduated from Stanford University. Pastor Comparet was a former assistant district attorney and deputy city attorney for San Diego and founder of Kingdom Identity Ministries as well as a member of the Christian Knights of the Invisible Empire.

Kingdom Identity Ministries is the largest supplier in existence of materials related to Christian Identity, a radical-right theology that generally identifies people of color as soulless sub-humans and Jews as satanic or cursed by God.

Kingdom Identity Ministries was willed the copyrights to Comparet's written material after his death in

1983.

I was recently provided with some full-length sermons delivered by Mr. Comparet. I want to briefly address some of his false teachings as a warning to anyone who may read this and is being influenced by people within this movement.

One interesting thing about his sermon messages was how he addressed **Genesis 3:3** in two of his messages that I listened to. In both messages Comparet tells us **Genesis 3:3** is mistranslated, but he offers no proof of this. He thinks it is mistranslated because he believed the tree Eve was to not touch was speaking of Satan the devil. In other words, what God did not want Eve to do was have sex with Satan.

One of the reasons Comparet and others believed this different telling of the story of Adam and Eve is due to the Hebrew word for "touch" in **Genesis 3:3**.

The Hebrew word for "touch" there is *naga* in Hebrew (Strong's H5060). Now the word does mean "to touch" or "to lay the hand upon," but it can also mean euphemistically "to lie with a woman." As you will find with many lies and heresies there is always a little truth thrown in to throw people off.

Well, you might be wondering how the context of **Genesis 3:3** would fit sexual relations since God warned Eve not to touch a tree. Once again Comparet and others fail to use proper biblical hermeneutics. What Comparet taught was the tree in the garden was really Satan the devil. How did he figure that?

Turn over to **Ezekiel 31** to find out. In this chapter Ezekiel provides a prophecy about Assyria (the nation) being likened to a tall cedar (tree). Ezekiel uses this typology in other parts of his book too (tree being a nation or a person). Now here is the big leap Comparet makes: In **Ezekiel 31:9** we read the trees in Eden envied the Assyrian tree. Comparet then suggests since Satan was in the garden he must be the Assyrian being described here in **Ezekiel 31** because it seems to imply the Assyrian was also in Eden.

This idea is flat out wrong. Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 31 is against Egypt (verse 2). The prophecy pro-

vides a comparison of the nation of Egypt at the time of Ezekiel circa 600 BC to Assyria, which up to that time in history was one of the most powerful nations ever. Yet, despite Assyria's greatness, they were cut down by God. The same will befall Egypt. The mention of Eden could relate to the fact all nations and people come from Eden in the sense that is where mankind began. God was comparing Assyria and Egypt to other nations, and all originated in Eden. Or Eden could be used here poetically. Even the trees in Eden could not compare to Assyria in a poetic sense. Every original variety of tree was in Eden.

Once again context is important in trying to understand Scripture. Just because Eden is mentioned does not mean we have to put the Assyrian cedar back in the time of Adam and Eve.

"Seedline" believers also make a lot about the word "beguiled" in **Genesis 3:13**. The Hebrew word used here is *nasha* (Strong's Hebrew 5377). The word means to lead astray. It can mean to delude mentally or morally to seduce. But of the sixteen times this word is used in the Old Testament it is not used with sexual connotations.

Further evidence of how to use the word *nasha* in **Genesis 3:13** is found in the New Testament (NT) in **2 Corinthians 11:2–3**. Here a Greek word is used to address when Eve was "beguiled" back in the garden. The Greek word here is *exapatao* (Strong's Greek 1818) which can mean to seduce, beguile, or deceive. This word is used five times in the NT, and once again none of them have any sexual connotations.

Another misinterpretation of Scripture that is made with "seedline" proponents is found in **Genesis 3:15**. In this verse we are told that God will put enmity between the seed of the woman (Eve) and the serpent (Satan). Those who believe in "seed of Satan" theology look at the use of the word "seed" here in a literal sense. In other words since Eve has been the mother of literal children born on the earth it would follow that Satan is also someone who has born children on the earth too.

Although, this is possible with the Hebrew word for "seed," here it does

not make sense. The Hebrew word for "seed" here (H2233 *zera*) can mean literal children, but it can also mean "seed" in a figurative sense too. That seems to fit better because it seems to be implying Eve is the mother of all humanity and Satan will have some influence on the humanity that comes from Eve. This would need to be said in a different way if Satan literally had a line of children through Eve. So obviously he literally did not have children through Eve.

Further evidence to support this contention on **Genesis 3:15** can be found in NT scriptures. We don't find any scriptures in the Bible addressing a literal physical battle between Satan's progeny on the earth and Eve's. But what we do find are scriptures that address a spiritual battle between the influence of Satan and the minds of Eve's physical descendants on the earth.

In **Ephesians 6:12** we read the following: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Other NT scriptures point out this adversarial relationship between the flesh and the spirit (**Matthew 26:41; Romans 8:1; 1 Corinthians 5:5**). Remember Satan and his minions are spiritual beings who will war against the spirit in man (mind, thoughts, etc.) This is the true enmity between Satan and the seed of Eve.

Among the "seedline" proponents much is made about **Genesis 5**, where we read about the generations of Adam in verse 1. In verse 3 of this chapter we read that Seth was made in Adam's own image and likeness. The argument is made by "seed of Satan" folks that Seth was the first in this other line of seed because of the descriptive terms used here which are not used in the same way with Cain. Here they are making too much about nothing.

In **Genesis 4:1** we read Adam knew (had sexual relations) his wife Eve and she conceived and bare Cain. It seems obvious to me that scripture makes it clear Cain did not come from a union between Satan and Eve, but from a union between Adam and Eve!

There are some NT scriptures that are used to confuse people also. A

Continued next page

number of these scriptures say the same thing. In **Matthew 3:7, 12:34, 23:33** and **Luke 3:7** Jesus calls the Pharisees and Sadducees a generation of vipers. In the Greek the word for generation, *gennema* (Strong's Greek 1081), can mean "offspring" or "brood." What the "seed of Satan" folks do is tell us the Jews here are being called the offspring or vipers of Satan's seed.

But note how they want us to take the word "generation" or "offspring" literally, but they don't want us to do that with the word viper.

Scripture often uses phrases like "children of light (**John 12:35-36**)," "children of hell (**Matthew 23:15**)," "children of promise (**Romans 9:6-9**)," and "children of wrath (**Ephesians 2:3**)" in a non-literal way.

Also, note that when you read **Matthew 3:7-8** and **Luke 3:7-8** carefully, you will see that Jesus alludes to the fact that these Jews are children of Abraham! If they were coming from Satan's seedline, how could they get into Shem's line?

Now listen to this reasoning carefully. In **Matthew 23:33** Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees once again, and He

again calls them "serpents" and "ye generation of vipers." In **Matthew 23:34** He tells them prophets, wise men, and scribes have been sent to them. Commentators tell us this is referencing the prophets of old who spoke to Israel and Judah as well as the apostles and others who would bring the message of God. The thing to note here is if these Pharisees are of the "seed of Satan" how could the prophets of old have been sent to them? Remember the prophets were sent to ancient Judah and Israel. Those people were from the line of Shem. So obviously Jesus does not believe in the "seed of Satan" theory.

There is further confirmation as to who the Jews in Jesus' day were. In **John 8** we have another dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees. In verse 33 the Pharisees claim to be of the seed of Abraham which would put them in the line of Shem. In **John 8:37** Jesus confirms this fact! As you read this entire chapter it becomes evident Jesus had issues with the Pharisees not because of their genealogical line, but because of their spiritual mindset.

The last NT scripture we will look at in this discussion is **1 John 3:12**.

Here we read about Cain being of the wicked one (Satan) because he killed his brother. But did he kill his brother because he was the literal child of Satan? Of course not, let's get the context of this verse by going back to **1 John 3:10**. The context is the "children of God" will do righteous acts and love their brother. Cain was a "child of the devil" because he

hated his brother and killed him. This pertains to all humans throughout history. What makes you a child of God is not related to a "seedline." It relates to the choices you make in life and whether or not you are following the spiritual influence of Satan or Christ. We are all of the same bloodline in the human race (**Acts 17:26**).

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Questions & Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

Didn't Isaiah prophesy the end of Sabbath-keeping for the people of God?

QUESTION: This is no theory. In Isaiah 65, the prophet Isaiah says the Old Creation of Genesis 1 and 2 would not be remembered or even come to mind! And, the weekly Sabbath is a reminder of the seventh day after when the world fell into sin and darkness and needed redemption (Jeremiah 4). "Thus saith the LORD: For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (Isaiah 65:17). Speaking of the Church, which Christ has Himself established, the prophet Isaiah goes on to say: "But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy" (verse 18). The prophet Isaiah, having said this in chapter 65, could not possibly mean the opposite in Chapter 66!... Isaiah 66:22-24 says "from" one Sabbath to another, not "on" the Sabbath! The prophet Isaiah, in only a few verses earlier, explicitly said the "old creation" would not be remembered! And...the weekly Sabbath was given to the Jews to REMEMBER THE OLD CREATION! Therefore, the correct understanding of Isaiah 66:22-24 is that it is a Hebrew idiom to mean every day of every week, including Sunday, not just on Saturday.... Like Isaiah 65:17-18 shows the end of remembering the Sabbath day and no longer even bringing it to mind, the prophet Jeremiah, in the scripture speaking prophetically of the Church, says, "they will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again. At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the LORD,' and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem [the Church], for the name of the LORD to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart" (Jeremiah 3:14-17). Who does not see that Jeremiah 3:14-17 demonstrates explicitly that it is when the ark of the covenant of the Lord disappears, that the saints are given the power to overcome the "imaginings of their evil hearts"?

C.S. (posted on social media)

ANSWER: The "former" things of Isaiah 65:17 are the "former troubles" of verse 16. And, no, the weekly Sabbath was *not* "given to the Jews to REMEMBER THE OLD CREATION!" It was established *for man* at the beginning of human history, and it was given anew to the Israelites to benefit them just as God intended it to benefit mankind from the very beginning. It's not only a remembrance of the original creation (and, hence, a day to honor and worship the Creator), but it was also to liberate them from their day-to-day work obligations so they could worship God both individually and communally. It depicts God as both Creator (Exodus 20) and Redeemer (Deuteronomy 5)—and everyone in the New Creation will worship Him as such.

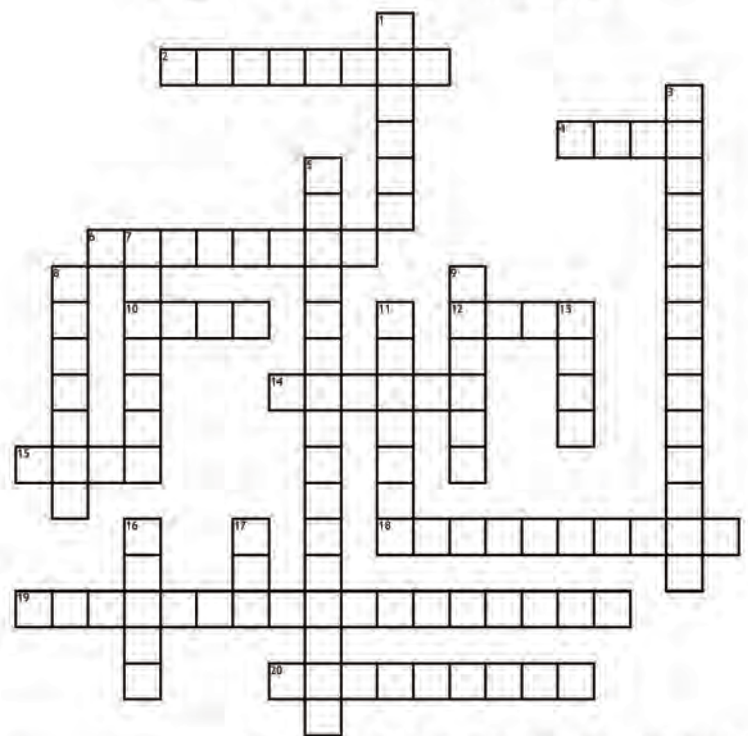
Read the verses leading up to Isaiah 66:23-24. They tell of the regathering of Israel and of how the nations will see God's glory during and as a result of that event. Once that happens and true worship is restored in Jerusalem, then every month on *Rosh-Hodesh* (the new moon), and every week on the Sabbath (see the Complete Jewish Bible), people from many countries will assemble for worship in God's presence in Jerusalem. And as they are leaving the city to return home, they will look on the corpses of the people who had rebelled against God. That's what we get from Isaiah 66:23-24 when it is read in context. It does not mean that every human being from every nation on the earth will come to Jerusalem every month and every week to worship Yahweh. Rather, it means that the worship of God by both the restored nation of Israel and peoples from other nations will be taking place in Jerusalem at that time. Of course every believer all over the world will worship God every day, and those believers who are in Jerusalem (both those who live in the land and visitors from other nations) will come

before God to worship as a community. We may rightly apply passages like this one to the establishment, growth, and destiny of the New Testament Church, but it is important that we begin our study with what the text itself actually describes—and it clearly describes the restoration of Israel and reinstatement of true worship in the Promised Land.

The reason the people of Jeremiah 3:16 will no longer talk about the Ark of the Covenant, will not miss it, and will not desire to make another one is explained in the next verse. Jerusalem itself (not just the Ark) will be called the Throne of Yahweh. In the past, people came to the Tabernacle (Temple) to worship because they knew that the divine presence was in the inner sanctuary, where the Ark of the Covenant was located. But Jeremiah describes a time when the divine presence will permeate the whole of Jerusalem. We are told that peoples from the nations will be gathered there, with the peoples of Israel and Judah, to worship Yahweh. Again, this is what the passage literally describes, though I would not deny that it refers in some way to the establishment, mission, expansion, and destiny of the New Testament Church.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Fall 2023 Puzzle



Across

2. He had Ezra read the book of the Law to the people
4. A city in the Old Testament
6. One of the seven churches in the book of Revelation
10. King of Israel before David
12. Another word for Father
14. One of Christ's apostles
15. A son of Noah

18. The oldest man that ever lived

19. This event happened in 325 A.D.

20. The father of John the Baptist

Down

1. Who had a donkey talk to him?
3. The king who asked Daniel to interpret his dream
5. Where will Christ land at His second coming?

7. One of King David's sons

8. Paul wrote two Biblical epistles to this young man

9. God's Name in the Old Testament

11. Abram's Name was changed to what?

13. A king of Judah

16. A minor prophet in the Old Testament

17. Joshua son of?

Completed puzzle, page 8

Gnosticism—Past and Present



This is a compilation of material on Gnosticism from various Church of God groups and is my attempt to pull it all together here.

By ARNIE FONTAINE

The Overview

The interaction of Satan and Eve gives us the first glimmer of the roots of Gnostic thought. We find in Genesis 3:1–5 three thoughts Satan presents to Eve. Each in turn separates man from God. First, Satan plants the seed of doubt about God's Word in Eve's mind. Second, he tells her she will not die if she/they eat of this fruit. And third, he tells her she/they will be like gods, knowing good and evil. Gnosticism has survived and developed since then in religions and philosophies down through the ages.

In the earliest sacred writings, God confronts Job. Please note in Job 40:1–8, God asks Job if he will set aside God's judgments. It is this attitude of man determining right from wrong instead of studying God's Word to see what God would have us do that is part of Gnostic thought.

In the early years of the Church, first and second century, there was a large influx of Greek influence. The trademark of that was Gnosticism. In Acts 17 we read of Paul's encounter with Epicureans and Stoics. They were two branches of Gnosticism with opposing approaches to spiritual enlightenment, self-indulgence, and self-abstinence, each in extreme.

The books of John, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Jude, 1 John, and Revelation all combat various elements of Gnosticism. The much later written Gnostic gospels contradict the New Testament Gospels. John especially addresses an aspect of this system called Docetism.

Gnostics generally believed that all spirit was inherently stable and good (overlooking the fact that Satan and his demons are spirit and yet also unstable and evil), while all matter and flesh were inherently evil (contradicting God's statement in Genesis 1:31).

Prior to Christ's arrival on the scene, segments of the Jews were Hellenized—hence, Hellenistic Jews. They were influenced by the Greeks, who were heavy into philosophy and knowledge. *Gnosis* has to do with attaining knowledge. Gnosticism espoused higher spiritual attainment through intellectual works of the individual. There is much to chew on in delving into this subject. It may surprise you as to its many tentacles reaching through the centuries.

Gnostic Beginnings

In review we have three tenants of Gnostic thought.

1. Distrust God
2. You won't die
3. One can find the truth/knowledge without God; can be like God, determining right from wrong.

Let us first discuss the “you won't die” position that Satan tells Eve. He is telling Eve that God is dishonest and that she won't die. Adam and Eve of course eat of the fruit and do not die then. Was Satan correct, or was it a half truth? Immortality is the issue.

I would like to move to Greece and the philosophers so famous in history, Plato and Socrates. Although Socrates is not documented as writing his beliefs down, Plato, his student, wrote in *Phaedo* of Socrates' belief in an immortal soul. There is an ongoing dialogue put forth by Plato of the last day of Socrates' life. In it, he lays out his arguments for his belief in the immortal soul. This was in 399 BC. According to Plato, Socrates' last words were describing his death as a release of the soul from the body.

These Greek philosophers were one channel for Gnostic thought to travel through time. This citation is illustrative of its pervasiveness. “The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews with contact from Greek thought, and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1941, Volume 6, “Immortality of the Soul,” pp. 564, 566). If this be the case then, it precedes the advent of Christianity by centuries.

Those of us aware of Tyndale's contribution to our having a Bible today know that he gave his position on the immortal soul to Thomas More. Tyndale said, “The true faith putteth the resurrection, which we be trained to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the Spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the fleshly minded pope consenteth until heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupteth the Scripture to establish it.”

Strong words indeed.

The Gnostic system has used dualism to explain God, the universe, our planet, and our existence in relation to it all. I thought this background needed to be put forth before we delve into the Scriptures dealing with this insidious system that pervades Christendom to this day.

Gnostic Dualism

Dualism has two basic branches. One affects our concept of God; the other affects our view of mankind's nature. Let's look at the second first, as it directly affects how we look at the very meaning of life. Is that not what mankind has sought over the centuries? Gnostic dualism divides an individual into the physical and the spiritual. The physical is evil, and the “soul” is somehow inherently spiritual and hence eternal. Gnostics, in general, believed that the purpose of human existence was to return to the spiritual realm from whence all originated. Death, then, was seen as liberation of

the spirit. One large denomination has large families to assist in this returning to whence they came. Were they right in their assessment?

The idea that the body is a source of shame is indeed an old one, and it occurs in many forms throughout history. It is a common feature of dualistic philosophies which teach that a person's mind is the “real” or eternal person, and that the body is a temporary, lesser—and often shameful—feature of our existence. Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, and a multitude of other philosophers have contributed to this false understanding of the human self. The Neo-Platonist concept of dualism heavily influenced professing-Christian doctrine, but it all began with Satan's lie and Adam and Eve's acceptance and fall.

In the fourth and fifth centuries AD, Augustine of Hippo, a Catholic Church father, “Christianized” the pagan Plato, blending dualism with Christianity. Spiritual dualism has been a central doctrine of mainstream Christianity ever since.

Spiritual dualism has had disastrous effects on Christian doctrine. Dualism has corrupted the truths of justification and sanctification, as a connection exists between dualism and the Protestant “no works” doctrine.

According to this idea, all one has to do is profess his belief in Jesus Christ and accept His grace (mental actions), and one's sins (physical actions) will be forgiven. Such a person is now saved forever. This is a process of reduction to justification alone.

Modern Christianity has been unknowingly so deeply influenced by pagan ideas that the average churchgoer is completely deceived about what the Bible really says regarding this and many other subjects. Most of us who grew up with a professing Christian background were taught that the “soul” is something distinct from the body, and it goes to heaven or hell (or purgatory for a while) after the body dies.

Yet John's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus completely rejected Satan's assertion. John tells us that no human being other than Christ—which would include such biblical figures as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses—is in heaven:

John 3:13 states, “And no one has ascended into heaven, except He Who came down from heaven, even the Son of man, Who is in heaven” (Faithful Version [FV]).

The same verse in the KJV reads, “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”

These words were written decades after Christ's death and resurrection. Many saints lived and died prior to this writing, and John makes no stipulation for their entry to heaven at that time.

So, what is the human soul?

A Review

The word “soul” in the Old Testament comes from the Hebrew word *nephesh*, and merely means “a creature.” For example, the first time

the word “soul” is used in the KJV is in Genesis 2:7, where we read: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” This alone should cause us to pause. Note that it says “a living soul.” Would that not indicate the possibility of a dead soul? The NKJV translates it in a way that leads to less confusion, stating that “man became a living being.”

Genesis 1:21 refers to animal life—apart from humankind—as *nephesh* when it tells of “great sea creatures and every living thing, *nephesh*, that moves.” And notice that **Leviticus 21:11** speaks thusly: “Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor defile himself for his father, or for his mother.” Body here is *nephesh*—a dead *nephesh*!

So, if *nephesh* is the Hebrew word translated into English as “soul”—and it is—then a soul can die. This is confirmed in Ezekiel 18:4: “Behold all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine, the soul who sins shall die.” In each use of soul, it is *nephesh*.

Gnostic dualism denies the possibility of death, which flies in the face of these scriptures. I did not address the resurrection at Christ's Second Coming and numerous scriptures backing this up. It is presumed the reader already understands that is God's purpose at Christ's Second Coming. This is at best an overview.

The other aspect of dualism is the nature of God, which shall be addressed next.

Gnostic Dualism and God

A famous COG minister once gave a sermon on manmade religion. It seems to fit this Gnostic subject. From the beginning, mankind has sought God or gods and fashioned theologies to fit what they believe. It is no different with Gnostic systems; they have splintered and morphed into a variety of beliefs. How has Gnostic theology generally viewed God then? They agree in a one Supreme Being concept that is remote from human affairs. To counter this God they devised a Demiurge “god” that was inferior to God and did the actual physical creation. Where did he come from? Well, the female aspect of God, Sophia, who thus was the mother of the creator god. Sound familiar? He is portrayed as the creator of the earth and its life forms. He is viewed by some Gnostics as fundamentally evil, jealous, rigid, lacking in compassion, and prone to genocide. One can see the seeds of the common misconception of who the God of the Old Testament was. Identifying God has become the basis for a myriad of divisions in Judaism and Christianity.

From these beliefs came the notion that there is an eternal battle between good and evil going on. Not so, at least not at a Godly level. The true battle is within us, as **James** states in **1:12–15**. Peter warns us of Satan's role in **1 Peter 5:8**. Recall the previous writing on dualism and the separation of

Continued next page

good/spiritual and evil/physical and you might notice a connection between man's dualism and their concept of God. Physical is always evil and spiritual is good, so it follows in their mindset that whoever created the physical can't be supreme and infallible. It gets rather confusing at times separating biblical truth from syncretic inroads blended into Christianity via Gnostic philosophies.

The Jews of post-exile time and beyond became adamant monotheists—that is, they believed God is one in the absolute sense, not only one in essence but one in person; hence their rejection of the Christ. John records a telling dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees at the temple in chapter 8. Following the incident of the woman caught in adultery, the exchange begins in verse 12 and continues through the end of this chapter. They knew what He was saying as He punctuated the exchange in verse 58:

“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM” (KJV).

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM’” (FV).

And again, in chapter 10 of John, the Jews were about to stone Him. He was challenging their unitary monotheism. Recall He came to reveal the Father and hence the true duality as opposed to the Gnostic one.

Gnostic dualism requires a radical revision of the Gospel narratives. First, the God-sent Savior could not be a flesh-and blood human being because flesh and blood are a part of the material creation, which is evil; so biblical Christology had to be radically redefined. In their thinking, the human we call Christ was possessed by the true Savior and left His body during the time we call Passover to return to heaven unscathed.

John and Jude reveal the beginnings of the questioning of the nature of the Godhead. Who was Christ? (See **1 John 2:22; 4:2-3; 2 John 1:7; John 5:37; Jude 5; Revelation 22:13.**) From here to the fourth century the Godhead's makeup was debated, argued, and formalized. Much was done to avoid any semblance of Judaism. This was due in part to an influx of Greek converts bringing in their philosophies and the continued problems with the Roman government caused by Jewish zealots. The major outgrowth of it all was establishing a triune god, Trinity, as opposed to a monotheistic or dualistic approach, and a shift to Sunday worship. This “doctrine” has become the test doctrine for salvation by most of Christendom. Mormons, Catholics, and various Protestants each have their “view or opinion” on the composition of the Godhead. Unitarians have a non-Trinitarian interpretation. I leave that fascinating research to you.

But wait...if you act now.... Sorry, couldn't resist that one.

What did Christ say on entering eternal life? He must have said something. Okay, you know where I'm going with this. Notice **Matthew 19:17.**

KJV: “And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.”

FV: “And He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except one—God. But if you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

(On a side note, apparently Jesus didn't think keeping the commandments was “legalistic,” a term not even in the Bible.)

Besides coming to die for our sins as the Lamb of God, He came to reveal the Father, as John declares in **John**

1:18. Note, *just* the Father—duality. Hopefully this overview gives you something to chew on.

Gnosticism with an Attitude

Satan convinces Eve sufficiently so that she takes the forbidden fruit and also convinces her husband it is okay. From this beginning, humanities' future unravels with only God's plan able to redirect mankind's path via an assortment of covenants to a very small population out of the whole. Can you trust God and be like Him with knowledge to decide good and evil for yourselves? Is that not the end result of this verse?

“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (**Genesis 3:5, KJV**).

“For God knows that in the day you eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be like God, deciding good and evil” (FV).

Verse 6 confirms this, when she “realizes” that the tree will make her “wise.” It would be interesting to know how she came to that understanding prior to eating of the fruit. Was Satan that good of a salesman? Must have been. The Garden of Eden was not destroyed forthwith but guarded by a cute cherubic baby or woman.... Oh sorry—did I burst your preconceived notion of angelic likenesses? Cherubim were guarding the East entrance.

What do cherubim look like? Rather than let man decide, why don't we see what the Bible says? **Ezekiel 10** describes a being with four wings and four faces and hands like a man. Lest we forget, Satan was a cherub, a covering cherub.

Moving on to the Cain and Abel incident, we find the first recorded sacrifice to God by the two young men. Much has been written about this. Questions have been asked as to why Abel's offering was better. Was it the attitude of the person or the sacrifice itself? Maybe both. Keeping with the Gnostic theme of determining what is right or wrong, maybe this is the first indication of someone determining how to worship God. Paul in Hebrews focuses on the sacrifice in chapter 11 (the faith chapter), verse 4. John writes briefly on this subject as well in **1 John 3:12**, comparing their relative works. Cain's are of the Devil who cast the Gnostic seeds back then. Worship is determined by man's devices or God's instructions. You have had a sermon or two on this Cain-Abel incident, I'm sure.

The next place I'd like to go is after the Flood, to the account of the only recorded man of God to have Ham. Oh sorry, that was Noah's son. Here we have some begats. Noah begat Ham who begat Cush who begat Nimrod. What, pray tell, happened here? Cush and Nimrod determined to establish a kingdom and build a tower that might even reach Heaven. Sorry, not part of God's plan. Why would they want to reach into Heaven? To be like God possibly? Even here we have several possibilities, but bottom-line, God was not pleased.

Moses takes an extended trip up the mountain, and what happens? Here we have a clear indication of what the

Israelites did and God's response. Let's go there and see. The story is in **Exodus 32**. Please notice Moses was gone 40 days and only then did the people start to wonder where he was and if he would ever return. Their solution was to copy the Egyptian theology of idolatry and establish a day to worship.

Exodus 32:5: “And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.”

And what was God's response? Did He think, *They mean well and, after all, they are dedicating to me?*

Afraid not.

Exodus 32:10: “Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.”

It is only Moses' intervention that saves these people.

So how does this fit the two Gnostic principles being covered here? The Israelites doubted Moses and by extension God. He has delayed His coming—*h'mmm*.

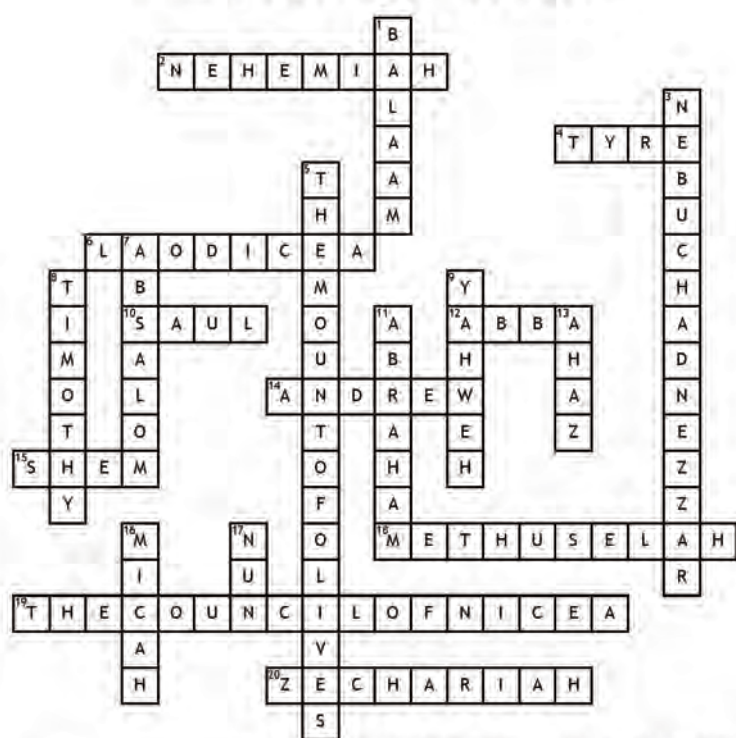
Second, they used their knowledge of worldly religions to incorporate into worship of God. I urge you to review **1 Corinthians 10: 1-12**. Paul makes it clear to Christians in the Corinth Church of God to not make the same mistakes their forefathers made. Also note the time frame of when this was written—that's right, Feast of Unleavened Bread. The method is syncretism—a blending of paganism and truth. Verses 3 and 4 really hit home with spiritual meat and drink. The New Covenant symbols were bread and wine.

The next stop I'd like to go to is the 300s AD. We see Constantine trying to bring his empire together, and what does he do? Why he decides because he is so wise in the ways of God that he will simply blend pagan and Christian observances together and, voila, everything is okay now. The newly conquered can feel right at home. From this point forward we have a steady renunciation of truth for convenience, power, and influence. This led to corruption and persecution for those that didn't toe the line.

A final example of Gnostic knowledge of God is the Trinity. Here is the introduction to the subject by a well-respected conservative Protestant source, the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

“The Term ‘Trinity’: The term ‘Trinity’ is not a Biblical term, and we are not using Biblical language when we define what is expressed by it as the doctrine that there is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three coeternal and coequal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence. A doctrine so defined can be spoken of as a Biblical doctrine only on the principle that the sense of Scripture is Scripture. And the definition of a Biblical doctrine in such un-Biblical language can be justified only on the principle that it is better to preserve the truth of Scripture than the words of Scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity lies in Scripture in solution, when it is crystallized from its solvent it does not cease to be Scriptural, but only comes into clearer view. Or, to speak without

Fall 2023 Puzzle



Across

2. He had Ezra read the book of the Law to the people
4. A city in the Old Testament
6. One of the seven churches in the book of Revelation
10. King of Israel before David
12. Another word for Father
14. One of Christ's apostles
15. A son of Noah

Down

1. Who had a donkey talk to him?
3. The king who asked Daniel to interpret his dream
5. Where will Christ land at His second coming?

7. One of King David's sons lived

8. Paul wrote two Biblical epistles to this young man
9. God's Name in the Old Testament
11. Abram's Name was changed to what?
13. A king of Judah
16. A minor prophet in the Old Testament
17. Joshua son of?

figure, the doctrine of the Trinity is given to us in Scripture, not in formulated definition, but in fragmentary allusions, when we assemble the *dis-juncta membra* into their organic unity, we are not passing from Scripture, but entering more thoroughly into the meaning of Scripture. We may state the doctrine in technical terms, supplied by philosophical reflection: but

the doctrine stated is a genuinely Scriptural doctrine.”

The writer admits the Bible does not teach this doctrine and then proceeds to justify its existence. Note the Gnostic theme of knowledge apart from God to rewrite Scripture to suit a notion. The classic example, of course, is the added scripture in **1 John chapter 5**.

As well as many of you may be aware, this mystery as it is defined elsewhere is a new test doctrine for “Christians” even though never mentioned as such in the Bible. We have here an example of the created defining the Creator! Arrogance? The history of the Trinitarian doctrine goes back thousands of years preceding the Christian era. It is rooted in pagan

belief systems and slowly evolving into its current state via primarily the Catholic Church.

So we come to the conclusion of this study that admittedly is an overview with hopes it will cause us to study more in God’s Word, ever growing in grace and knowledge—that is, godly knowledge, grace, and ultimately godly wisdom.

Why Did God Make Man?

By WILLIAM BLANK



I keep reading the whole Bible all the way through and have done it many, many times. As I was reading it the last time I wrote down in a little notebook the following texts that stood out to me. I hope you carefully read them with an unbiased mind. As you read these amazing passages take note of the word glory and its derivatives.

Matthew 13:43: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

John 1:12–13: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

John 17:5: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

Romans 8:14–18, 29: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Note: “adoption” in verse 15 is a poor translation—it should be “sonship.”)

Romans 9:26: “And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.”

2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

2 Corinthians 6:18: “And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

Ephesians 3:14–19: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

Philippians 3:20–21: “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

Colossians 3:4: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Hebrews 2:10–11: “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.”

2 Peter 1:4: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

1 John 3:1–2: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

Revelation 21:7: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

Also, carefully read 1 Corinthians 15:35–53.

All these verses are not just nice sounding platitudes—they mean what they say.

How Does Jesus Fulfill the Law?

By VANCE A. STINSON



Many claim that Jesus’ declaration that He didn’t come to “abolish the Law” but to “fulfill it” means that He did not overturn the Law before its purpose was accomplished but instead brought its purpose to fulfillment, thereby bringing an end to the Old Covenant with its myriad of laws, commandments, statutes, and judgments. He then inaugurated the New Covenant with its new “Law of Christ,” which supersedes and replaces the laws of the previous covenant.

Others, however, claim that Jesus “fulfilled” the Law by raising Old Testament standards to a new and higher level, and that all the commandments, statutes, and judgments of the Law of Moses remain in effect for the followers of the Messiah.

But do either of these views truly capture the meaning of Jesus’ mission statement regarding the Law? What, precisely, did Jesus mean when He said that He came to “fulfill” the Law?

Jesus’ teaching on this subject is found in Matthew 5:17–20:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus did not say that all the *commandments, statutes, and judgments* of the Mosaic Law would remain in force “until all is accomplished.” Rather, He said that not a dot or an iota would pass from “the Law”—the Torah, or Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible)—until all is accomplished. This simply means that the Torah would remain an authoritative source of divine revelation “until heaven and earth pass away.”

The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” was a common Jewish expression meaning the Holy Scriptures. Jesus came to “fulfill” the Scriptures, not “abolish them.” One of Matthew’s major themes is to show *how* Jesus, as the prophesied Messiah, fulfilled the Scriptures. He presents Jesus as the Prophet like Moses, the new David, and the true Israel. He shows that even scriptural passages on Israel’s history point to Jesus. Several times, he cites an event in the life of Jesus and points out that the event “fulfilled” a particular prophecy of Scripture. Jesus, then, was speaking of the *prophetic features* of the Law and the Prophets—the Scriptures—when He declared that He came to “fulfill them.” The prophetic features include both direct predictions and types and shadows of the Messiah and His redemptive work.

Since Jesus fulfills the Scriptures, “these commandments”—*all* the commandments of Scripture, including civil and ceremonial laws, the Ten Commandments, and laws concerning the tabernacle and priesthood, ritual purification, circumcision, consecration of the firstborn, Sabbaths, festivals, and tithes—must now be understood in light of the life, works, teachings, and mission of Jesus (the “Christ-event,” for short).

The book of Acts and New Testament epistles show how the Christ-event affects the Mosaic Law. The New Testament reveals that Christ is the new High Priest (Hebrews 4:15), an office forbidden to Him under the Mosaic Law (7:14). His blood, not the blood of goats and bulls, is the blood of sanctification (9:12). Christ carries out His priestly ministry in the heavenly tabernacle (8:2), not an earthly holy place. The covenant He mediates is a New Covenant, vastly superior to the Mosaic Covenant with its types and shadows (8:6–12; 10:1). And His “circumcision”—the cutting of His flesh (His death)—enables the true worshiper to enter the Holy Place and approach the heavenly altar with confidence (Colossians 2:11; Hebrews 10:19–22).

But Jesus “fulfills” the Law in another way, as well. The Christ-event had a positive effect on the *universal and permanent features* of the Old Testament Law—the commands to love God with all one’s being and one’s neighbor as oneself, which summarize the Ten Commandments, or Ten “Words” (teachings). As the “Prophet like Moses,” Jesus brought to light the original and true meaning and intent of God’s commandments while exposing the erroneous traditions the scribes and Pharisees had attached to them.

And now, with the full restoration of the universal moral law, and with the shadows of the Mosaic Covenant having been replaced by the realities to which they pointed, the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary and Mediator of the new and superior Covenant calls for nothing less than radical holiness—righteousness that “exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.”

Prophetic Awareness

By **GEROGE ROPER**



Contemplating the future is an approach that all engage in. In so doing, many question how society might evolve. As the world responded with aggressive measures

to recent public health concerns, numerous people wondered if developing circumstances were a prelude to conditions even more foreboding. The overwhelming concern was how the culture would recover and what our ultimate tomorrow would look like. Likewise, throughout the ages, philosophers, theologians, and sages have pondered what influences might demonstrate that human society had arrived at a pinnacle of governance or a precipice of self-destruction. In speculating what precursors could signify the onset of a universal dystopia or a worldwide utopia, one point of reference would be that of the Bible.

The Bible is filled with literary, symbolic, and poetic prose that alludes to a culminating period in humanity's existence. Many adherents of the Bible support the book's status as an authoritative source to how the course of society will play out. It is noted that God, seen to be the true Author of the Bible, has pledged to be transparent with those that are committed to Him.

"Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7, New Living Translation).

These prophets served as envoys of God's messages, and they have transcribed God's "intelligence briefings" concerning world affairs for successive generations. Hence, countless individuals turn to prophecy for insight into what conditions will overtake humankind and when such happenings might take place.

In reviewing prophecy, many are watchful for potential trigger events that might spark the progression of prophetic occurrences. More often than not, such conjecture is often centered around geopolitical alliances that may coalesce in Europe, as a tell-tale sign of when prophecy will be prompted to hasten. However, the Bible presents other indicators that could prove to be just as consequential.

One indicator to consider pertains to the receding of the Euphrates River. The Euphrates River is the longest running river in Western Asia. It travels from Turkey, across Syria, and through Iraq. Over the last several decades, this river system has continued to experience diminished water flow, down from former water levels. Environmental factors such as drought and changes in weather patterns have contributed to this decline. In 2021, the Iraqi Ministry of Water Resources issued a report stating that at this current rate of decline the Euphrates River could run dry by 2040.

Such a scenario holds prophetic implications for the future. The Bible recounts that any existing water within the banks of the Euphrates will be

completely dried up, making way for two opposing military powers to mobilize and join forces, forming a massive army. Utilizing the dried canal as an artery to travel through, these troops then advance on Jerusalem to confront the returned Christ and His army.

"Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great Euphrates River, and it dried up so that the kings from the east could march their armies toward the west without hindrance" (Revelation 16:12, New Living Translation).

The present gradual diminishment to the water levels of the Euphrates River that we see today could be a developing precursor that would further lead to prophecies coming to pass in the future.

Another consideration to surmising when prophetic gestures might begin to portray themselves is that of the red heifer. The red heifer refers to a very unique cow which was utilized by the nation of Israel in the performance of a special ceremony that Israel was instructed to carry out by God. The performed ceremony produced ashes that were then mixed with water, creating a solution used for purifying. The solution was preserved and utilized for purification as the need called for in the nation of Israel. The solution made with the ashes of the red heifer would be sprinkled on individuals or ceremonial objects that needed purifying.

The state of being pure or impure are concepts that hold great relevance. The condition of purity that stems from the red heifer's ashes acts as a license or a permit that allows a function to take place. Without that license, without that state of purity, you cannot proceed further with certain endeavors. The red heifer's ashes were an invaluable resource that made purification possible, allowing for a number of crucial functions to be carried out.

"The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: 'This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke. Give it to Eleazar the priest; it is to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the tent of meeting. While he watches, the heifer is to be burned—its hide, flesh, blood and intestines.... A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and put them in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They are to be kept by the Israelite community for use in the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin.'" (Numbers 19:1–5, 9, NIV)

The standards by which this animal was evaluated in order to be deemed worthy to be part of the ceremony were very strict. As its name suggests, the heifer was reddish-brown in color. To qualify as a suitable choice, the animal was to have no non-red hair, be of a certain age, have no blemishes, and be in compliance with other stringent rules related to the cow's upkeep. Any instance in not meeting these criteria

would disqualify the heifer.

Jewish writings purport that from the time of Moses, until the fall of the second temple in Jerusalem, nine red heifers emerged in a span of approximately 1,500 years. From the fall of the second temple until today, a period stretching approximately 1,950 years, no qualifying red heifers have presented themselves.

Without a viable red heifer, purity cannot be established. The purification process is a necessity and is a prerequisite to enabling certain roles and functions. Pursuing facets such as a working priesthood, conducting specific sacrifices, or the existence of a third temple can't be fulfilled without establishing purity through the ashes of a red heifer. All of these examples have strong prophetic implications. With centuries having gone by with no red heifer available, such ambitions could not be pursued.

However, recent events in Israel have revealed three red heifers that are being watched closely as they mature. These heifers appear to meet the criteria and if they continue to remain eligible, a red heifer ceremony would be conducted as soon as Passover 2024. To have the ashes of a red heifer readily available would make the conducting of daily sacrifices plausible, an act that carries great prophetic significance.

In the book of Daniel, it is insinuated that daily sacrifices would be reinstated by explicitly noting that daily sacrifices would be halted. The feat of having daily sacrifices begin again could not initially be accomplished without first establishing purity. Purity cannot be established without the ashes of a red heifer. The ashes of the red heifer cannot come about unless the red heifer ceremony is performed. Finally, the ceremony cannot be performed without the introduction of an acceptable red heifer. Therefore, the red heifer is key to sacrifices being reinstated.

"From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there

will be 1,290 days" (Daniel 12:11, NIV).

This verse's prophetic indications recognize that a future military-religious leader who, with the ability to perform signs and wonders, falsely professes himself to be god, will usurp the autonomy of Jerusalem. In so doing, the daily sacrifices that will be conducted at the time will be interrupted. At that point a specific amount of time will elapse before the return of Christ. It is through this lens that the present day rise of an acceptable red heifer could be seen to contribute to the future prophetic chain of events.

Although students of the Bible speculate on how prophecy will unfold, the future has still yet to reveal itself. What is certain is that what God has said will come to pass will occur. Strict scenarios regarding how prophecy will ensue is merely conjecture on our part. When it comes to recognizing signs of impending fulfillment to prophecy, the greatest indicator to look out for is the condition of our relationship with God. Christ emphasized that we are to be most alert to our spiritual state, giving priority to our relationship with God and our relationship with each other.

In the book of Matthew, chapter 24, the disciples inquired of Jesus what would be the sign to take notice of that would identify the end of man's age (Matthew 24:3). Christ initially responded by describing contemporary occurrences to take notice of, but He followed that by giving repeated warnings to monitor our spiritual condition. In response to their question, He continued to give multiple examples to reinforce His point of our need to stay spiritually alert.

"So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming. Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected" (Matthew 24:42–44, NLT).

The strongest sign to our prophetic awareness is indeed our spiritual condition.

FEAST OF TABERNACLES 2023 Poughkeepsie, New York

The Church of God International is pleased to host the 2023 Feast of Tabernacles in Poughkeepsie, New York. The festival site is located in New York's Hudson Valley, a region located one hour outside of New York City. Surrounded by picturesque mountains and colorful foliage, the serene setting is the backdrop of this Northeastern fall festival site.

One of the feast activities will be a visit to New York City for a showing of the Tony Award winning Broadway show, *The Lion King*, in Time Square, New York.

This year's Feast also offers a chartered sunset dinner cruise traversing the scenic Hudson River. Setting sail from New York City, the tour will pass such sites as the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty and will take in the spectacular evening view of the New York City skyline.

We invite you to join us in New York to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. For more information, visit cginewyork.org/fot.

The Third Commandment

By MICHELLE ALGARRA



Largely unrecognized by a lot of professing Christians, and even true Christians in God's church, is the fact that personal overcoming may necessitate a change in one's personality, speech habits, and communication. Basic personality traits developed since the infantile stage, childhood, and adolescence usually persist a lifetime. However, a lot of mannerisms, conversation, and lingo common among worldly people in society and even amongst educated people are not acceptable based on God's standards.

One way a Christian shows love for God and others in through grace in speech and conversation. It is part of deep honor and reverence for God's name that we try hard to talk in a manner that would be pleasing to God who gave us the gift of speech/communication. Without language there would not even be any such thing as education and the progress and advancements human beings have made in human society.

Jesus Christ, the Word, is the Author of speech, and He has given human beings the freedom to express themselves in any way they deem appropriate, according to culture and standards of behaviour, and even knowledge acquired from study. It is the prerogative, as well as obligation, of individual Christians. To utilize this great gift in having friendly relations with others, sharing not only knowledge and information, personal experiences, but most especially to be able to share God's truth as revealed in the Scriptures. The Third Commandment—"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7)—involves not only deep reverence for God's name as the Father of all but also how we learn to communion with Him (in prayer) and with others in daily contact and fellowship in the church.

It is important to root out wrong uses of God's name, and all the titles and attributes of God, in pagan expressions, profanity, vulgarity, slander, perjury, false testimony, swearing, outright lies, distortions of the truth, and wrong philosophies and ideologies that denigrate God and His Word, the Bible.

When we converse with people, we must try not to be offensive to anybody, condemning evil deeds and the problems they cause, without devaluing the people who commit those deeds for they also have good qualities God has blessed them with in varying degrees.

We must learn to be kind and gracious to everybody, without compromising with wrong habits of conversation, and use the right venues for expressing our ideas and opinions. We should learn also to respect people and communicate with them according to their level of understanding, chronological age, and maturity. There are proper fora for mundane conversation, intellectual discussions, and personal inquiry.

Usually skeletons in one's closet, grievous sins, and derogatory information are secrets that must be kept confidential, for they denigrate one's self in the eyes of others. Such intimate influences should be a matter between God and the individuals concerned, and washing dirty linen in public not proper Christian conduct in behaviour.

Always have positive affirmations for God, one's self, and others. And one must learn to strike a balance between extreme loquaciousness and overconfidence on the one hand (to the extent of being brash and acerbic), and being timorous or fearful and timid (to the extent of being sullen or morose) on the other.

James counsels on taming or controlling the tongue as part of human behaviour, a trait that must be learned by everybody in all walks of life, regardless of level of education, culture, or circumstances.

"For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, withersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame, it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:2-9).

As Paul says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out your mouth, but that which is good to use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

Understanding Repentance

By MICHELLE ALGARRA

One of the main requirements or prerequisites to baptism is the theoretical understanding of the basic doctrines of the Church of God, and another is the individual counselling for baptism has undergone repentance. Concomitant with this is "counting the cost," which is part and parcel of one's commitment to God signified by the baptismal ceremony.

What is repentance, and what does it entail?

The *New Handy Webster Dictionary* defines repentance as "contrition for sins." Penitence is "sorrow for sin, the state of being repentant."

Original literature in the parent organization describes repentance according to the feelings associated with guilt. The founder of that progenitor Church of God group said he felt that he was merely rubbish compared to the standard of perfection in God's moral laws, but instead of considering physical suicide he contemplated on repentance and baptism.

The feelings associated with repentance usually involve deep sorrow, contrition, remorse, and sometimes involves depression because of the sins one committed in the past.

Along with the realization that one has fallen far short of God's laws on moral perfection is the desire to change one's ways or completely turn away from past behaviour contradictory to the way of God and renouncing the ways of this world. Along with this is the acceptance of Jesus' blood on the cross as atonement for one's sins, and the inward cleansing and forgiveness only Jesus' sacrifice can provide.

In committing one's way to God through the rite of baptism, there is a deep desire to learn to live God's way of life that is possible only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is granted through the laying on of hands by an authorized minister of God's church.

Even without having undergone the rite of baptism, repentance must be evident by the fruits which it bears. A person has undergone repentance when he stops indulging in actions he already realizes are contrary to God's way, and he tries to be obedient to God and follow the standards of the church.

The change may not be immediate or consistent. Changes may be gradual and incremental according to the determined behaviour of the individual concerned, and the strength and inspiration the Holy Spirit provides once one has received this gift of God.

Also, sinful proclivities and habits, wrong attitudes and behavioural problems cannot be overcome overnight and require a lifetime of overcoming. There is even the dangers associated with backsliding, or even the total turning away from God's truth through the imposition of false doctrines learned from impostors and association with people in this world.

Self-examination is an integral component to repentance, or how far one has fallen from God's standards as opposed to the standards of this world. And a clear distinction must be made between the sorrow of this world and the sorrow of repentance. The former is merely depression over the consequences and repercussions of one's sins, while the latter is the determination not to commit those sins again.

The Bible teaches one must grow both in grace and knowledge. Continually imbibing of God's truth through diligent acquisition of Scripture knowledge (through church sermons, reading the Bible and abundant church literature), continual communication with God through prayer, practicing self-control, and determination to apply God's standards of behaviour in practice and not just in theory are the motivations and/or goal of being a Christian.

It is not enough just to attend church services (weekly Sabbaths and Holy Days) and read the Bible and church literature. Even if one has done this consistently for decades without changing one's patterns of behaviour and learning not to compromise with God's truths, or bearing fruits, a person called by God may just be a sanctimonious hypocrite without fully realizing it.

Repentance involves both inward and outward change in behaviour. Character is defined in the *Webster Dictionary* as "distinctive qualities and moral excellence." This involves determination to attain a standard of perfection according to biblical principles, or following Jesus Christ's teachings and perfect example.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me (Psalm 51:1-11).

Common Faith Academy's Involvement in Kenya

Common Faith Academy (CFA) is an organization of volunteers dedicated to producing interactive online biblical-based courses. These courses include visual content via links to the internet to provide a modern, colourful experience for students. Some courses are self-run, others are guided by an instructor.

The Kenyan Church of God International (CGI) elder, Robert Onsando, would like to share the Academy's courses in Kenya. As well as carrying out his ministerial duties, Robert is the administrator in a school of more than 80 teenage orphans which is run by the US based not-for-profit, certified 501C3 corporation, Tabitha Outreach Foundation. The foundation was begun in 2018 by Dianne and Mike Webb, friends of CGI. The foundation's mission is to help break the cycle of generational poverty by providing education and life-skills training as well as assisting in practical ways. Robert also runs a training class adult leaders from various church of God groups in Kenya, and neighbouring countries, to assist them in their leadership roles.

Kenya experiences frequent electricity interruptions and unreliable inter-

net supply. In remote areas they do not have electricity or internet access. This makes it difficult for Kenyans to access and run online courses. Also, many Kenyans are not fluent in English.

Consequently, CFA and Robert are currently assessing the feasibility of converting CFA's existent online courses into offline courses and translating them into the Swahili language. The first CFA course being changed to an accessible offline course is titled "The 10 Commandments." If this is successful it will be followed by the course, "Is The Bible Reliable?" This could be followed by "Remember the Sabbath," which Robert thinks his Sunday-observant friends would find to be an interesting course.

Later, it is planned to convert "The Exodus Plagues" course, probably in time for the Unleavened Bread season next year. Robert said his Muslim friends would be interested in this course. He also commented that the course "Why Evil, Pain and Suffering?" would be

applicable to his students. Mike James produced this course for CFA.

Robert envisaged that not only will the courses assist him in his teaching, but also provide a vehicle for preaching the gospel.

To overcome electricity interruptions, and unreliable internet, CFA and Robert are investigating the purchase of a portable battery-operated Wi-Fi

transmitter which is capable of containing preloaded educational content; plus CFA courses which a teacher and students could access via Wi-Fi devices. They are also looking at sourcing some second-hand Chromebook laptops for students.

Tom Caelli
CFA team member



Robert, at the far left, with some of the students and one of their teachers

In Loving Memory

William "Bill" Russ

1945 – 2023



A Celebration of Life service will be held on Wednesday, August 9, 2023, at the chapel of the Taylor Funeral Home. Pastor James Satterfield gave the eulogy. William Arnold "Bill" Russ, 77, of Dickson, TN, passed away at his home on August 2, 2023 surrounded by his loved ones.

He was born on November 21, 1945 in Indianapolis, IN to the late William and Finnis Russ. He was raised in Indianapolis, IN. He graduated from Hampton High School in 1963. He worked at Schrader Automotive, and then transitioned into working at Diversified, which later changed

to Quad Graphics, as a general mechanic for 29 years.

Survivors include his wife of 50 years, Sandra Russ; his children, Nickie Russ and Demetrius Russ; bonus children, Shonnett Corlew and Keith Bell; sisters, Roberta Hornbeck, Sue Phillips, Carol Russ, and Mary Russ; brothers, Anthony Russ and Latroy Russ; grandchildren, Demequa Russ, Demontez Coleman, Heaven Hollingsworth, Demetria Russ, and Ahlayah Boyd-Ralston; great-grandchildren, Kaetaz Russ, Kyren Huddleston, and Teagan Fowler; a host of nieces, nephews, and cousins; and best friend, Charles Beasley.

Bill had a love for all sports. He spent many years coaching his son in football and was able to be a father figure to many children over the years. He was an avid basketball player and played in the over-35-years-old league for many years. He then retired and was able to spend more time doing what he loved doing most: studying the Word of God, spending time with family, and turkey hunting.

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Open Church Policy

The Church of God International is an open church.

We have many people attending who are new in the faith. Some will not always keep each of God's laws as they should, and some will not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brother do. Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men. Always remember that you will be judged for what you do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please the Father in all that you do.

The Old Covenant and the Ten Commandments

By VANCE A. STINSON

Author Steve Lehrer, commenting on Deuteronomy 4:13–14, writes: “It seems to me that the Ten Commandments are very tightly bound to the Old Covenant based on the Scriptures above. The main point so far is that the Old Covenant has passed away and the Ten Commandments (which include the Sabbath) written on tablets of stone or the tablets of the covenant are a central part of that Old Covenant. This should be enough to make a strong case that the Ten Commandments, and in particular the Sabbath, are not binding on believers today in the New Covenant era” (*New Covenant Theology*, 2006, page 183).

Deuteronomy 4:13 states, “So He [God] declared to you [Israel] His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments, and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.” This says that the Decalogue (the unit of law called the Ten Commandments) is the Covenant. Therefore, since Hebrews 8:13 tells us that “He has made the first [covenant] obsolete,” does this mean that the Ten Commandments, as Lehrer suggests, “are not binding on believers today in the New Covenant era”?

First, no serious theologian would ever claim that the Sinaitic Covenant consisted solely of the Ten Commandments. The Covenant was a *binding agreement* between God and the people of Israel. It consisted of both terms and promises, including promises of copious blessings for obedience and severe consequences for disobedience. The terms included the Ten Commandments as well as dozens of additional laws, commandments, statutes, and judgments. So Deuteronomy 4:13 cannot possibly mean that the Sinaitic Covenant consisted exclusively of the Ten Commandments (and, of course, Lehrer is not making that claim).

Second, no knowledgeable Bible student claims that *all* the laws of the Old Covenant pertain exclusively to the people under that covenant. Laws against murder, adultery, idolatry, blasphemy, lying, stealing, and covetousness, for instance, are universal—they apply to all peoples at all times and in every culture. All believers acknowledge that the Old Testament commandments to love God and neighbor are universally binding. If, then, individual commandments that formed a part of the Sinaitic Covenant remain in force and are binding for Christians, why would anyone conclude that the Decalogue, *as a unit of divine law*, cannot apply universally and could not have been carried over into the New Covenant? Where is the New Testament principle that permits the transfer-

ence of individual laws from the Old Covenant to the New, but forbids the transference of whole units of divine law?

Third, New Testament treatment of the Decalogue supports the Decalogue’s permanency and universality. James, writing to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1:1), an audience he identified as Christians (1:1; 2:1; 5:7), said, “For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:11). James said that to “stumble in one point” was to be “guilty of all” (verse 10), showing that he saw these specific commandments of the Decalogue as components of an indivisible unit. He clearly believed that this unit of divine law remained in force for believers under the New Covenant. (See also Matthew 19:16–22; Romans 7:7, 12, 14; 13:8–10; Ephesians 6:1–2.)

Fourth, All conservative evangelical pastors, teachers, apologists, and theologians, as well as many outside evangelical circles, believe there is an objective universal moral law that has been in place from the beginning of human history. It makes no sense whatsoever that God would have failed to include His universal moral law in the Mosaic package. So to treat all commandments, statutes, and judgments of the Law of Moses as if they were all in the same category of law is

absurd. The Ten Commandments most decidedly *do* stand apart from other features of the Law of Moses. The New Testament supports the centuries-old premise that the two great commandments on loving God and neighbor are a summary of the Ten Commandments, which represent ten moral categories touching on the most fundamental areas of life and relationships.

Conclusion: The Sinaitic Covenant was made up of both promises and laws, including the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy 4:13 neither confirms nor refutes the universality of the Decalogue; it simply shows the *centrality* of the Decalogue to the Covenant. Other texts show that this unit of divine law remains in force today.

Written with the finger of God on tablets of stone, the commandments of the Decalogue are everlastingly binding on the creatures who bear the image of God. Request your FREE copy of our booklet, *The Ten Commandments*, today!



FEAST OF TABERNACLES 2023

Festival Sites

This Feast of Tabernacles reminds us that we’re presently wandering in the “wilderness” of this world and pictures the coming Millennium—the 1,000 years of Christ’s reign on earth—when the true harvest of mankind can now take place. Without Satan—the original source of evil—incarcerated and no longer able to “deceive the nations,” all the nations of the world can finally be brought to God. For 1,000 years, a Golden Age shall reign; happiness and peace will be reality and worldwide salvation will be possible. This harvest of people will be far larger than the first, as the larger fall harvest portrays in the agricultural cycle. The Millennium will be the time when God sets His hand to save the world. It will be a time of rebuilding the waste areas and forging of a new society under the righteous rule of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ.

This year, the Feast of Tabernacles is from September 30 to October 6, with the Eighth Day (Last Great Day) on October 7. Festival services will be held at locations listed below. For more information on each site, check the “Feast of Tabernacles” page on our website ([Feast of Tabernacles — The Church of God International \(cgi.org\)](http://Feast of Tabernacles — The Church of God International (cgi.org)). Scan the code for instant access.)



Poughkeepsie, NY
Medina, OH
Clearwater, FL
Daytona Beach, FL
Galveston, TX
Hot Springs, AR (Co-Sponsored)
Panama City Beach, FL (Co-Sponsored)

The CGI also has Feast sites in **Canada** (Collingwood, Ontario), the **United Kingdom** (Haywood’s Retreat), **Africa, Jamaica**, and the **Philippines**. Check the website for more information.

What’s going on in your local church area? Combined services? Public Bible studies? Potlucks? Church activities? Celebrations? Memorials? Visiting ministers? Baptisms? Ordinations? Evangelistic campaigns? Birth or death announcements? Let us know, and perhaps we can publish it under “Church News.” We’d love to hear from you!

The Editor

OUR INTERACTIVE GOD

By VANCE A. STINSON

When we look back through history and examine the various pagan cultures of the world, you find that almost all of them believed in multiple gods—gods of healing, gods of fertility, agricultural gods, and so on. But we also find that most of them at least acknowledged that there was one supreme, eternal God who was above all the various gods.

And, believe it or not, the Bible affirms that there *really are* many gods, some good and some bad. The Hebrew term for “god” is *elohim*, which simply means “MIGHTY ONE(S).” The term is used in reference to human kings and judges, as they exercise power in the nations of men. And it is used in reference to the angels—both the good ones and the *fallen* ones. Yet, it is clear from the Scriptures that there is one Supreme, Eternal God, and, among the Hebrews (unlike the many pagan nations), HE ALONE is to be worshiped! Sacrifices were to be brought to Him, not to the other *elohim*, or “gods,” or powerful spirit beings, which included the archangels, the cherubim, the seraphim, and any other angelic beings.

We see this notion of “God and the gods” throughout the world. Even many of the classical Greek philosophers believed in both the supreme God, the one Aristotle called “the unmoved mover,” as well as multiple gods, such as the gods presumed to reside on Mount Olympus—Zeus, Hermes, etc. But it appears that at least some of the philosophers didn’t really take the Olympian gods seriously. But they *did* take the one Almighty, Eternal God seriously, though their ideas about Him were flawed.

The Philosophers

Here is an overview of some of the things the different philosophers believed:

Heraclitus rightly taught that everything—the whole universe—is in motion, but he said that there was one thing that remained constant. He called it the *logos*. The *logos* brought about change, but the *logos* itself did not change—it remained *unmoved*, eternally *changeless*.

Plato used so many ideas about God that it’s not clear what he really believed about Him, or “It,” as the case may be. He appears to have believed that God and the matter that composes the universe are both eternal, and that God (or what he called the “Demiurge”) fashioned the universe from this preexisting material. Plato’s God is in every way perfect, and since He is perfect, He cannot change. If He changes at all, in any way, then it can only be a change for the worse, and that would make Him less than absolutely per-

fect, so Plato’s God does not change at all; He remains the same. Nor does He love, for to love indicates to lack something, and God lacks nothing; therefore, God does not love. So God is beyond emotions. He is *impassible*!

Aristotle wrote about God, but his main concern was the motion of matter. He noted that everything was in motion, and he tried to understand why. He thought, along with others, that the planets moved because the gods pushed them. Later, some Christians would believe the same thing—that the *angels* were pushing the heavenly bodies that were in motion. But Aristotle thought the motion of matter, whether gods were pushing the planets or not, required a FIRST CAUSE. There could be no eternal regression of motion, as all motion is the result of previous motions, which are the result of previous motions...and so on. So there had to be a *starting point*—a *First Cause*! Aristotle’s God *was* the First Cause. Like virtually everyone else, Aristotle believed the material that composes the universe had always existed, just as God had always existed. And so it must have been God who set the material universe in motion. Aristotle coined the expression, “unmoved mover.” He also held Plato’s notion of an infinitely perfect God, which means a changeless and impassible God. Like Plato, he believed that if a perfect being changed, it could only be for the worse; therefore, the infinitely perfect God does not change—not now, not ever! So if It doesn’t change, how is It the “First Cause” of the motions of matter. Aristotle’s solution: The motion of matter is not the result of God acting upon the matter; it is the result of matter’s response to the presence of the infinitely perfect God. Think of it like this: God is infinitely perfect and beautiful and matter desires to be like Him and is therefore drawn to Him. So God does not *act* upon the matter, for to do so would require *change*. And if He changed, the change would be for the worse, which would mean He would not be infinitely perfect or absolutely immutable. GOD, therefore, *has no potentiality*! He *has only pure actuality*!

Now, the *Hebrew* concept of God is quite different. For the Hebrews, God interacts with His creation. He is responsive. He answers prayers. He is even described as occasionally *changing His mind*! To Aristotle, this must surely be a *monstrous* lie! Either that, or the God of the Hebrews is an inferior God, not the one eternal and *changeless* God! Or, there is another option: the Bible’s descriptions of God are largely ANTHROPOMORPHIC!

Let’s look at one such description. It’s found in the Book of Jonah:

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.’ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened” (Johan 3:1–10).

If you have adopted the Aristotelian model of God, and at the same time believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then you *must* say that this is an *anthropomorphism*! For here, God *responds* to human repentance! He “relents.” He *changes His mind*! From the Aristotelian perspective, the writer must surely be attributing human attributes to God without intending them to be taken literally. Yet, there is no reason for this kind of non-literal description. When the biblical writers say that God changes His mind, they mean that God changes His mind. When they say He waits to see, they mean He waits to see. When they say He responds to the actions of men, they mean He makes decisions *in time*,

and those decisions are based on the things He sees men do.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God loves, expresses anger, and exhibits other emotions in His interactions with the creatures He made to bear His image. So again, to hold the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God *and* accept the Aristotelian model of God, one must conclude that the biblical descriptions of God are largely anthropomorphic or anthropopathic.

The Early Church Fathers

The apologists and Christian philosophers who came on the scene after the time of the apostles began moving away from Hebrew thought. Their writings indicate they were clearly influenced by the Greek philosophers. They sought to describe God in a more universal way, not only as the God of the Jews; so, in their good intentions, they began to interpret biblical descriptions of God through the lenses of Greek philosophy. Some, both then and in later centuries, emphasized the immutability, or changelessness, of God. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, adopted the philosophical language of Aristotle, stating that God has no potentiality but is only pure actuality. So history shows that philosophical ideas from centuries past did affect, perhaps both positively and negatively, the Christian view of God.

It wasn’t difficult for the church fathers to find superficial biblical support for their philosophical views. Let’s look at a few examples.

Malachi 3:6: “For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.”

Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

James 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is *no variation or shadow of turning*.”

All these verses tell us that God does not change! But in every case they

2023 Fall FESTIVAL CALENDAR

These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times (Leviticus 23:4).

Feast of Trumpets: September 16

Day of Atonement: September 25

Feast of Tabernacles: September 30 – October 6

Last Great Day (Eighth Day): October 7

mean that God is perfectly FAITHFUL! If He makes a promise, He is faithful to keep it. You can depend on Him; He won't fail. He will *not* go back on His word. He is perfect in CHARACTER! It does *not* mean He does not change in any sense. It does not mean He is the "unmoved Mover," as Aristotle described Him. He is, as the late Clark Pinnock said, the "MOST-MOVED MOVER"! He is a *responsive* God! He *interacts* with His creation and will ultimately bring it to perfection! (William Hasker's clock analogy is helpful. A clock that keeps perfect time, says Hasker, is always moving, always changing, but is PERFECT.)

Augustine, who lived in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, was Western Christianity's most influential theologian. He emphasized the immutability and impassibility of God, and his teaching on predestination and election leaves many of us thinking that Augustine turned God into something other than a God who truly loves His human image-bearers. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas followed Augustine's thought in many regards and incorporated Aristotelian philosophy into Christian theism.

In the sixteenth century, in the time of the Protestant Reformation, Augustine's influence was still very strong. Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk. John Calvin drew many of his concepts from Augustine. And today's Calvinism reflects the heavy influence of Augustine.

The God of the Bible

The God of the Bible, unlike the God of the philosophers, is not the immov-

able, impassible One who does not interact with human beings or the material creation. He instead deals with His human subjects in time, interacting with them, even moving in their lives *in hopes* of bringing them to repentance and faith.

Calvinists and other Augustinians seem to describe a God different from the One "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). If God pre-determined from all eternity the precise identities of those who would be lost, how can He desire salvation for all men? In fact, how can a timeless God who infallibly knows and pre-determines every minute detail of the future "desire" anything?

If God knew and decreed all things from all eternity, how could He, in the days of Noah, be "sorry that He had made man on the earth" or be "grieved in His heart" upon seeing that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5)?

When God tested Abraham, and the latter proved his faithfulness, how could God say to him, "Now I know that you fear God" (Genesis 22:12). Didn't He already know it—from all eternity?

On more than one occasion, God's plan to bring destruction to a sinful person or people was reversed when repentance occurred or intercessory prayers were offered.

When God was about to destroy the Israelites for making and bowing down before a golden calf (Exodus 32), Moses "pleaded with the LORD

his God" to spare His people (verses 11–13), and as a result "the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (verse 14).

When Israel refused to enter Canaan, God said to Moses, "How long will these people reject Me? [He had to ask? He didn't know from all eternity? It wasn't in the eternal decree?] And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them [as if He were trying to persuade them, though He knew from all eternity and had so decreed that they wouldn't]?" (Numbers 14:11).

Then, again, Moses intercedes for Israel, pleading with God to withhold His wrath (verses 12–19). The result: "Then the LORD said: 'I have pardoned, according to your word'" (verse 20).

These are but a few examples of God interacting with His people, responding to prayers, and altering previous decrees upon changing conditions. There are many other examples—so many that we cannot simply ignore them or claim they are anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms. God is *truly* interactive with His creation!

The ultimate interaction between God and man occurred some 2,000 years ago, when the divine Word "emptied Himself" by coming to His human creation *as one of them!*

Paul tells us that Christ had been "in the form of God" but "did not consider it robbery [or something to be held onto] to be equal with God, but made [emptied] Himself [to be]

of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5–8).

Here, being "in the form of God" and "equal with God" are contrasted with being "in the form of a bondservant" and "in the likeness of men." He was ontologically equal with God the Father but, through self-emptying, became a human being! He put Himself *into His creation*, literally taking to Himself a human nature and experiencing human life in its fullness!

I believe this "self-emptying" of the divine Word reflects an attribute of the divine nature itself. God is, by nature, "self-emptying." That is, He is *interactive*, putting Himself into His creation, making Himself vulnerable to the pain of grief and sorrow, and yet experiencing the joy of being lovingly embraced by His children. He deals with us in time, not through eternal decrees.

Our God is a God who hears, a God who risks, a God who loves us so much He sent His Son to save us from the things that have separated us from Him. He hasn't created robots who will perform as programmed. Instead, He has produced *children* who can freely choose to love Him. And nothing could please a parent more than the love of his or her children. That's what our Heavenly Parent wants of us.

He first loved us; let's make sure we love Him in return.

The Law and the Gospel

How the Christ-Event Bridges the Divide Between Israel and the Church

By VANCE A. STINSON

Many Old Testament laws, including several of the commandments of the Decalogue, were tailored specifically for Israel. References to the Exodus and the Promised Land appear throughout the Decalogue. Does this argue against the universality and permanency of the Decalogue?

It is true that the Decalogue contains specific references to Israel and the nation's history and culture. Note the following:

1) In the introduction to the commandments, God identifies Israel as the recipient of the law: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2).

2) In Exodus 20, the Sabbath commandment is linked with the seventh day of creation week (verse 11), but in Deuteronomy, the Sabbath is connected to the Israelites' experience as slaves in Egypt and their departure from that place: "And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath

day" (Deuteronomy 5:15).

3) The commandment to honor parents is accompanied by a promise pertaining specifically to the Promised Land: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

The argument is that the Decalogue cannot be transferred *as an indivisible unit* into the New Covenant because its specific references to Israel, the Exodus, and the Promised Land do not pertain to people who did not descend from Jacob, are not recipients of the land promises, and whose ancestors did not come out of Egypt in the Exodus. If these features are removed, a part of the Decalogue is removed, so it no longer stands as an indivisible unit. Since the Decalogue, in its entire and fully intact form, could not have been transferred to the New Covenant, one cannot treat the commandments of that law equally or claim that all of them are universal laws.

The argument fails, however, when examined under the light of the deeper, Christological revelation supplied by the New Testament. Christ did not come to redeem Israel only, but all humankind. The universal nature of God's redemptive purpose in Christ is

reflected in the apostle Paul's enlightened understanding of the Fifth Commandment:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. '*Honor your father and mother,*' which is the first commandment with promise; *'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'*" (Ephesians 6:1–3).

Paul recognizes the permanent validity of the Fifth Commandment, but he also recognizes the permanent validity of the promise accompanying the commandment. Christ's universal redemptive purpose *informs* Paul's understanding of the full meaning of the commandment. In its original form, only the Promised Land was in view; but Paul, enlightened by the deeper revelation of Christ, recognizes that the promise ultimately extends to the ends of the earth, so he interprets the commandment and its promise accordingly.

Paul's interpretation brings out the *full* meaning of the Fifth Commandment without destroying its original meaning or intent. Thus, the Fifth Commandment and its attached promise are carried over *in full* to the New Covenant. Other references to Israel, the Exodus, and the Promised

Land should be interpreted accordingly.

The Christ-event also informed the early disciples' understanding of the promises given to Abraham and enabled them to abandon their exclusivity regarding the people to whom the promises pertain.

The promise of a "new covenant" was given specifically to the "house of Israel" and "house of Judah" (Jeremiah 31:31), but the writer of the book of Hebrews applies this prophetic promise to the redemptive work of Christ and establishment of the church (Hebrews 8:6–13). The church is racially and ethnically diverse, but all its members are considered true (spiritual) Israelites. Christ is the ultimate "Seed of Abraham" (Galatians 3:16), and all who are "in Christ"—all true Christians—are therefore Abraham's offspring, or "seed." As Paul said, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (verse 29). The church, then, is the true "Israel of God" (6:16). (**Note:** This by no means suggests that ethnic Israel no longer has a place in God's plan or in prophecy.)

Further, in Paul's "olive tree" analogy of Israel, the "natural branches"

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(representing unbelieving Israelites) are “broken off” (thus no longer a part of the tree), and branches from a “wild olive tree” (representing Gentiles who put their faith in Christ) are “grafted in” and “become a par-

taker of the root and fatness of the olive tree” (Romans 11:17). The Gentile believers, once “grafted in,” become a part of the true Israel. And if the unbelieving Israelites repent and turn to God through Christ, they can

be “grafted in” again (verse 23). This analogy further supports the view that the true “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16) is the ethnically diverse Church of God.

With this understanding of the early

church’s view of itself as the “Israel of God” and true heir of the Abrahamic promises, it should not surprise us to see New Testament passages affirming the integrity of the Decalogue for believers under the New Covenant.



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

3900 TIMMS ST., TYLER, TEXAS 75701

Published by The Church of God International

www.cgi.org

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Texas 75701
Permit No. 254

Fall Issue

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