

V. DOCTRINES, REVELATIONS, AND PRACTICES

A. SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

The great work of the ministry of The Church of God is to preach the Word of God, ministering its truth to both saint and sinner. It is not possible for that work to be accomplished, however, without knowledge of the Scriptures and the skill needed for their interpretation and application. It has been rightly said that a sound and trustworthy interpretation of the Scriptures is the root and basis of all revealed theology.

The process of Biblical interpretation involves the sciences of Biblical Introduction, Textual Criticism, Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Exposition. Fortunately for most of those in the Christian ministry, the works of Biblical Introduction and Textual Criticism have been accomplished in their behalf by men of dedication to God and His Word in previous generations. Biblical Introduction makes an examination that inquires of the age, authorship, and canonical authority of the Bible. Textual Criticism seeks to ascertain the exact wording of the original texts as nearly as possibly by collating and comparing ancient manuscripts.

The part of the process of scriptural interpretation that involves the majority of Christian ministers is the work of hermeneutics, exegesis, and exposition. Hermeneutics is the science that establishes rules for interpretation. Exegesis is the process of applying the rules of hermeneutics to a particular passage of Scripture and bringing forth the true meaning of that passage. Exposition is the work of comparing and contrasting one passage of Scripture with others so that its meaning may be clearly understood.

1. Hermeneutics and Exegesis

Some passages of Holy Scripture are to be interpreted literally, while other passages are to be interpreted figuratively or allegorically. This makes the work of establishing rules for interpretation all the more difficult. This has given rise to a wide variety of schools of thought on scriptural interpretation.

The Church of God uses two methods of hermeneutics that are based in Holy Scripture. The first of these is the grammatico-historical method and applies to all recorded events in the Scriptures as well as to the instructions of both Old and New Testaments with regard to proper human conduct and interaction with others. The second is the allegorical method, which is subordinate to the grammatico-historical method and is used in the interpretation of passages of Scripture that are to be taken figuratively.

a. Grammatico-Historical Method

The hermeneutic rules of the grammatico-historical method which are vital to a proper interpretation of those passages of Scripture which are to be taken literally include the following:

- (1) Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. This is the most important principle of Biblical hermeneutics. Holy Scripture cannot be interpreted in the light of secular writings or events. Those writings and events must be interpreted in the light of Holy Scripture. Scripture rightly divided confirms but never contradicts Scripture. The way in which Scripture interprets Scripture is by comparison of parallels from the same author and parallels from other authors.
- (2) Words and sentences can have but one literal meaning. Unless a person is making a riddle, he speaks in such a way as to convey his meaning as clearly as possible. This is true also of narratives of miraculous events that are recorded in the Bible. They are to be taken literally.
- (3) The scope of the entire book must be understood in order to interpret a particular passage. In order to make use of this valuable tool the reader must seek to

understand the purpose for which a particular book of the Bible was written and the overall theme of that book. When this is understood, the meanings of particular passages correlate with the overall scope of the book and become clear.

- (4) Context interprets text. This rule is vital to scriptural interpretation where too often people lift passages out of context to make them confirm some idea that they have developed, when in fact they have nothing to do with that concept. A particular verse of Scripture can be interpreted only in the setting of the verses which precede and succeed it.
- (5) The historical setting of the writing must be considered in order to gain a clear understanding of the intent of the author in writing the passage.
- (6) The rules of grammar must be strictly applied in order to interpret the passage accurately.
- (7) The intent of the author in writing the passage must be respected and an imaginative interpretation must not be assumed in contradistinction to the author's intent.
- (8) The obvious meaning of a passage must be given priority over an obscure meaning. Again, the writers of Holy Scripture intended to reveal, not obscure their meaning. Since they were skillful writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they were seeking to make a revelation, not conceal a mystery.

b. Allegorical Method

The second method of hermeneutics that The Church of God employs is the allegorical method which is applied to the interpretation of those passages that are to be taken figuratively and to those passages that are prophetic in nature. Jesus declared that both the law and the prophets prophesied until John (Matthew 11:13); therefore, the events of the Old Testament, as well as its prophecies, are prophetic in nature. The way in which the events of the Old Testament prophesy is through the use of types and shadows and allegories.

The record of the ministry of Jesus and of the Early Church is filled with references to the fact that the works which they accomplished were parallel with events of the old economy. Jesus declared that the only sign that He would give to that generation was the type of Jonah's being in the belly of the whale three days and nights that would be repeated in His entombment for three days and nights. Paul allegorized the relationship of the law and grace in the two sons of Abraham (Galatians 4:22-31). Hebrews used the types and shadows of the priesthood and temple worship of the Old Testament to reveal Christ. Peter used the temple as a type of the church and its various offices (I Peter 2:5-9).

The hermeneutic rules for allegorical interpretation include the following:

- (1) All use of types and shadows and allegories must agree with those that were revealed by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament.
- (2) Once a principle has been laid down in the Scriptures it may be applied wherever a parallel circumstance is seen. This concept is based on the fundamental principle of divine law which declares that what God has done in one generation, He will repeat in another time (Ecclesiastes 3:15).
- (3) The allegorical interpretation of parables and riddles must be made in the light of other statements and actions of the author.
- (4) An allegorical interpretation of Scripture must never introduce an idea or concept that contradicts a grammatico-historical interpretation of a literal passage of Scripture.

c. Interpretation of Prophecy

Prophecy is interpreted by using both the grammatico-historical method and the

allegorical method. Since God never changes and uses the same principles for the manifestation of His work in succeeding generations, particular passages of prophecy often have multiple fulfillments. Generally these are manifest in three dimensions: the historical, the spiritual, and the future national; however, there are many passages that have more than three fulfillments. It is in these interpretations that both the grammatico-historical and the allegorical methods come into play.

No prophecy can be fully understood unless its historical fulfillment is comprehended first. The grammatico-historical method gives a clear understanding of the way in which the predictions of the prophets are fulfilled in history. After the historical fulfillment of a particular prophecy is understood, spiritual and future national fulfillments may also be developed. A classic example of this principle is found in the fulfillments of the prophecy of Amos 9:11-15: *"In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name saith the Lord that doeth this."* This prophecy was literally and historically fulfilled in the days of the rebuilding of the temple of Solomon which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

During the work of the Early Church, however, James declared that this prophecy was again fulfilled spiritually in the rebuilding of the spiritual house of David that was the early church and in the bringing of Gentiles into that house. This prophecy is again in the process of being fulfilled in the Last Days when the church (tabernacle of David) is being restored among the Gentiles. And, Amos 9:11-15 will be fulfilled in the Last Days when the nation of Israel will be planted in their own land never to be removed again.

As in the case of this passage of prophecy, various other prophecies of the Scriptures may be interpreted in the light of their historical fulfillments and subsequently interpreted in the light of parallel allegorical fulfillments in the spiritual dimension and even interpreted in the light of national fulfillments in the last day's generation. Again, the guiding principle of interpretation of prophecy in spiritual and end-time national fulfillments is that those interpretations must be parallel and coordinated with the historical fulfillments in order for them to be clearly understood and properly in place. Since the church is an organism for the fulfillment of prophecy, this principle is doubly important to this institution, for it cannot clearly understand its true course of action in the fulfillment of prophecy unless it seeks to fulfill in a spiritual dimension.

2. Bible Translations

The Church of God makes no attempt to establish a church authorized translation of the Scriptures, nor does it attempt to censor the use of various translations. It does, however, recommend that its ministers and members give priority to the use of versions of the Bible which are true translations as opposed to paraphrases. It also recommends that priority be given to translations that were rendered by a number of scholars rather than to those that were rendered essentially by one individual. This is in keeping with the scriptural principle that in the multitude of counselors is safety.

3. Study of the Old Testament

The apostle Paul instructed Timothy that *"all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (II Timothy 3:16,17). The "all scripture" to which Paul referred was the Old Testament, for the writings of the New Testament had not yet been compiled.

It is essential for every minister of the Gospel to be a serious student of the writings of the Old Testament. One reason for such serious study is to acquire knowledge of the events of the history of God's people from Adam to Christ. Without a comprehensive knowledge of the Old Testament,

one cannot understand the reasons for the events of the New Testament; for every event that occurred in the lives of the children of God in the Old Testament was symbolic of some event in the dispensation of grace.

The history of the Old Testament contains types, shadows, allegories, and prophecies of the grace dispensation (Hebrews 10:1; Colossians 2:16,17). It also sets the stage for the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the provisions of the perpetual atonement. In order to comprehend the events of the life of Christ, the early apostles, and the Last Days' church, one must have a working knowledge of Old Testament history (Galatians 3:24).

Paul made it clear in Romans 16:25,26 that the knowledge of the mysteries of God's ever-unfolding program of the ages is revealed and proclaimed only through the Scriptures of the prophets (Acts 24:14;28:23). The law, the prophets, and the psalms are the two or three witnesses of the prophetic work of God in the grace dispensation (Luke 24:44). They witness to the righteousness of God (Romans 3:21), foreshadow good things to come (Hebrews 10:1), and prophesy of New Testament events (Matthew 11:13).

Other passages of scripture which confirm The Church of God's responsibility to use the Old Testament for confirmation of its doctrines and practices include Matthew 5:17;11:13; 22:29; Mark 7:13; Luke 16:16,17; John 4:34; 12:34; Acts 24:14; 28:23; 26:22; Romans 5:14;15:4; I Corinthians 15:46; Galatians 4:24; Colossians 2:16,17; I Timothy 4:13; II Timothy 3:16,17; Hebrews 3:5; and II Peter 3:2.

The Church of God recommends that every minister and layman of the church follow Paul's advice in II Timothy 2:15 and study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

4. Fulfillment of Prophecy and Prophetic Types

The Church of God believes that Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled both by Jesus Christ and the by the early church which He established.

Instances of the fulfillment of prophecy in the ministry of Jesus include the following:

- Micah 5:2 was fulfilled in Matthew 2:5,6.
- Hosea 11:1 was fulfilled in Matthew 2:15.
- Isaiah 53:4 was fulfilled in Matthew 8:17.
- Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:1 1 were fulfilled in Matthew 21:13.
- Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22 were fulfilled in Matthew 21:42.
- Song of Solomon 1:12 was fulfilled in Matthew 26:7.
- Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled in Luke 19:38.
- Psalm 22:1 was fulfilled in Matthew 27:46.
- Deuteronomy 18:15 was noted as fulfilled in Acts 3:22; 7:37.

Instances of the fulfillment of prophecy in the Early Church include the following:

- Judas fulfilled Zechariah 11:12-13 noted in Matthew 26:15; 27:3-5.
- Psalm 69:25; 109:8 were noted as fulfilled in Acts 1:16-20.
- Joel 2:28-32 was fulfilled in Acts 2: 16-18.
- Proverbs 9:1-3 was fulfilled in Acts 6:1-7.
- Amos 9:11 was fulfilled in Acts 15: 13-17.
- Acts 24:14 declare the fulfillment of prophecy.
- Isaiah 49:6 is declared to be fulfilled in Acts 13:47.
- Colossians 1:25 shows that Paul's ministry fulfilled prophecy.

The use of Old Testament events as prophetic shadows to reveal New Testament realities is noted in the following:

- I Corinthians 5:7 declares Christ's death to be the reality of the Passover.
- Galatians 4:22-31 declares the two sons of Abraham to be allegorical of the covenants of law and grace.
- Colossians 2:16,17 declare meats, drinks, holy days, new moons, and Sabbath days to be shadows of things to come.
- Hebrews 5:1-10 declares Melchisedec to be a shadow of the true High Priest, Jesus Christ, and the new order of priesthood.
- Hebrews 12:22,23 declares Mount Zion to be a shadow of the church.
- Hebrews 8:5 declares that the priests of the law were examples and shadows of heavenly things.
- Philippians 4:17,18 declare that the offerings of the law were typical of the contributions of the saints to the work of God.
- Hebrews 4:1-10 reveals the tabernacle to be prophetic of the church.

5. The Testimony of Jesus

According to Revelation 19:10, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Jesus, Himself, declared that He did not receive any witness other than prophecy to authenticate His work and ministry (John 5:32-39). The Church of God, therefore, believes that it is necessary that any major work of God in the dispensation of grace must be witnessed by the words of prophecy. This was true of the ministry of Jesus and the early church, and it is true of the last day's church.

More often than not events of the grace dispensation are recognized to have been fulfillments of prophecy in retrospect; however, it is possible for a prophet to receive a revelation of the need for prophetic fulfillment and institute programs to bring about that fulfillment.

This approach to prophetic fulfillment should not be confused with the re-enactment of prophecy in which events of the Old Testament are duplicated in the hope of fulfilling them. The re-enactment of prophecy is not the fulfillment of prophecy.

Prophecy is the witness by which the church recognizes that it is doing the will of God for a particular dispensation. This is the thrust of Peter's statement in II Peter 1:16-19 in which he declared that the word of prophecy is the more sure word that is like a light in a dark place. The Church of God believes that both Jesus and the church must find their works witnessed in the pages of prophecy.

6. Study of the New Testament

The Church of God recognizes the New Testament, witnessed by the law and the prophets, as its only rule of faith and practiced government and discipline. Every doctrine, practice, and rule of discipline and conduct set forth by the church must be firmly established on the writings of the New Testament.

The most essential part of an individual's study, therefore, is his effort to acquire a thorough knowledge of the writings of the New Testament. It is only through the New Testament that a believer is able to know the will of God for the Grace Dispensation; therefore, everyone should have a comprehensive understanding of the words, commandments, and activities of Jesus, the events of the Early Church, the doctrinal writings of the apostles, and the prophetic writings of the book of Revelation. It is by understanding the New Testament that the church establishes a foundation on which it may securely build its doctrine and practice.

7. The Closed Canon and Extra-Biblical Revelation

The Church of God believes that the canonic Holy Scripture is closed. The sixty-six books of the Bible that have been recognized as canonical since the days of the Early Church are still upheld as the written record of the Word of God, which is elevated above all other revelation or understanding. The Church of God maintains the motto, *"No Law book But the Bible,"* and does

not, therefore, accept any tradition of man or extra-Biblical revelation on a par with the words of the Holy Scriptures.

While men and women may receive divinely-inspired revelations, the Word of God recorded in the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible is the criterion by which those revelations are judged. The Church of God encourages its members and ministers in the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit in prophecy, knowledge, and wisdom, and it recognizes the inspiration of dreams, visions, and revelations. It does not, however, base any of its doctrine or practice on verbal utterances, dreams, visions, or revelations. While men and women may receive divinely-inspired revelations, the Word of God recorded in the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible is the criterion by which those revelations are judged.

B. OUTLINE OF WORSHIP AND RELATED PRACTICES

From the time that man was created in the image of the Eternal God, it has been his responsibility to worship and praise his Creator. The need for worship is summed up in the words of Psalm 95:1-3,6: *"O Come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation . . . and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker."*

The Church of God believes that it is the New Testament responsibility of believers to worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The church must epitomize the fullest essence of Biblical worship that is both grounded in the truth of the Word of God and filled with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Since worship can only be termed true worship when it has the proper blend of spirit and truth, The Church of God seeks to develop a program of worship for its people that elevates their spirits into the realm of the Holy Spirit and their minds into the truth of God's Word.

The worship of the church includes all acts of prayer, praise, devotion, and giving that are carried out in collective meetings of the people. It is the responsibility of the ministry of the church to lead the people into worship as well as to impart to them the Word of God through preaching. These are the sacerdotal functions of the New Testament priesthood, the breaking of the bread of life in the form of the Word of God and the leading of God's people into worship and praise.

The system of worship which God has established for His people is a part of the overall concept of New Testament Judaism that The Church of God practices. It is a system that restores the worship that was employed in the Early Church through the reformation that Jesus brought to Judaism. While the motive for worship is now love for God rather than fear and the methods of worship are now spiritual rather than ritualistic, the principles of the system which God set forth throughout Bible days for the worship and praise of His Name have not changed (Ecclesiastes 3:15; Matthew 5:17).

The following outline of worship and related practices represents The Church of God's effort toward restoring Biblical concepts to its order of worship. This is a part of the work of the restoration of all things which The Church of God is progressively accomplishing through its commitment to the Word of God above all tradition.

1. The Hours of Prayer

A significant part of the system of worship that God ordained for His people is the outline of the hours of prayer. These times provide for a continuing daily practice that facilitates prayer in the lives of God's people. They are not a practice that engenders bondage to ritualism. They are a constant reminder to the believer of his need to maintain contact with his Creator through the privilege of prayer. They are a part of God's system of reminders to His people of times that they should set aside to meet with Him.

The scriptural hours of prayer are the third (9:00 AM), sixth (12:00 NOON), and ninth (3:00 PM) hours of the day or morning, noon, and evening. The exact timing of the hours of prayer is not as

important as the need for morning, noon, and evening prayer. The following passages of Scripture confirm the hours of prayer and the need for God's people to remember them: *"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice"* (Psalm 55:17); *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime"* (Daniel 6: 10); *"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour"* (Acts 3:1); *"On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour"* (Acts 10:9).

The Church of God recommends to all of its members that they remember the hours of prayer at 9 AM, 12 noon, and 3 PM with appropriate prayer, devotion, and worship to God.

2. The Jewish Calendar

In matters pertaining to church festivals and observances, The Church of God uses the Jewish calendar because it is based on the scriptural outline of God's calendar and more accurately reflects the times of the feasts of the Lord. In matters pertaining to civil affairs and business dealings, the church uses the accepted Gregorian calendar.

The Scriptures themselves and history confirm the fact that the Early Church continued to use the calendar which God had revealed to Moses and that it continued to observe the Sabbath and the festivals which God had enjoined upon Israel at Sinai. While the method of and the motive for observance was cleansed through the reformation that Jesus brought to Judaism, there was no attempt on His part to institute a new calendar or a new system of festivals.

The sweeping changes which separated the Christian church from its Judaic heritage occurred immediately before, during, and after the reign of Constantine the Great, the Roman Emperor who made it a crime against the state not to observe Sunday rather than Sabbath and required the church to outlaw the observance of Passover with Holy Communion and to eliminate any other Judaic practices from its liturgical calendar.

When Rome gained ascendancy in the church, it sought to gain political influence and numerical adherents by compromising truth to accommodate the peoples of heathen lands. The times of Judaeo-Christian Holy Days were changed to coincide with pagan festivals, and the worship practices of the Early Church were modified to include greater imagery and visible objects of worship. The result is the tragedy of all of modern Christianity being bound in the traditions of men that are rooted in heathen religious systems rather than its continuing in the observance of the religious system which God gave to His people Israel and which was continued in the Early Church.

The Jewish calendar begins with the month of Abib (March-April), not January (Exodus 12). In contrast to the Gregorian calendar in which days of the week are named after pagan deities, the Jewish calendar referred to days of the week by number rather than by name.

Below is an outline of the names of the months of the Jewish calendar and their counterparts on the Gregorian calendar.

JEWISH	ROMAN
Abib (Nisan).....	March, April
Zif (Iyar).....	April, May
Sivan.....	May, June
Tammuz.....	June, July
Ab.....	July, August
Elul.....	August, September
Tishri(Ethanim).....	September, October

Bul (Marheshvan).....	October, November
Chislev.....	November, December
Tebeth.....	December, January
Shebat.....	January, February
Adar.....	February, March
*Veadar	

*The Jewish year is strictly lunar, being twelve lunation's with an average of 29½ days, making 354 days in the year. The Jewish sacred year begins with that new moon of Spring which comes between our March 22 and April 25, in cycles of 19 years. Hence the Jewish calendar contains a thirteenth month, Veadar, introduced seven times in every nineteen years, to render the average length of the year nearly correct, and keep the seasons in the proper months.

Since the basis of the Jewish calendar was revealed to the children of Israel by Moses, The Church of God maintains the use of this calendar in establishing the timing of festivals and days of memorial that are a part of its liturgical calendar.

3. Liturgical Calendar

Of all the elements of the Biblical system of worship, probably none has been more generally ignored and neglected than God's liturgical calendar. While many elements of the Judaic heritage of the church have been perpetuated in most Christian churches (e.g. tithe paying, offerings, altars, and the like), centuries of tradition and neglect have generally obscured the calendar of events which God gave to His people.

The word *liturgy* means *an outline for public worship of God*. A liturgy sets forth the order in which a body of people carries out its worship service. When the word is applied to the calendar, it simply means the days and times of memorial on which the liturgy of worship is carried out.

The liturgical calendar of most of the Christian churches of the world today prescribes the observance of such days as Christmas, Palm Sunday, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Day, and many others. These days of memorial are certainly different from those that are outlined in the Old Testament and most assuredly perpetuated in the New Testament as God's liturgical calendar.

This is God's intention for His people regarding the liturgical calendar which He instructed them to use: *"And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations: ye shall keep a feast by an ordinance for ever"* (Exodus 12:14). Since God left very little doubt that His days of memorial should be observed by His people throughout their generations forever, The Church of God has searched the Word of God to discover the timing of God's days of memorial and the proper New Testament method of observing those days.

The primary events of God's liturgical calendar are set forth in Exodus 23:12,14-17: *"Six days thou shalt work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest...three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread...and the feast of harvest...and the feast of ingathering...three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord."*

a. Sabbath (Revised November, 2007)

According to Bible prophecy, the seventh-day Sabbath is to be observed among the Gentile peoples of the earth in the Last Days. Isaiah declared: *"Also the sons of the stranger [Gentiles], that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keeps the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer...for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people"* (Isaiah 56:6,7).

As a part of its program of restoration, The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres recognizes the seventh-day (Saturday) to be the true Sabbath of the Lord. The church commemorates the

Sabbath in remembrance of the fact that God set the Sabbath apart following His six days of Creation, in honor of the spiritual Sabbath which Jesus brought when He delivered the believer from works of righteousness into the liberty of the righteousness of faith, and in expectation of the Sabbatical Millennium when both God and man will rest from six thousand years of labor in the kingdom of God. The Church of God remembers the Sabbath day to keep it set apart to God by conducting religious services on this day as instructed in Leviticus 23:3, "...the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation...", and by observing it as a day of rest from secular labors and a time of laboring for God in His work of helping others.

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it for all mankind long before Israel was called His people. Exodus 20:11 declares: *"For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it."*

Jesus did not come to change the Sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week (Sunday). The Roman Empire—and subsequently the Roman Catholic Church—changed the official day of corporate worship from Saturday to Sunday calling it "the Lord's day." It's important to note that the change from Sabbath to Sunday was the result of a number of issues of that day. We will attempt to highlight a few for the purpose of this discussion.

1. **A TIME OF CONFUSION** – After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Early Church and the Jewish people went through a time of great confusion and merging of Christianity and Judaism. The converted Jewish people tried to impose the requirements of the Law of Moses onto new Gentile Christians. Even the Apostles were involved in this dispute. In Acts 15, we see that a Council was held at Jerusalem to come to a compromise so that a united approach—approved by Apostles—could be implemented by the Early Church.
2. **THE GOSPEL WENT FORTH** – Driven by the Great Commission given by Jesus, Himself, in Matthew 28:19, 20, the Early Church spread the good news of the Gospel throughout the land. The result was that the Early Church grew and heathens were hearing the Gospel message for the first time. However, along with the surge of new believers into the Early Church, came a mixture of their pagan beliefs and practices.
3. **THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE JEWS** – It was during this transitional period that the Jews revolted against the occupying Roman Empire [AD 66-73]. They came under great persecution for their actions. As a result of the persecution of the Jewish people, the Early Church sought to distance themselves from anything Jewish which would result in them being persecuted. Consider the summary of Samuel Bacchiocchi: *"The investigation conducted so far suggests that the primary causes that contributed to the forsaking of the Sabbath and to the adoption of Sunday are to a large degree social and political in nature. The social tensions that existed between Jews and Christians as well as the Roman anti-Jewish policy greatly conditioned Christians in their negative evaluation of significant Old Testament institutions like the Sabbath."* [Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, (The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, Rome 1977) p. 235]
4. **THE RISE OF ANTI-SEMITISM** – The rapidly expanding Early Church began to view anything stemming from Judaism as an affront to the Gospel. *"This brief analysis of the texts of Ignatius, Barnabus, and Justin has confirmed the presence in their respective communities (Antioch, Alexandria, Rome) of strong anti-Judaic feelings which, augmented by social tensions and theological convictions, created the necessity of avoiding any semblance of Judaism... These conditions undoubtedly encouraged the adoption of Sunday*

worship in order to force a clearer distinction from the Jews." (Bacchiocchi, p. 233)

I. THE ROLE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND CATHOLIC CHURCH

Beginning with Jesus, Himself, persecution and martyrdom were characteristic of the church through its first three centuries of existence. All of the apostles except John were martyred, as were a large percentage of believers and leaders of the church through subsequent generations. The pagan Roman government was continually hostile toward the Christian believers, subjecting them to the cruelest of torture and death.

A. The Emperor Hadrian (AD 117 - 138)

1. *"In AD 130 the Roman Emperor Hadrian visited Judaea and ordered the construction of a new city to replace the town that Titus had razed to the ground, Jerusalem (AD 70). It was to be a Roman City, with a Roman temple dedicated to the Roman supreme god Jupiter. Two years later, Hadrian forbade castration and circumcision, making a law against a practice that had offended Greek and Roman sensitivities for a long time. The Jews explained this law as directed against them. As a 4th century author put it: 'At this time, the Jews started a war because they were forbidden to mutilate their genitals.' Little is known about the initial stages of the revolt. 'Soon, the whole of Judaea had been stirred up, and the Jews everywhere were showing signs of disturbance, were gathering together, and giving evidence of great hostility to the Romans, partly by secret and partly by open acts; many others, too, from other peoples, were joining them from eagerness for profit, in fact one might almost say that the whole world was being stirred up by this business.' (Cassius Dio, Roman History 69, 13. 1-2) The revolt was clearly religious in nature. The rebels were convinced that this was the apocalyptic hardhat had been predicted by prophets like Daniel and Zechariah. Like all wars, it was a human catastrophe. The Christian author Hieronymus (second half 4th century) writes that 'the citizens of Judaea came to such distress that they, together with their wives, children, gold and silver remained in underground tunnels and in the deepest caves' (Commentary on Isaiah 2:15). Slowly but surely, the Romans gained the upper hand. After the Jewish defeat, Hadrian tried to root out Judaism. The prisoners were sold at Hebron and Gaza, each one at the price of a horse. He forbade the conquered to teach Mosaic law and to own scrolls. The province Judaea was renamed Palestine; Jerusalem was called Aelia Capitolina." [Wars Between the Jews and Romans, http://www.livius.org/ja-jn/jewish_wars/jwar07.html]*
2. *"After AD 135 radical changes occurred in the Jewish world. In that year, the Roman Emperor Hadrian crushed the Second Jewish Revolt which had been unsuccessfully led by Bar-Kokhba. Jerusalem became a Roman colony from which Jews (and Jewish Christians) were excluded. Hadrian renamed the city Aelia Capitolina and, more important still, he outlawed the practice of the Jewish religion in general and of Sabbath keeping in particular throughout the empire. There are indications that Sunday observance was introduced at this time as an attempt to emphasize to the Roman authorities the Christian distinction from Judaism. [How Did Sunday Keeping Begin? Biblestudy.org]*

II. SENTIMENTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH LEADERS AFTER THE TIME OF THE APOSTLES

- A. Iqnatius of Antioch [AD 110]: *"Those who were brought up in the ancient order of things [i.e. Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's day, on which also our life has sprung up again by him and by his death."*

- B. Justin Martyr First Apology Chapter 67 [AD 155]: *"But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. "*
- C. Sylvester I (AD 314-335) was the pope during the reign of Constantine. Here is what he thought of the Bible Sabbath: *"If every Sunday is to be observed joyfully by the Christians on account of the resurrection, then every Sabbath on account of the burial is to be execration [loathing or cursing] of the Jews."*
- D. Cyril - The Catholic Bishop of Jerusalem [AD 350]: *"Fall not away either into the sect of the Samaritans or into Judaism, for Jesus Christ has henceforth ransomed you. Stand aloof from all observance of Sabbaths and from calling any indifferent meats common or unclean."*
- E. *"The [Catholic] church took the pagan buckler of faith against the heathen. She took the pagan Roman Pantheon, [the Roman] temple to all the gods, and made it sacred to all the martyrs: so it stands to this day. She took the pagan Sunday and made it the Christian Sun day...The Sun was a foremost god with heathendom. ...There is, in truth, something royal, kingly about the sun, making it a fit emblem of Jesus, the Sun of Justice. Hence the church would seem to have said, 'Keep the old, pagan name. It shall remain consecrated, sanctified.' And thus the pagan Sunday, dedicated to Balder, became the Christian Sunday, sacred to Jesus. The sun is a fitting emblem of Jesus. The Fathers often compared Jesus to the sun; as they compared Mary to the moon."* [William L. Gildea, *Paschale Gaudium*, in *The Catholic World*, 58, March, 1894, p. 809]

III. TIMELINE OF ROMAN EMPIRE/CHURCH MANDATES REGARDING JEWS AND/OR SABBATH OBSERVANCE.

- 321 AD Emperor Constantine's Edict: *"On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain-sowing or for vine-planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost."*
"In the year 321 the Emperor Constantine, who was not yet a declared Christian, but was still hovering between paganism and Christianity, issued a decree making Sunday a compulsory day of rest: but the fact that he speaks of Sunday as 'the venerable day of the Sun' [the pagan sun-worship title for the day] shows that he was thinking of it as a traditional sun-festival at the same time that he thought of it as a Christian holy day...Sunday came to be observed throughout Europe as it is still observed by Roman Catholics, namely, as a day on which, like our Christmas, people went to church in the morning and then gave themselves over to rest or to holiday-making or sports." [Arthur Weigall, *The Paganism in Our Christianity*, 1928, pp. 236-237]
- 363 AD Council of Laodicea - Observing the Jewish Sabbath is condemned; Sunday is commanded to be the day of rest from labor: *"Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if thy can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ."* [The 29th Canon]
- 375 AD The Apostolic Constitutions - Worshipers are commanded to assemble twice on the Lord's day—morning and evening.
- 585 AD The 2nd Council of Macon - Work of any kind is prohibited on this day [Sunday], and it is commanded that Christians worship God on this day.

- 590 AD Gregory the Great (became Bishop of Rome in 590 A.D.) - He condemned Sabbath observance as a "doctrine of the Antichrist" (also the applying of Sabbath laws and rituals to the Lord's Day).
 - 747 AD Council of Clovischhoff - This Council, which was held in England, decreed that travel is forbidden on the Lord's Day.
 - 749 AD The Constitutions of Egbert - Severe penalties are levied against anyone who works on Sunday.
 - 789 AD Charlemagne - In France he issued a decree prohibiting all ordinary labor on Sunday as a breach of the 4th commandment
 - 14th Century The Archbishop of Canterbury-In the 14th century he ordered "abstinence from secular work on the sacred day of the Lord." However, he warned the people not to meet on Saturdays lest they "partake in the Jewish profession." [Al Maxey, THE LORD'S DAY It's History and Significance, www.zlanet.com/maxey/Study4.html]
- A. *"The Church of Rome adopted concrete measures to wean Christians away from Sabbath-keeping and to encourage Sunday worship instead. Justin Martyr, for instance, writing in the mid-second century reduces the observance of the Sabbath to a temporary Mosaic ordinance which God imposed exclusively on the Jews as 'a mark to single them out for punishment they so well deserve for their infidelities.' This kind of negative reinterpretation of the Sabbath led Christians to transform their Sabbath observance from a day of feasting, joy and religious celebration into a day of fasting, with no eucharistic celebration or religious assemblies permitted. The Saturday fast served not only to express sorrow for Christ's death, but also, as emphatically stated by Pope Sylvester (314-337 A.D.), to show 'contempt for the Jews' and for their Sabbath 'feasting'. The sadness and hunger resulting from the fast would enable Christians to avoid 'appearing to observe the Sabbath with the Jews' and would encourage them to enter more eagerly and joyfully into the observance of Sunday. Because the basic function of the Saturday fast was to discourage Sabbath-keeping and to enhance Sunday worship, it seems likely that the Sabbath fast and Sunday worship both originated contemporaneously and at the same place. There is no question that the Saturday fast was introduced by the Church of Rome." [How Did Sunday Keeping Begin? Biblestudy.org]*

IV. THE ANTI-SEMITISM OF CONSTANTINE

- A. Constantine denounces Passover and anything Jewish. *"When the question arose concerning the most holy day of Easter, it was decreed by common consent to be expedient, that this festival should be celebrated on the same day by all, in every place. ...And truly, in the first place, it seemed to every one a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews in their celebration of this most holy solemnity, who, polluted wretches! having stained their hands with a nefarious crime, are justly blinded in their minds. It is fit, therefore, that, rejecting the practice of this people, we should perpetuate to all future ages the celebration of this rite, in a more legitimate order, which we have kept from the first day of our Lord's passion even to the present times. Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews. We have received another method from the Saviour. A more lawful and proper course is open to our most holy religion. In pursuing this course with a unanimous consent, let us withdraw ourselves, my much honored brethren, from that most odious fellowship."* [Eusebius Pamphilus, *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids 6, Michigan, 1966) p. 52]
- B. Constantine makes it against the law to keep Passover: *"Besides, it should be considered that any dissension in a business of such importance, and in a religious institution of so great solemnity, would be highly criminal. ...As it is necessary that this fault should be so amended that we may have nothing in common with the usage of these parricides and*

murderers of our Lord..." [Eusebius Pamphilus, p. 53]

V. THE PRESUMED AUTHORITY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

- A. *"The Church changed the observance of the Sabbath to Sunday by right of the divine, infallible authority given to her by her founder, Jesus Christ. The Protestant, claiming the Bible to be the only guide of faith, has no warrant for observing Sunday. In this matter the Seventh Day Adventist is the only consistent Protestant."* [The Catholic Universe Bulletin, Aug. 14, 1942, p. 4]
- B. *"Nowhere in the Bible do we find that Jesus or the Apostles ordered that the Sabbath be changed from Saturday to Sunday. We have the commandment of God given to Moses to keep holy the Sabbath day, that is, the seventh day of the week, Saturday. Today, most Christians keep Sunday because it has been revealed to us by the [Roman] church outside the Bible."* [Catholic Virginian, Oct. 3, 1947]

While Christianity at large would have us believe that replacing the seventh day Sabbath as a day of corporate worship with worshiping on Sunday is no big deal, the truth is that it was a well designed scheme of Satan to distract Christians from the blessings of worshiping on the Sabbath as well as the opportunity to be obedient and please God by adhering to His command to honor the seventh day. There are many blessings associated with honoring the Sabbath-there is no blessing designated for honoring the first day of the week.

The fact that the seventh day Sabbath was replaced by Sunday and promoted to be a replacement for the true Sabbath is well-recorded in history. The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres recognizes that Sunday as a Sabbath was instituted by the Roman Catholic Church and for us to recognize Sunday as a Sabbath is not acceptable.

The observance of the Sabbath in New Testament order must be approached from a prophetic perspective rather than from a legalistic command. Under the law of Moses, the Israelites could keep the Sabbath only by meeting the following requirements: doing no work, kindling no fire, doing no baking or boiling, bearing no burden, and offering two lambs. All this was done as a part of their works of righteousness. Under the New Testament however, Christ has become our righteousness, and we are no longer under the law.

The Old Testament observance and its requirements were nailed to the cross as a part of the ceremonial system of works of righteousness. When we continue to remember the Sabbath day in New Testament order, we demonstrate that we accept the object lesson of which the Sabbath day is: a type and shadow-the truth that Jesus has given us true rest in the Spirit.

As a reformer of Judaism, Jesus changed the motive for and method of observance of the Sabbath. He declared to the Jewish people that He was the Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5), and He proclaimed that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). He also emphasized the fact that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath day (Mark 3:4) and demonstrated what He meant by that emphasis by healing, preaching, and working the works of God on the Sabbath Day. He declared that it was necessary to work when the Father worked and not to be bound by legalistic restrictions (John 5:17).

There are a few scriptures found in the New Testament that are used by many to say that the first day of the week, Sunday, was adopted by the Apostles and the Early Church as the new day of corporate worship. Bible scholars have used these scriptures to validate their theory that the Apostles abandoned the seventh day Sabbath and adopted Sunday in part because Jesus arose on the first day. The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres believes that Jesus Christ and/or the Apostles of the Early Church did not change the corporate day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.

C. ROMANS 14:1-6 (NKJV)

- [1] "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.*
- [2] For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.*
- [3] Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.*
- [4] Who are you to judge another servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.*
- [5] One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.*
- [6] He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks."*

This scripture has been used to say that we are not permitted to judge or esteem one day above another, which, according to their theory, does not allow us to advocate or promote honoring the seventh day Sabbath. The fact is that this passage is not discussing the day one chooses to worship on, it is talking about fasting.

If you read the entire chapter of Romans 14, you will note that the Apostle Paul mentions food and/or eating in 8 of the 23 verses:

- Vs.2 "For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. "*
- Vs.3 "Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. "*
- Vs.6b "...He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks."*
- Vs. 15 "Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. "*
- Vs. 17 "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. "*
- Vs. 20 "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense."*
- Vs. 21 "It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak."*
- Vs. 23 "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin."*

It is obvious that much of what Paul is addressing in this chapter is about food. On the subject of fasting he tells the man who isn't fasting not to judge the man who fasts, and vice versa. On the subject of being a vegetarian he instructs them not to judge each other regarding the eating of meat. And finally he instructs them to avoid foods that offend the other person. A summary of the chapter is found in verse 20a, *"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food..."*

So what's the big deal about food? During the time of the Early Church it was a matter of great importance. The only regular fast appointed by God in the Old Testament was the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31). However, it appears that four other fasts were added around the time of the Jewish captivity in Babylon (Zechariah 7:1-7;8:19).

At the time of Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees were fasting twice per week. Luke 18:11,12 (NKJV), *"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men-- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess. "Fasting was looked upon as a very great virtue in the Early Church. In fact, they thought so highly of fasting that they inserted the term "fasting" into the Biblical text even though it wasn't in the original manuscripts (check various translations or margin notes for*

Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:30; I Corinthians 7:5). This emphasis upon fasting also caused them to do the very thing the Pharisees had done which was to prescribe certain set times for fasting: twice a week on Wednesday and Friday!" [Biblical Fasting: What Is It and How to Do It, <http://new-life.net/fasting/htm>]

The fast days for the Pharisees in Jesus' time were on Mondays and Thursdays. This practice was changed by the Early Church to Wednesdays and Fridays to distinguish themselves from the Jews. *"The familiar fast days of Wednesdays and Fridays date back to Apostolic times. The First Century document called the 'Didache', more commonly known in English as 'The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles' instructs the faithful: 'Your fasts must not be identical with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Mondays and Thursdays; but you should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.'* [Didache 8:11]. *The Jews fasted on Monday and Thursday; the followers of Christ were to fast on Wednesday-the day when Christ was betrayed-and Friday-the day of His crucifixion."* [Rev. Lawrence Barriger, *An History of Fasting*, <http://www.acrod.org/sn/fasting2.html>]

We can see the importance that was placed on fasting in the early centuries and why the Early Church may have been confused on the subject. However, we should also note the influence that Gnosticism and asceticism played in the confusion.

- Gnosticism is the thought and practice especially of various cults' of late pre-Christian and early Christian centuries distinguished by the conviction that matter [the substance of which a physical object is composed] is evil and that emancipation [freedom] comes through gnosis.
- What does the word gnosis mean? Literally knowledge. "Esoteric knowledge of spiritual truth held by the ancient Gnostics to be essential to salvation."

SUMMARY – Gnosticism is the belief that you can attain higher knowledge through purging yourself of evil matter by fasting and by denying your flesh by avoiding physical pleasure.

It should also be noted that Gnosticism was not a separate religion but a religious concept that could be combined with an established host religion with the promise of "improving" it. When Gnosticism blended with Judaism it became Gnostic Judaism which was a mixture of religious practices with a Gnostic flavor. This type of Judaism--known as Kabbalah--is still being practiced today. It emphasizes the "mystic" aspects of God and one's self. Gnosticism not only blended with Judaism, it also infiltrated the teachings of the Early Church.

Again, the teachings of Gnosticism stressed that one must purge himself of evil matter by avoiding physical pleasures and by punishing the flesh; hence the practice of asceticism. Asceticism means *practicing strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline*. While mainstream Christian believers may not practice asceticism today, it is still alive and well within many religions. In the Roman Catholic Church followers are encouraged to deny the flesh and also to punish the flesh. Consider the Roman Catholic tradition called "Lent". Lent is a time when Catholics are encouraged to abstain from certain foods, mainly meat. Lent of course leads to the celebration of Easter where in some cultures the priests or monks still engage in self-flagellation [*to flog oneself as an act of religious discipline*]. We can also see the effects of Gnosticism in the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Back to Romans 14:1-6. In verse 5 it says, *"One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind."* The previous verses talk about food and judging each other because of what they eat or do not eat. Verse 5 is an extension of that same context. Paul is saying, some people choose one day to fast over another...let each be fully convinced in his own mind." Surely we can agree that Paul is not instructing *"one who is weak in the faith"* to decide what day they want to observe as a Sabbath and that it would be right.

Verse 6, *"He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the*

day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks." Paul is saying that if someone chooses a day to fast to God, then he does it to the Lord. Paul also says that if another chooses not to fast, that's okay too. Notice that at the end of the verse he comes back to the issue of eating. Summary: Paul is saying that you cannot judge someone because they don't fast the same days you do, or perhaps that they don't fast at all! Paul is not doing away with the 4th Commandment to observe the seventh day Sabbath and giving us a license to esteem which ever day we decide we want to choose.

D. COLOSSIANS 2:16, 17

[16] "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

[17] Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

This is another landmark scripture that is used to say that you can choose another day to worship God and that no one has the right to judge you because of it. A closer examination of this passage will show that Paul was again addressing controversy within the church brought about by the mixing of Christianity and Judaism with Gnosticism and the principles of asceticism.

The book of Colossians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome sometime between 60-64 A.D. (Colossians 4:18). The church in Colosse was pastored by Epaphras (Col. 1:7) and consisted mostly of Gentile converts (Col. 1:21). Many of the members were unknown to Paul (Col. 2:1). Epaphras traveled to see Paul in Rome with good news and bad news about the church in Colosse. The good news was that the Gospel had born fruit among the Colossians (Col. 1:6), who were continuing in the faith (Col. 1:4) in Christ and in love for their fellow believers.

The bad news was that the Colossians were being troubled by a new teaching that was contrary to the Gospel which Epaphras had been preaching to them. The new teaching proclaimed a profound knowledge apart from God (Col. 2:8), and an emphasis on following prescribed rituals (Col. 2:16) including the worship of angels (Col. 2:18) and ascetic self-abasement: denying the flesh through fasting and abstention from meat (Col. 2:18,20-23).

The principles of Gnosticism were attempting to infiltrate the Gospel at Colosse. It has been commonly accepted in Christian realms that Judaizers were the ones who were trying to infiltrate the church at Colosse. A closer examination of the context of Colossians 2 will identify that it was actually the tenets of Gnosticism and asceticism that Paul was addressing. Colossians 2:20-23 (NKJV):

[20] *'Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-*

[21] *"Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"*

[22] *Which all concern things which perish with the using-according to the commandments and doctrines of men?*

[23] *These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."*

In verse 20, Paul asked them why they subjected themselves to regulations that had nothing to do with Christianity. The rest of that phrase is found in verse 22 which identifies that the regulations are concerning things that *"perish with the using."* This is a reference to the teaching of Gnosticism that all matter—things that perish—is evil. The reference in verse 21 is a direct response to the false teaching that you should deny your flesh any pleasure. Verse 23 also references neglecting the body.

The terminology in Colossians 2:8, 18 (NKJV) clearly identifies Gnosticism and just as clearly

rules out Judaism. *"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ... [18] Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind."*

Verse 8 does not describe the religion of Judaism (either Old or New Testament observance). Judaism is not based on a vain philosophy according to the traditions of man and on the basic principles of this world, Gnosticism is. In verse 18 Paul talks about 'taking delight in false humility' which is a reference to asceticism-denying the flesh. He also talks about the worship of angels-a part of Gnosticism. Finally, Paul concludes by saying *"vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,"* remember, Gnosticism promised increased knowledge based on denying your flesh.

So what does all of this have to do with Colossians 2:16, 17? The expression *"in meat or in drink"* in verse 16 is an inaccurate and misleading rendering of the Greek words *en brosei kai en posei*. A better translation is "eating and drinking" not "food and drink". The two practices that were under attack here are eating and drinking as part of the observance of Festivals, New Moons, and Sabbaths. It was not the fact of what should or should not be eaten or drunk but the act of eating and drinking in the process of worship. Why? Because feasting would be considered indulging the flesh and thus sinful according to Gnosticism. So the topic in question was decidedly not clean and unclean meats but fasting and asceticism [self-denial] versus Christian rejoicing and feasting.

"Or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days." The word *respect* is the Greek word *meros* which means *to cut in portions*. "Meros" is nearly always translated as *part* or *portion* elsewhere in the New Testament. The significance is that only a *portion* or aspect of the inherent quality or nature of the Festivals, New Moons and Sabbath were being criticized, namely how they were to be observed. Gnosticism had no problem with observation of special days. In fact, astrological observance of special segments of time was a major part of Gnostic practice. The conflict in Colosse was the manner in which the members were celebrating them.

SUMMARY – The Apostle Paul, while in prison at Rome, was made aware of heresy that was being promoted in the church at Colosse. He undertook to write a letter to the Colossians to reaffirm the Gospel and the supreme deity of Jesus Christ. Paul did not record the events found in Colossians 2:16, 17 to say that it was no longer necessary to observe the seventh day Sabbath. Paul was reacting to the heresy that was being promoted in the local church called Gnosticism which attempted to intermingle heathen man-made regulations with God's holy days, festivals, and Sabbaths.

In verses 16 and 17 Paul was addressing the manner in which the Colossians were to celebrate these special days by renouncing the false doctrine that they were subject to judgment because they engaged in eating and drinking on these days as opposed to fasting as the Gnostics would have them believe. Paul also renounced the doctrine of praying to angels by establishing that all of the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9, 10).

E. ACTS 20:7,8

[7] *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."*

[8] *"And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together."*

This scripture is another one that is used to supposedly support the theory that it was the custom of the Apostles to meet on Sunday as opposed to Saturday for corporate worship. The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres believes that Acts 20:7 is not an endorsement from the Apostle Paul that Sunday-the first day of the week-was the new day of worship for the Early Church. This scripture simply recorded events of a special service held to accommodate Paul's arrival.

According to the "Grammatico-Historical Method" section of our Manual (V, A, 1., a.), context interprets text. In other words, a particular verse of Scripture can be interpreted only in the setting of the verses which precede and succeed it. Such is the case with Acts 20:7.

As you read the 20th chapter of Acts you will note that the verses preceding verse 7 chronicle the travels of the Apostle Paul.

- Verse 1 - Paul travels to Macedonia
- Verse 2 - Paul travels to Greece
- Verse 3 - After 3 months in Greece Paul returns to Macedonia
- Verse 5 - Paul travels from Philippi to Troas
- Verse 6 of the chapter tells us that Paul spent seven days in Troas. What did Paul do on his travels? Verse 2 tells us that *he "encouraged them with many words..."* In other words, Paul traveled around to the congregations of believers and when he arrived they met together and Paul preached to them. When you consider the context of Acts 20, the most plausible explanation for the meeting in verse 7 is that they were conducting a special service to accommodate the visit of the Apostle Paul. There is no mention to indicate that this was their weekly established time of worship. If the Holy Spirit-the One who gives inspiration for all Scripture-was trying to give us new direction concerning the weekly day of worship, all He would have to do is add the phrase, "As was their custom..." to the verse.

SUMMARY – The truth is that this incident was recorded to a.) Make record of Paul's travels to Troas, and b.) To make record of the miracle of Eutychus being raised to life through Paul's ministry.

While much discussion has been held on whether or not the early Apostles instituted a new day of worship by honoring the first day of the week and abandoning the Sabbath, the real discussion should be the example that Jesus set. I Peter 2:21 tells us that Jesus was an example for us and that we should follow in His footsteps. According to Luke 4:16, it was the custom of Jesus to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Scripture also supports the fact that it was the custom of the early Apostles to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. Acts 17:2 says, *"And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures."*

It has also been erroneously reported that the Apostle Paul taught new Gentile converts to observe the first day of the week as a replacement for the seventh day Sabbath. Scripture again refutes this theory. In Acts 13:42-44 Paul teaches the Gentiles-and the whole city for that matter-on the Sabbath. In Acts 18:4 it says, *"And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks."*

The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres believes that Jesus Christ reformed the seventh day Sabbath observance just like He reformed Passover; however, He did not change the day of corporate worship nor did He teach us to honor the first day of the week in remembrance of His resurrection.

To His own generation and to all those who were to follow, Jesus declared, *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus predicted that He would give the Jewish people, who were burdened down with legalistic regulations concerning the Sabbath, a true Sabbath (rest) for their souls.

The Sabbath rest that Christ came to bring to believers in Him is explained further in Hebrews 4: *"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them... but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest"* (Hebrews 4:1-3). *"For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath*

ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:10). This is indicative of the fact that those who have believed in Christ have ceased from works of righteousness, accepting the faith righteousness of Christ instead: *"For by grace are ye saved through faith...not of works"* (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Hebrews concludes the subject of the New Testament rest (Sabbath) with this statement: *"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God...Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief"* (Hebrews 4:9, 11).

Another part of the spiritual experience of rest that is a blessing to those believers who receive it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking with tongues. This is in fulfillment of the promise of Jesus: *"And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high"* (Luke 24:49). On the day of Pentecost they were all *"filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance"* (Acts 2:4). They knew that they had received the spiritual experience that the Lord had promised to them because they spoke with other tongues as the word of prophecy to them declared: *"For this is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing...for with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people"* (Isaiah 28:11,12).

The ultimate Sabbath for man will take place when Jesus Christ, the spiritual Sabbath, returns to rule over the whole earth for a thousand years. This will be the Sabbatical Millennium of peace and rest when the entire world will be subjected to the righteous reign of the Son of God. The earth will then experience a thousand-year Sabbath.

In an effort to unify the church and to solidify the church's stance recognizing the validity of the seventh day Sabbath, The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres recently reviewed its policy regarding weekly church services. In November 2006, The Council of Apostles and elders agreed that each local church conduct a church service on the Sabbath Day (Saturday). Friday Evening church services are considered optional and left to the discretion of the local pastor and congregation. The church also recognized that additional church services may be conducted on any other day of the week. The church also emphasized its belief that Sunday as a Sabbath was instituted by the Roman Catholic Church and for us to recognize it as a Sabbath is not acceptable.

To The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres, the Sabbath day is a blessing in many dimensions. It brings to remembrance the wondrous works of creation that the Eternal God accomplished in six days followed by His day of rest. It provides a time for relaxation and rest for the human body. It is a time set apart for worship and service to God in doing good works for God and man. It calls to remembrance the eternal rest of spirit and soul which Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, brought to the believer in a spiritual and eternal dimension. It emphasizes the importance of the infilling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. And, it foretells the coming event of the age when Jesus Christ returns to rule over the earth for the Sabbatical Millennium.

b. The Feasts of Yahweh (Primary Festivals)

The Feasts of Yahweh were outlined by God in Exodus 23:14-17: *"Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread...and the feast of harvest...and the feast of ingathering...Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God."* In Exodus 34:18,22,23 and Deuteronomy 16:16 these three primary festivals were emphasized again. Later when Solomon instituted the worship of God in the temple in Jerusalem, the Scriptures declare that *"Solomon offered burnt offerings unto the Lord on the altar of the Lord...on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles"* (II Chronicles 8:12,13). There are, then, quite simply three Feasts of Yahweh: Passover (Unleavened Bread), Pentecost (Harvest or Weeks), and Tabernacles (Ingathering).

(1) The Feast of Passover

The Feast of Passover began as celebration in remembrance of the passing of the Lord over the households of the children of Israel who had applied the blood of the paschal lamb to the doorposts and lintels of their houses before that night when the firstborn of Egypt were slain. Its continuing celebration was enjoined upon Israel to be carried out on the fourteenth day of Abib, the first month of the Jewish religious calendar. The fourteenth day of Abib was the time when the Jewish people had killed the lamb of the Passover celebration. Since Israel departed from Egypt on the fifteenth day of Abib, the Jewish people came to attach more importance to the Feast of Unleavened Bread that began on that day and lasted for seven days. This is the reason for the fact that the first Feast of Yahweh was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

As time progressed this entire festival came to be known as the Feast of Passover. Ezekiel 45:21 says, *"In the first month...ye shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten."* This statement is repeated in Luke 22:1: *"Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the passover."* The Feast of Unleavened Bread then came to be known as the Passover.

From its institution by God at the time of Israel's deliverance from Egypt until the conclusion of the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament, the Passover continued to be observed according to the prescribed ritual outlined in Leviticus 23. It was celebrated yearly in Israel and in the church in commemoration of the deliverance of the people of God from bondage.

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples (Mark 14:12-18; Matthew 26:26-29). At the conclusion of this memorial supper, the last which He and the church would observe in Old Testament order, Jesus instituted the New Testament observance of the Passover. Whereas the Old Testament celebration remembered the deliverance of God's people from physical bondage, the New Testament observance honored their deliverance from the bondage of sin and death through the sacrifice of the true Passover Lamb, the Son of God.

Taking the unleavened bread of the Passover supper, Jesus broke it and gave it to His disciples, declaring to them: *"Take, eat; this is my body."* Then He took of the wine of the Passover celebration and gave it to His disciples, declaring to them, *"Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."* Then He instructed His disciples, *"This do in remembrance of me."* With this action Jesus instituted a new order of worship for the celebration of the Passover.

On the following day, the actual day of Passover, Jesus became the Passover Lamb who was slain so that the Father might pass over the sins of all those who would believe upon Him. Paul declared Him to be the Passover that was sacrificed for the believers (1 Corinthians 5:7). John understood Jesus to be the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world as a part of God's eternal plan of salvation. As the Lamb of God, Jesus became the one perfect sacrifice for sin that forever freed men from the bondage of sin and death (Romans 8:2), adopted them into sonship of the Father (Galatians 4:5,6), and translated them into His kingdom (Colossians 1:13,14).

Following the ascension of Jesus, the early church continued to remember His death in the manner in which He had instructed them at the time of His death: at Passover. Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to observe the Passover: *"For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast..."* Then he instructed them in the proper manner of observance of this feast in New Testament order: *"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come"* (1 Corinthians 11:23-28).

The church continued to observe the Passover well into the fourth century; however, Constantine outlawed the Christian observance of Passover in A.D. 321, and the practice was

subsequently discontinued in the Western Church. The Eastern Church continued to observe Passover on Abib 14 until the eleventh century.

The Church of God has brought about a restoration of this ancient New Testament practice, conducting its primary observance of communion each year on the eve of Passover, the same time that Jesus instituted it. All members of the church are encouraged to partake of the Passover in remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus that purchased their eternal redemption. This is The Church of God's continuing observance of Passover, a part of its system of praise, worship, and service encapsulated in New Testament Judaism.

(2) The Feast of Pentecost

The Feast of Pentecost, so named because it is the fiftieth day after the Passover, is one of the three festivals which Yahweh commanded His people to keep forever (Leviticus 23:21). The historical and Biblical importance of this feast is easily recognized when one considers the two great scriptural events that took place at this time, the giving of the law of God at Sinai and the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the believers in the upper room.

Some fifty days after the Lord had passed over the households of those who had followed His instructions through Moses by applying the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorposts and lintels of their houses, Israel was encamped before Mount Sinai. It was at about the time of Pentecost during the third month (Exodus 19:1-3) that the Lord, Himself, inscribed the tables of stone with the greatest document on proper human behavior ever set forth. Moses' encounter with Yahweh provided for all humanity a list of the likes and dislikes of the unchanging God. Without this document, one could not know what actions please or displease God (Romans 7:7).

Though many have sought to repeal the law of God given to Moses, God has never altered His basic precepts. The Ten Commandments still stand as the revelation of His law. Though times, manners, customs, and methods of observance may have changed through the introduction of a more perfect way, the fundamental concepts introduced in constitutional form for the children of Israel remain.

Besides the Decalogue, many other things were revealed to Moses during his forty days on Sinai: It was there that God, for the first time, revealed the entire pattern and system of government, praise, worship, and service in the heavenly realm. Moses was instructed to duplicate those things in the earthly realm of God's dominion, Israel (Exodus 25:40; Psalm 114:2). Thus God's chosen system of praise and service was codified in the law to be established among the children of Israel.

Pentecost, then, was a time for the giving of revelation in the old economy. The time between the first Passover and the first Pentecost was a time of concentrated outpouring of divine revelation, the pattern and types and shadows of which have been fulfilled in the dispensation of grace.

The same circumstances were true of the first New Testament Passover and the first New Testament Pentecost. From the time of His crucifixion and resurrection Jesus spent forty days of concentrated effort in communing with His disciples and outlining for them the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). At the conclusion of this time, Jesus ascended to the Father. Then, on the day of Pentecost, He caused His disciples to receive the baptism of the Spirit. By imparting this gift Jesus provided a better way for the believer to be guided into the truth of God than by the law.

The promise of the Father that He would write His law upon the hearts and minds of the people took place (Hebrews 8:10), so that the children of God were then at liberty to keep the laws of God voluntarily because of their love for their Creator and Savior, rather than by bondage and fear of death. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed them from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2) so that they could look into the perfect law of liberty in Christ Jesus and continue in the commandments of God, thereby finding themselves acceptable to God by the Holy Spirit (James

1:2,5). This liberty to serve God in Spirit and not by commandment came about when Christ freed the believer from bondage to the letter of the law. This explains Paul's statement in Romans 3:31: *"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."* That which came to the people of God on the first New Testament Pentecost was for the purpose of perfecting and even establishing that which came at Pentecost following the exodus.

The experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was in the fulfillment of bible prophecy as Peter noted on the day of Pentecost: *"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit: and they shall prophesy"* (Acts 2:16-18).

The purpose of the outpouring of the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was to endue the church with power from on high that would make them more effective witnesses of Christ and the kingdom of God (Acts 1:8). This power was needed to bring about the fulfillment of the type and shadow in the Old Testament Pentecost of the composition of the wave loaves of the firstfruits of the harvest. Since loaves of bread represent people, the wave loaves of the firstfruits offered at Pentecost represent the election of the church that will make up the bride of Christ as the firstfruits of the harvest of souls in the kingdom of God. The early church was responsible for making the first of these loaves of firstfruits, and 144,000 Jewish believers were sealed with the seal of God to be the firstfruits unto God, according to Revelation 7. It remains today for the same anointing of the Holy Spirit to empower the church to bring forth 144,000 Gentiles who will receive the seal of God to be the firstfruits of Revelation 14 that together with the Jewish half of the bride will be offered as the two loaves before the Lord.

The Feast of Pentecost is a continuing part of the liturgical calendar of The Church of God. It is a time for stirring up the gifts and operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the members of the church so that they may be empowered for service to herald the gospel of the kingdom of God into the entire world.

The Church of God celebrates Pentecost yearly with praise, prayer, worship, and ministry of the Word and Spirit in much the same manner in which the early church observed it in Acts 2 and for which Paul made effort to be at Jerusalem for its celebration (Acts 20:16).

(3) The Feast of Tabernacles (update May, 2021)

The Feast of Tabernacles was instituted as a time for rejoicing over the ingathering of the harvest of the summer in preparation for the coming winter. It was for this reason that it was also called the Feast of Ingathering. It was an eight-day celebration of great joy and excitement that was the most important of all the festival times for ancient Israel. The order of its observance in the Old Testament is outlined in Leviticus 23:34-36 and Deuteronomy 16:13-15.

The Feast of Tabernacles is significant in Bible history for the great events which occurred at that time. It was during the time of the Feast of Tabernacles that Noah's ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:4). Tabernacles was the time of the dedication of the temple in the days of Solomon (I Kings 8:2). It was the time when the Lord Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary on the first day of the feast: Tishri 15 (Luke 1:5,23,36; Isaiah 9:3,6). It was also at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus established the church (Luke 6:1,13). This feast was celebrated by Jesus in John 7.

The Feast of Tabernacles is the only festival which the prophetic Scriptures specifically declare will be observed during the millennial reign of Christ. *"And it shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations which come against Jerusalem, shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles"* (Zechariah 14:16). The reason for this millennial observance is the universal nature of the Feast of Tabernacles and the fact that it is a festival which produced and will produce events which affect all the peoples of the

earth.

The Feast of Tabernacles is a revelation of the second coming of Jesus. Since it was the festival of the dedication of the temple, of the incarnation of the Son of God, and of the beginning of the church, it will likely be the festival of the beginning of the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth (Matthew 13:37-39).

The Church of God has restored the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles to its liturgical calendar as a part of its concept of New Testament Judaism. It is a time for The Church of God to remember the great works of God accomplished during this festival in history, to rejoice in the birth of the only begotten Son of God, and to anticipate His return to establish His kingdom.

c. Festivals of Yahweh (Secondary Festivals)

There are four additional festival times which coordinate with the three Feasts of Yahweh and make a total of seven festivals. These are the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Firstfruits, which coordinate with the Feast of Passover, and the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, which coordinate with the Feast of Tabernacles. The primary purpose of these festivals in the New Testament era is to reveal the prophetic program of God that parallels the development of the religious year of the Old Testament.

The seven festivals are outlined in Leviticus 23, which is the complete delineation of God's liturgical calendar. *"These are the feasts of the Lord, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their season. (1) In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's Passover... (2) And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord; seven days ye must eat unleavened bread...(3) When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest; and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it...(4) And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days, and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals ... they are the firstfruits unto the Lord...(5) In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation...(6) Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement...(7) The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord"* (Leviticus 23:4,6,10,11,15-17,24,27,34).

The prophetic significance of this calendar of liturgical events presents a clear outline of the work of God in the New Testament dispensation. The first of the seven feasts, the Passover, found its fulfillment in the death of Jesus Christ on the day of Passover. He became the Passover Lamb, the foundation of the dispensation of grace. The second of the seven festivals, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was observed in the ceremony of the communion of the body and blood of Christ and is symbolic of the removal of sin (leaven) from the hearts of the believers through the atonement of Jesus Christ. It is symbolic of the definite and continuing work of maturity through sanctification in the lives of believers. The third of the seven feasts, the Feast of Firstfruits, was fulfilled three days and nights after the crucifixion of Jesus when He became the High Priest and fulfilled the waving of the sheaf of the firstfruits before the Lord by resurrecting from the grave and bringing forth some of the saints with Him and presenting them before the Lord as a token of the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead. This feast was the first century church's celebration which later was modified into Easter.

The beginning of the fulfillment of Pentecost, the fourth of the Feasts of the Lord, occurred in Acts 2 when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and were given power for service with which they were successful in reaping the first of the two loaves of the wheat harvest, the early church. Harvests represent the ingathering of souls in the New Testament era; therefore, the wave

loaves reveal two harvests. The church is living today in the time of the fulfillment of the reaping of the second wave loaf of firstfruits of the harvest among the Gentiles. When this is fulfilled, the Feast of Pentecost will be completely fulfilled.

The fifth of the festivals is Trumpets. The prophetic fulfillment of this feast involves the awakening of the kingdom of God, the nation of Israel, and the world to the coming kingdom of God upon the earth. It is a time for sounding an alarm among God's people to make preparation for the return of Jesus to the earth.

The sixth memorial time is the Day of Atonement. This important day is prophetic of the time when Israel as a nation turns to God and receives the only atonement for sin, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world.

The seventh festival is the Feast of Tabernacles, the time of the ingathering of all things when Jesus establishes His kingdom upon the earth.

It can be understood, therefore, that the liturgical calendar revealed in the Old Testament was prophetic in nature of the chronology of events which would occur in the dispensation of grace from the sealing of the New Testament in the blood of Jesus to the return of the Lord to establish His kingdom.

The secondary festivals are celebrated in The Church of God in the following ways: The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a part of the Holy Week celebration and is used to emphasize the need for sanctification in the lives of believers who have experienced their Passover in Christ and who need to remove leaven (sin or disobedience) from their lives.

The Feast of Firstfruits is a part of the Holy Week celebration and is used to emphasize the importance of the resurrection of Jesus to the justification of the believer (Romans 4:24,25), along with the promises of the resurrection and those who were resurrected with Him to be waved before the Lord as the firstfruits of the general resurrection of all believers.

The Feast of Trumpets is remembered as a reminder of the church's responsibility for the sounding of an alarm to awaken the sleeping kingdom of God, the Jewish people, and the nations to the fact that the coming of Jesus is near.

The Day of Atonement is remembered as a time of celebration of the atonement for sin in the person of Jesus Christ as both the Yahweh goat who was slain and the scapegoat who bore the sins of the people of God without the camp (Leviticus 16:7,15,21). It is also a time of prayer and fasting (particularly by the Women of Ruth International) that the Jewish people may accept their Messiah and that the time of Israel's national day of salvation may come.

d. Holy Week

The Church of God annually provides for the celebration of Holy Week, during which time it observes the Feast of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits. During this week the Passover celebration is carried out with the Communion service: The rite of feet washing is observed at one of the worship services during Holy Week. The church remembers the resurrection of Jesus on the day after the Sabbath after Passover (after 6:00 PM Saturday). Local congregations that prefer to celebrate the resurrection three days and three nights after Passover are at liberty to do so.

All of these worship services combine to make a meaningful and lasting remembrance of the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

e. Other Festivals

There are other festivals of Judaism which The Church of God remembers. These are Purim and Hanukkah.

(1) Purim

Purim is the annual remembrance of the deliverance of the Jewish people in the

days of Esther when Haman, the prime minister of Persia, sought their destruction. The Women of Ruth International, the women's auxiliary of the church, uses this time as a time of fasting and prayer for the divine protection and salvation of the Jewish people throughout the world.

(2) Hanukkah (updated November, 2015)

Hanukkah is the festival of the dedication which celebrates the rededication of the Temple in the Intertestamental Era—the time between the Old and New Testaments—when the Maccabees liberated the Temple following its desecration at the hand of Antiochus Epiphanes. Since Jesus was present for the celebration of this festival (John 10:22), The Church of God utilizes Hanukkah, along with the story of the rededication of the Temple, as a time for emphasizing the need for rededication of the spiritual temples of Christians to the cause of being the light of the world.

The Church of God does not; however, acknowledge or practice the strictly Jewish, non-Biblical, non-factual traditions and practices that have been associated with the modern-day observance of Hanukkah. These traditions and practices include the giving of gifts for 9 days and the use of the 9-branch candlestick—which is not found in God's Word. The story of the oil lasting for 8 days is also considered a myth by most Jewish historians.

Consider the words of Benjy Ben-Baruch, Congregation T'chayah, Detroit, Michigan, regarding whether the "miracle of the oil" actually happened: *"I have dealt with this issue for years and when I was a Hebrew school principal I was very clear that it was improper and unprofessional to teach the story of the miracle of the oil as having any historical accuracy. The myth of the oil is bad history, bad theology, and bad doctrine."*

The Church of God does not endorse the celebration of Hanukkah as a substitute for the celebration of Christmas on December 25. The church recommends that its members not engage in any of the non-Biblical, commercialized practices and traditions associated with modern-day Hanukkah. The church recommends that its members use this time to focus on rededicating themselves as a vessel for God's light to shine through to the surrounding world (Matthew 5:14-16).

f. Days of Memorial

(1) February 13 – Reformation Day

February 13 is remembered each year as the anniversary of the Reformation of The Church of God. It was on this day in 1957 that Bishop Grady R. Kent began the Reformation of the church which has greatly motivated the church toward the restoration of Bible truth and practice. All local churches conduct special memorial services that recall the events of the Reformation and reaffirm the determination of the church to continue its efforts to bring about a complete restoration of the words of the prophets (Acts 3:21) and to continue to reform its doctrine and practice until it comes to perfection and the full knowledge of the Son of God (Ephesians 4:11-13).

(2) May 2 – Marking of Mount Hattin

On May 2, 1962, Chief Bishop Grady R. Kent represented the church in the land of Israel where he officially marked Mount Hattin, pointing out the place where Jesus established His church (Luke 6:12,13). It has long been the teaching of the church that Jesus, Himself, established the church on Mount Hattin in the second year of His ministry at the time of the ordination of the twelve apostles. This is in contrast to the traditional teaching of Christianity that the church was established on the day of Pentecost. It is for this reason that the marking of Mount Hattin is important, for the truth of the establishment of the church is confirmed by the marking of this historic place in Israel.

(3) May 14 – Founding of the Nation of Israel

The Church of God recognizes as prophetic the event which occurred on May 14,

1948, when by the proclamation of the United Nations and by the leaders of Israel, the State of Israel was established. This action was in fulfillment of Isaiah 66:8 and has subsequently been witnessed by the fulfillment of other prophecies that have revealed the protection of the nation of Israel. During this time of memorial in the church, emphasis is made for the need of the church to support the prophetic right of Israel to exist as a nation. Prayer is made for the peace of Jerusalem and for the salvation of the Jewish people.

(4) June 13 – Arise, Shine of the Church

The Church of God believes that a prophetic event occurred on June 13, 1903, when Prophet A.J. Tomlinson prayed and prevailed to bring about a resurrection of the church in fulfillment of Isaiah 60:1-2. A memorial service is conducted in each church remembering this great event and underscoring the church's dedication to the prophetic work of bringing about a complete restoration of the church to its first century glory.

4. The Birth of Jesus on Tishri 15: Timing and Celebration (updated May, 2021)

All scriptural evidence and logic confirm the Feast of Tabernacles (September-October) as the time of the birth of Jesus; therefore, The Church of God makes the commemoration of His birth a part of its worship system at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. During the May 11-13, 2021 Council of Apostles and Elders, The Church of God at Jerusalem Acres accepted as church doctrine that **JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN ON TISHRI 15** (which is the start of the annual Feast of Tabernacles celebration).

We know the day that Jesus died: Wednesday, Abib 14, the Day of Passover. We readily admit that was the day some 2,000 years ago that changed our lives and gave us hope of a bright future. However, we must also admit that Passover could never have happened if Jesus had not been born 33½ years earlier on Tishri 15 (the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles).

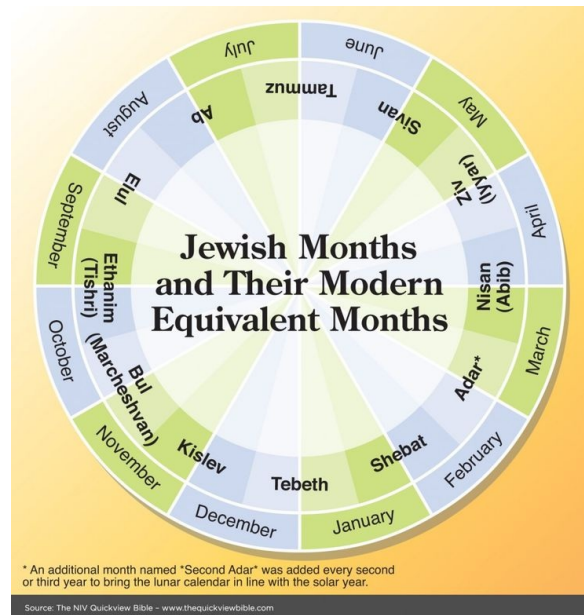
Most Bible Theologians and Historians agree that Jesus started His ministry when He was 30 years old (Luke 3:23) and ministered for 3½ years making Him 33½ years old when He died on the Cross at Passover on Abib 14 (Mar/Apr). If you count forward 6 months that would give you His birthdate which is Tishri 15 (Sep/Oct).

In Galatians 4:1-5, the Apostle Paul used the phrase, “when the fullness of time had come,” to describe the birth of Jesus. “Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a

slave, though he is master of all, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:1-5). The use of that phrase tells us that Jesus was born at a very specific time. His birth was not random or spur of the moment. It was a defined, well-organized event of monumental proportions.

The key to understanding the timing of Jesus' birth is found in Isaiah 9:2-7,

2 “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.”



-
- » This is in direct correlation with Luke 2:9 when the shepherds beheld an angel and a great light when Jesus was born.
 - LUKE 2:9, *"And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid."*
 - JOHN 1:1-8,14, (Amplified Version), *"In the beginning [before all time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself. 2 He was present originally with God. 3 All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without Him was not even one thing made that has come into being. 4 In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men. 5 And the Light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness has never overpowered it [put it out or absorbed it or appropriated it, and is unreceptive to it]. 6 There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came to witness, that he might testify of the Light, that all men might believe in it [adhere to it, trust it, and rely upon it] through him. 8 He was not the Light himself, but came that he might bear witness regarding the Light.... 14 And the Word (Christ) became flesh (human, incarnate) and tabernacled (fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile) among us; and we [actually] saw His glory (His honor, His majesty), such glory as an only begotten son receives from his father, full of grace (favor, loving-kindness) and truth."*
-

3 "You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; They rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."

- » This great light shines when you are rejoicing over the harvest in the Fall.
 - » Tabernacles is a celebration of the harvest. It occurred on the exact same day of the same month every year. There was no guessing as to when you would celebrate the harvest.
 - LEVITICUS 23:39a, *"Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month [Tishri15], when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days..."*
 - » The celebration/joy of the harvest was at a very specific time of the year. It wasn't random—it was a set time: Tishri 15—THE FIRST DAY OF TABERNACLES.
-

4 "For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian."

- » What is the Prophet Isaiah talking about when he says *"You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder..."*?
- » Isaiah is saying that mankind's yoke (bondage) to sin has been broken.
- » When Adam and Eve chose to obey Satan rather than God, they became slaves to sin. This sinful nature was then passed down to their descendants.
 - PSALM 51:5, *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me."*
 - ROMANS 3:23, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"*
 - ROMANS 6:16, *"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"*
- » That's why we have to be BORN AGAIN.
 - JOHN 3:3,5, *"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven...5 Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'"*
- » Jesus broke the yoke of sin over our lives.
 - ROMANS 5:12-19,
 - 12 *"Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and*

- death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—
- 13 (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.
- 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.
- 15 But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.
- 16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.
- 17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)
- 18 Therefore, as through one man's [Adam] offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's [Jesus] righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.
- 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.”
- » We are no longer slaves to sin, now we are slaves to righteousness!
- ROMANS 6:18, “And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

5 “For every warrior’s sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire.”

6 “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

» What happens on the 15th day of the 7th month (Tishri 15)? JESUS IS BORN!

7 “Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

God was very specific as He instructed the Israelites concerning His feast dates in the Old Testament. He was not vague when He defined His feast dates and what He wanted done on those dates. We all know the story of how God used the Roman Government to call for a census (Luke 2:1-3) that required Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-7) so that the prophecies concerning Jesus’ birth could be fulfilled (Micah 5:2).

Another confirmation of the birth of Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles is found in Luke 1:5. The key statement is the fact that Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was a priest of the course of **ABIA**. The course of **ABIA** was the eighth of the twenty-four priestly courses of ministration in the temple in Jerusalem (I Chronicles 24:7-19). Each course ministered for one week twice a year, with the first course starting at the beginning of the Jewish civil New Year, Tishri. The reason for the ministration's beginning at the start of the civil year rather than at the first of the religious year (Abib, March-April) is the fact that the delineation of the priestly courses began with Solomon's dedication of the Temple during the Feast of Tabernacles (II Chronicles 7:1,2,8-10). Tishri corresponds to the second two weeks of September and the first two weeks of October on the Gregorian calendar and is noted as September-October. (See chart at end of this section).

The time of Zacharias' first biannual ministration in the temple during the eighth course, the course of **ABIA**, was during the latter part of the month Bul, which corresponds to October-

November. The time of his second biannual ministration was at the end of the month Zif, which corresponds to April-May. Zacharias was ministering before the Lord during the middle of May when the angel of the Lord appeared to him and declared to him, *"Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John"* (Luke 1:13). After his ministration in the temple, Zacharias returned to his home (Luke 1:23). His barren and aged wife Elisabeth conceived miraculously. Her conception took place in early June, and she subsequently hid herself for five months.

At this time the angel of the Lord appeared to Mary, the espoused wife of Joseph, and announced to her: *"Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS... The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren"* (Luke 1:30,31,35,36).

It was during the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy that Mary was overshadowed of the Holy Spirit and conceived Jesus. Since Elisabeth had conceived in early June, her sixth month of pregnancy and the time of Jesus' conception would have been in early December. An average gestation period of forty weeks or two hundred and eighty days would have had Jesus born in the month of Tishri, the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Placing the time of the nativity at the Feast of Tabernacles coordinates with the descriptions of contemporaneous events and circumstances. At the time of Tabernacles, shepherds would still have been abiding in the fields. Since the Feast of Tabernacles was the time of ingathering, it would have been the most natural time of the year for the Roman government to impose taxation on the people of Israel. Autumn would also have been a time when Mary could have undertaken the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

The New Testament explanation of the nature of the Son of God as both God and man that is recorded in John's Gospel lends support to the timing of the nativity at Tabernacles. John 1:14 declares *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."* A literal translation of this passage is, *"And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us."* It is certainly more than coincidence that it was in the Feast of Tabernacles that the Word of God became flesh and tabernacled with men. Throughout their history the Feast of Tabernacles had been the time when the Jewish people dwelt in booths and searched the skies for the signs of the appearance of the Messiah.

The Church of God remembers the birth of Jesus each year with various forms of celebration, including special programs and worship services. Many churches conduct a banquet in which members and friends are invited to celebrate the birth of the Lord.

A great part of the worship of most of Christianity centers in the celebration of Christmas as the birthday of Jesus. While The Church of God respects those who honor with true reverence and devotion the birth of the Son of God at this time, it does not commemorate the date of the nativity on December 25.

The observance of Tishri 15 as the time of the birth of the Lord is a part of The Church of God's effort to restore the worship practices of the church to a more perfect order. It is but another indication of the fact that the concept of New Testament Judaism brings the church's praise, worship, and service into a unified biblical system.

TISHRI Sep.-Oct. Courses 1, 2, 3, 4	BUL Oct.-Nov. Courses 5, 6, 7, 8 ↑ Zacharias' Ministration	CHISLEV Nov.-Dec. Courses 9, 10, 11, 12	TEBETH Dec.-Jan. Courses 13, 14, 15, 16	SHEBAT Jan.-Feb. Courses 17, 18, 19, 20	ADAR Feb.-Mar. Courses 21, 22, 23, 24
ABIB Mar.-Apr. Courses 1, 2, 3, 4	ZIF Apr.-May Courses 5, 6, 7, 8 ↑ Zacharias' Ministration	SIVAN May-Jun. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 ↑ Conception of John the Baptist	TAMMUZ Jun.-Jul. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 1 Month	AB Jul.-Aug. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 2 Months	ELUL Aug.-Sep. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 3 Months
TISHRI Sep.-Oct. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 4 Months	BUL Oct.-Nov. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 5 Months	CHISLEV Nov.-Dec. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 ↑ 6 Months Conception of Jesus	TEBETH Dec.-Jan. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 4 Weeks	SHEBAT Jan.-Feb. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 8 Weeks	ADAR Feb.-Mar. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 12 Weeks
ABIB Mar.-Apr. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 16 Weeks	ZIF Apr.-May Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 20 Weeks	SIVAN May-Jun. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 24 Weeks	TAMMUZ Jun.-Jul. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 28 Weeks	AB Jul.-Aug. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 32 Weeks	ELUL Aug.-Sep. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 36 Weeks
TISHRI Sep.-Oct. Weeks 1, 2, 3, 4 ↑ 40 Weeks (280 Days) Birth of Jesus Tishri 15	CHRONOLOGY OF THE CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST				

5. The Crucifixion and Resurrection: Timing and Celebration

In view of the statements of John the Baptist: *"Behold the Lamb of God: which taketh away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29), and of Paul: *"For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us"* (1 Corinthians 5:7), it is obvious that Jesus was the true Passover Lamb. In order for Him to fulfill that divine principle, Jesus must have been offered for the sins of the world on the very day of Passover. The Holy Scriptures furnish certain facts and fixed points which make it possible to detail the events which preceded the crucifixion, to fix the time of the crucifixion, and to ascertain the duration of the time that Jesus remained in the tomb (See chart at end of this section).

In order to comprehend the events of the New Testament it is necessary to be familiar with the events and their timing in the old economy. It is important to remember that according to the Bible the day begins at sunset, not at midnight, so that the evening of the day is followed by the morning (Genesis 1:5). The Hebrew day began with the going down of the sun or at approximately six pm.

In Exodus 12:3 God commanded Moses to instruct the Israelites to take a lamb for each household on the tenth day of the month of Abib and keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, on which day the whole congregation of Israel was to kill it at evening or between the two evenings, as the Hebrew is literally rendered. Since the fourteenth day of Abib began at six pm on what we would call the thirteenth day, the period between the two evenings could be recognized as any time during the twenty-four hours of the fourteenth day. This question is clarified, however, by Deuteronomy 16:6: *"But at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the Passover at even, at the going down of the sun."* The period between the two evenings, therefore, was the time between the going down of the sun and the arrival of darkness.

Following the killing of the Passover lamb, the Israelites were instructed to strike its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. Then they were to *"eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs"* (Exodus 12:8). During that night, the Lord passed through the land of Egypt and smote the firstborn of every house upon whose door the blood had not been applied. During that night of terror in Egypt, the Israelites did as they were ordered: *"None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning"* (Exodus 12:22). It was during this night that Pharaoh relented and sent instructions to Moses and Aaron by night to *"rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord"* (Exodus 12:31).

During the day of the fourteenth of Abib, the children of Israel spoiled the Egyptians. Finally at the end of that day, after six pm, or on the evening of the fifteenth day of Abib, the Israelites departed from Rameses and journeyed to Succoth. Numbers 33:3 fixes the time of their departure thus: *"And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians."* This no doubt accounted for the fact that the Jews placed such great emphasis on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This day, the fifteenth day of Abib, was a high holy day, a Sabbath, and the day of Passover, the fourteenth of Abib, came to be a day of preparation for this day of holy convocation.

By the time of the New Testament, the Jewish people had so closely celebrated the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread that the terms became interchangeable: *"Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover"* (Luke 22:1). By this time, the whole eight days of Passover and Unleavened Bread had come to be known as the Passover feast. This fact alone accounts for some of the confusion of the New Testament account of the last Passover. It is apparent, however, that Jesus did eat the Passover supper before His death on the cross. *"Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat"* (Luke 22:7); *"And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?"* (Mark 14:12).

The actual day of Passover, the fourteenth of Abib, came to be known as the day of preparation for the coming Sabbath or holy convocation on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread: *"And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath"* (Mark 15:42). This passage of Scripture has been the basis for the "Good Friday" crucifixion; however, in the context of the whole Passover-Unleavened Bread time frame, it is clear that the preparation was the day of Passover (Abib 14) before the Sabbath of Unleavened Bread (Abib 15).

The basic criterion for establishing the date of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus must be His own prophetic sign to His generation: *"As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:40). If the Lord had said that He would remain in the heart of the earth for three days, it could be assumed that he intended a period of less than seventy-two hours. The fact that He said three days and three nights and then repeated the phrase precisely can only indicate that He meant three days in addition to three nights, or seventy-two hours. The use of the Hebrew idiom *three days and three nights* precludes the possibility that the Lord may have remained in the tomb less than seventy-two hours.

The secondary criterion on which the calculation of the events of the week of the crucifixion and resurrection may be established is the fact that the Scriptures say repeatedly that the visitations of various people to the tomb of Jesus in the pre- and post-dawn hours of the first day of the week found the tomb vacant. This establishes the fact that Jesus resurrected before dawn on the first day of the week. Since He remained entombed for seventy-two hours, and since we are informed that He was interred at shortly before six pm on the day of the crucifixion, counting backward from around six pm at the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the first day of the week, the time of interment must have been at six pm on Wednesday. From this point an accurate chronology of the events which surrounded the death and resurrection of the Lord can be established, in which all the passages of Scripture which conflict with other dates for the crucifixion are reconciled.

The chronology of John begins in John 12:1 with this statement: *"Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany."* According to Luke 19:1-10, Jesus had approached Jerusalem from Jericho on the previous day and had spent the night. During that sixth day before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany according to Luke 19:29 where the events of John 12 transpired. Since the Passover to which the New Testament writers referred was in fact the first day of Unleavened Bread or the fifteenth day of Abib which in that year was on Thursday, six days before that day was Friday, the ninth of Abib.

John 12:12, 13 states that *"on the next day much people that were come to the feast...took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord."* It was earlier in this day while at Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives that Jesus had sent His disciples to procure the ass and colt that He subsequently rode into Jerusalem at His triumphal entry (Luke 19:29-38). The event that most Christians celebrate on Palm Sunday actually took place on the Sabbath. Finally Jesus went out of the city with the twelve at evening to Bethany (Mark 11:11). These were the events of the Sabbath, the tenth day of Abib.

Mark 11:12 continues the chronology thus: *"And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry."* The Lord found no fruit on the fig tree and cursed it. When He came into Jerusalem and the Temple, the zeal of the Lord's house consumed Him, and He drove the moneychangers from the temple. Then He taught at length as Luke 19:47 and John 12:20-50 declare. These were the events of Sunday, the eleventh day of Abib.

Mark continues the chronology in Mark 11:20: *"And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots."* Then Jesus continued to Jerusalem and spent time teaching and giving parables in the temple (Mark 11:20;14:1). In Mark 14:1 this statement further identifies that day: *"After two days was the feast of passover, and of unleavened bread."* Since the Feast of Passover and of Unleavened Bread to which the writer alluded had come to be recognized

as the fifteenth day of Abib and since the statement of "after two days is the passover" would have to have been made on the third day before the Passover, it may be concluded that this day was the twelfth day of Abib.

Mark identifies the next day as being *"the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover"* (Mark 14: 12). Though his identification of that day as the first day of unleavened bread was not accurate when compared with the Old Testament dating, his statement, *"when they killed the passover,"* identified the day precisely. It was at sunset on this Tuesday, the thirteenth day of Abib, at the entering into the fourteenth day that the Passover lamb was slain. During the foregoing day—that is, the thirteenth—Jesus had sent Peter and John to *"prepare us the passover, that we may eat"* (Luke 22:8).

After Jesus and His disciples had concluded the observance of the Passover supper on that evening of the day when they killed the Passover, Jesus instituted the New Testament Passover, instructing His disciples, *"This do in remembrance of me."* After the disciples had partaken of the last supper, Jesus washed their feet, instituting the ordinance of feet washing. Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives where Jesus predicted Peter's denial. Finally they came to Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed. Immediately thereafter the chief priests and a multitude of armed men came with Judas and seized Jesus.

The subsequent events of that night of Wednesday the fourteenth of Abib are documented both in history and in the Gospels. During the night, Jesus was tried in the court of Caiaphas. At dawn he was taken to Pilate. It was then that the Jews would not enter before Pilate so that they would be clean to eat the Passover (John 18:28). The Passover of which they wished to eat was that first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was called the Passover, the annual, not weekly, Sabbath.

After trial by Roman standards, Jesus was found not guilty by Pilate, who, fearing an uprising of the people and wishing to placate their furor, assented to the wishes of the people and their leaders and issued the order for the execution of Jesus. The Son of God was taken to Golgotha and crucified at nine am (John 19: 18). After hanging on the cross for six hours, Jesus died at three pm. John 19:31-42 further identifies this time: *"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day (for that sabbath day was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away...and after this Joseph of Arimathea...besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus...there laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand."* The day of preparation for the annual Sabbath that was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the fourteenth day of Abib. Jesus, therefore, was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea at near sundown, or around six pm, on the evening of the fourteenth day of Abib, which corresponds to our Wednesday.

After six pm on the day of Passover, the preparation day before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jesus was interred in the tomb. On the very next day, the chief priests and scribes came to Pilate, fearful of the prediction which Jesus had made that on the third day He would rise again. They requested that a three-day watch be set upon the tomb and that it be sealed. Permission was granted, and the opposition of the Messiah set the trap which would stand for all eternity as a testimony of the resurrection of Jesus.

Since Jewish law required that a man be dead for three days and three nights before he could be pronounced legally dead, Jesus remained in the tomb for seventy-two hours. On the first day of His entombment, the watch was set. On the second day, the women prepared spices with which to anoint the body when the three-day waiting period had expired (Mark 16:1). On the third night and day of His entombment, the saints rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandments (Luke 23:56). At sundown, the angels opened the tomb with an earthquake in the end of the Sabbath as the first day of the week was drawing on (Matthew 28:1-7).

Some time later while it was still dark on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene was instructed not to handle the Lord because He had not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:17; Luke 24:39). Shortly thereafter Jesus ascended, taking with Him the firstfruits of the resurrection (the saints which arose at the time of the earthquake), and as the newly installed High Priest, waved them before the Lord as the wave sheaf of the firstfruits (Matthew 27:53; I Corinthians 15:23).

Some time later Jesus appeared to the women in the garden and to His disciples instructing them to "*handle me*" (Mark 16:1.6; Luke 24:39; John 20:27). Later that evening on Sunday, the first day of the week, Jesus appeared to the men who were walking very dejectedly toward Emmaus. In answer to His questioning, they related the events of the past few days to Him, concluding that that day was the third day since all those things were done. Their reference was the fact that the first day of the week was the third day since Jesus was crucified, entombed, and the watch set over His tomb, which was the annual Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread, or Thursday, the fifteenth of Abib (Matthew 27:62).

This is a chronology of the events of the Passover. With this account, the scriptures are harmonized, the dates are chronologically in order, and the times of the last supper, the crucifixion, the entombment, and the resurrection are placed on a sure foundation.

The Church of God celebrates the Passover on the eve of the fourteenth day of Abib with communion. It recognizes the crucifixion of Jesus to have occurred on Wednesday, the midst of the week (Daniel 9:27), rather than on Good Friday. It also celebrates the resurrection three days and nights later at the end of the Sabbath rather than at sunrise on Easter Sunday morning. With this understanding the church's remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus is established on a solid scriptural foundation.

A Comparative Chronology of the Passover the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection

HEBREW	ABIB 9			ABIB 10			ABIB 11			ABIB 12			ABIB 13		
	SIXTH DAY			SABBATH			FIRST DAY			SECOND DAY			THIRD DAY		
	6	12	6	12	6	12	6	12	6	12	6	12	6	12	12
MODERN	FRIDAY			SATURDAY			SUNDAY			MONDAY			TUESDAY		
NEW TESTAMENT REALITY	SIX DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER (John 12:1)			FIVE DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER THE NEXT DAY (John 12:12)			FOUR DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER ON THE MORROW (Mark 11:12)			THREE DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER IN THE MORNING (Mark 11:20) AFTER TWO DAYS IS THE FEAST OF PASSOVER (Mark 14:1)			TWO DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER FIRST DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD WHEN THEY KILLED THE PASSOVER (Mark 14:12)		
	Jesus comes to Bethany to Lazarus' home. Martha prepares a supper, and Mary anoints the feet of Jesus (John 12:3-11).			Jesus makes His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Micah 5:2 (Matthew 21:1-12; Mark 11:1-10). He beholds the city and weeps over it (Luke 19:41). Afterwards He goes out of the city with the Twelve at even (Matthew 21:17).			On the way to Jerusalem Jesus curses the fig tree (Mark 11:13). Then He drives the money changers from the Temple (Mark 11:15). He spends time teaching (Luke 19:47), and when evening comes, He goes out of the city (Mark 11:19).			Jesus comes again to Jerusalem and finds the fig tree dried up (Mark 11:20). He spends time teaching and giving parables in the Temple (Mark 11:20-14:1). He predicts His forthcoming death and prophesies of the destruction of Jerusalem and other events (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The second anointing in Bethany takes place at the house of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3-9). Judas plots to betray Jesus (Mark 14:10).			The disciples prepare the lamb and the upper room for Jesus to eat the Passover (Mark 14:12-18).		
OLD TESTAMENT SHADOW				The Passover lamb was taken out from the sheep and goats and was kept up until Abib (Exodus 12:3-6).									The Passover lamb was killed at evening (Lev. between the two evenings—i.e. sundown and dark) (Exodus 12:6) at the going down of the sun of Abib 14 (Deuteronomy 16:6). The Israelites were to eat all of the roast lamb before morning (Exodus 12:8,10; Deuteronomy 16:3,4).		

ABIB 14			ABIB 15			ABIB 16			ABIB 17			ABIB 18		
FOURTH DAY			FIFTH DAY			SIXTH DAY			SABBATH			FIRST DAY		
6	12		6	12		6	12		6	12		6	12	
WEDNESDAY			THURSDAY			FRIDAY			SATURDAY			SUNDAY		
THE PREPARATION DAY BEFORE THE SABBATH (Mark 15:42) "In the evening He cometh with the twelve," (Mark 14:17) and eats the Passover lamb supper with them (Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:14-23). He then goes with the disciples to Gethsemane for prayer (Mark 14:32). Immediately thereafter He is betrayed by Judas (Mark 14:43) and captured by the high priest and taken for trial before Caiaphas (Luke 22:54).			DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD CALLED THE PASSOVER (Luke 22:1; Matthew 27:62) First Night and Day of Entombment On this yearly Sabbath High Day (John 19:31), the chief priests request that a watch be established at the tomb and that it be sealed for three days (Matthew 27:62-66).			SECOND DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD Second Night and Day of Entombment On this day, spices are purchased and prepared to anoint the body of Jesus (Luke 23:56).			THIRD DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD Third Night and Day of Entombment The saints rest on this Sabbath day according to the commandment (Luke 23:56). Then at dusk in the end of the Sabbath, the resurrected Christ comes forth from the tomb.			FOURTH DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD In the pre-dawn hours, Mary is the first to see the risen Saviour, but she is instructed not to touch Him (John 20:7). Then Jesus ascends to the Father with the perfect, eternal sacrificial body and assuming the office of High Priest, offers the wave sheaf of the firstfruits of the resurrection whom He had led captive (Ephesians 4:10; Matthew 27:53; 1 Corinthians 15:23). Later Jesus appears to various disciples, finally to those two on the road to Emmaus, who remark that that day is the third day since all things concerning the death of Jesus had transpired.		
PASSOVER The Israelites ate of the supper as instructed and remained in their homes until morning, also as instructed (Exodus 12:22,28).			FIRST DAY OF UNLEAVENED BREAD The Israelites left Egypt by night on the fifteenth of Abib (Numbers 22:3; Deuteronomy 16:1).									THE MORROW AFTER THE SABBATH AFTER PASSOVER The wave sheaf of barley was plucked up at sundown and then waved in the temple before the Lord on the morrow after the Sabbath after Passover (Leviticus 23:11).		

6. Christian Holidays Not Observed

a. Christmas

The general celebration of Christmas by the majority of Christianity today is testimony to the power of tradition upon people and institutions, even those that claim to represent the truth of God. While it is true that an incalculable amount of good is done at this time of the year by conscientious and dedicated believers, the timing and often the nature of their celebration of the birth of Jesus are not founded in Holy Scripture. The Church of God commends the good that men do in the name of God at the time of Christmas; however, it condemns the commercialization and practices associated with Christmas that are products of heathen religions.

The celebration of December 25 as the birth of Jesus dates to the beginning of the fourth century. The decision of the Roman church to adopt this date as the official commemoration of the Lord's birth came as a result of its receiving the citizens of the Roman Empire into its fold and allowing the Emperor Constantine to assume leadership and authority over the church. As the church and the unconverted society became more and more entwined, the adoption of traditions from the pagan polytheistic religion became the order of the day.

This was the situation to which Tertullian addressed himself in A.D. 230 when he lamented the inconsistency of the Disciples of Christ in contrast with the strict fidelity of the pagans to their superstitions. He said, "By us, who are strangers to Sabbaths, and new moons, and festivals, once acceptable to God, the Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia, are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year's day presents are made with din, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar; Oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians."

It was, indeed, sad that the true faith of Jesus Christ fell into apostasy in accepting the practices of heathenism rather than converting the pagans to the truth of Christ; however, this is the price that the church paid for acceptance by the Roman Empire and the expansion of its adherents.

Christmas is in reality nothing more than a transformed pagan celebration of the winter solstice. The date of December 25 was chosen in A.D. 274 by the emperor Aurelian as the birthday of the unconquered sun which at the time of the winter solstice began again to show an increase of light. The festival which was celebrated at this time was called the Saturnalia in honor of Saturn, the sun god of Roman mythology. The Saturnalia was a festival involving much revelry and debauchery and was certainly so unsavory that the church should have avoided it; however, as Tertullian noted, Christians frequented these celebrations in the third century and gradually became influenced by them. Since they lacked the power of persuasion of the Gospel message to convince the pagans to accept the faith and practices of Christianity, the church gradually adopted the practices of heathenism in order to accommodate them and to bring them into the church. By A.D. 336 the church had officially adopted December 25 as the commemoration of the birthday of Christ.

December 25 as the time of the winter solstice was recognized in various heathen cultures in honor of their sun gods. It was thought that the sun god was resurrected to new life at this time. Adonis, Nimrod, Horus, and Saturn were sun gods of different cultures, and December 25 was closely celebrated in their honor. In conjunction with these celebrations, a number of practices were employed by the pagans which were adopted into the general celebration of Christmas by the Roman church. Among these are the Christmas tree, the Yule log, mistletoe, and the like. The Christmas tree can be traced to pagan Rome and Egypt where they were commonly used in the worship of the sun god. According to the tradition, the mother of Adonis, the sun god, was said to have changed into a tree and when in that state brought forth her divine son. Since the mother was a tree, the son, therefore, was the man the branch (a concept which the apostate church readily associated with Christ). This birth of the sun god supposedly took place on December 25.

The use of the Yule log on the eve of Christmas and the appearance of the Christmas tree on Christmas day originated in the belief in the death and resurrection of the sun god at this time of the year. The practice of kissing under the mistletoe originated in the concept of the reconciliation

of the branch (the sun god) and the accompanying drunkenness and sexual deviations officially practiced at this time of the year by the heathens.

The concept of Santa Claus as an omniscient being who dispenses gifts according to the conduct of children at the time of Christmas also has nothing to do with the Word of God and is an affront to the Son of God as the giver of life and the gifts of God. Various practices associated with the commercial aspects of Christmas also contradict what should be true Christian virtue and are a result of the capitalization on the erroneous traditions of the season by the merchants of the world (Revelation 18:11-19).

The Church of God celebrates the birth of Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles. All the evidence of Holy Scripture points to this time as the actual season of His birth.

b. Easter

The concept of the celebration of the resurrection at sunrise on Easter Sunday morning is also based in heathen practices of sun worship. All scriptural evidence indicates that Jesus was resurrected long before sunrise on the first day of the week. When the women came to the tomb while it was yet dark, they found it empty. There is, in fact, no basis for the idea that Jesus arose at sunrise except the sun god worship concepts appropriated from the heathens.

The idea of Good Friday is also based on an erroneous interpretation of Scripture. When the record of the crucifixion spoke of the need of preparation, it was not talking about Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath. It was talking about the day of Passover, which had come to be known as the day of preparation for the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was an annual Sabbath day. John 19:31-42 confirms this truth: *"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day has a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away."* The Sabbath after the crucifixion was not Saturday but the first day of Unleavened Bread; therefore, the crucifixion did not occur on Good Friday as most of Christianity mistakenly believes. In order for the prediction of Jesus that He would remain in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights to be fulfilled, the crucifixion occurred on Wednesday, and He was entombed for all of Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

The very word *Easter* is itself of pagan origin, coming from the German word *Oster*. Oster was a pagan Germanic festival which celebrated the death of winter and the beginning of spring. The Roman church associated this festival with the resurrection of Christ in order to convert the Germanic people to its ranks and adopted the name of the pagan festival as the name of the holiday celebrating the resurrection. The use of the word *Easter* became so prominent that even when the Authorized Version of the Scriptures was translated, *Easter* was used in Acts 12:4 as a mistranslation of the word *Passover* in the original Greek text.

The Church of God does not observe Easter Sunday as the day of the resurrection, nor does it observe Good Friday as the day of the crucifixion. It celebrates the crucifixion on Passover and the resurrection three days and three nights after the Passover. The church also celebrates the Feast of Firstfruits on the Sunday after the Sabbath after Passover, noting the symbolism of the resurrection of Jesus as the firstfruits of the resurrection.

c. Halloween

On the evening of October 31 of each year millions of people, particularly children, appear on the streets of cities in most western nations dressed as witches, fairies, goblins, demons, and the like. It is a night of pranks, ostrich overeat, and what most people would think of as fun. Halloween is a time to joke about returned dead and evil spirits; however, this quasi-religious holiday has no fellowship with the principles and doctrines of the New Testament church.

October 31 was designated Halloween or *Holy Eve* by Pope Gregory III of the Roman church in the eighth century when he consecrated a chapel in St. Peter's Basilica to all the saints. Gregory

IV extended this festival to the entire church in A. D. 834. Halloween was the beginning of a three-day celebration carried out each year in the following manner: a holy mass was held on the evening of October 31, *Holy Eve*, to usher in *All Saints Day* on November 1, a day to honor all saints known and unknown, to be followed on November 2 by *All Souls Day*, a day of praying for the release of the souls of the dead who were in purgatory.

These days of celebration and the activities associated with them were borrowed from the superstitious religion of the Druids of Ireland and Scotland who had been Christianized by the Roman church. Among the Druids, the Celtic year ended on October 31, the eve of Samhain. Samhain marked the end of summer and was a festival of the dead. On the eve of Samhain the spirits of the departed supposedly visited their kinsmen in search of warmth and cheer as the winter season approached. Also on the eve of Samhain, augers (diviners or priests) were supposed to predict the events of the coming year through reading omens such as interpreting the entrails of sacrificed animals, necromancers, and the like. At this time fires were lighted on hills to guide the spirits of the dead kinsmen to their homes and to ward off the evil spirits that came to haunt them in the form of fairies, witches, and goblins.

Since both the Druid religion and the Roman church through its pagan inheritance were superstitious concerning the dead, both either prayed to them or worshiped them. All Saints Day was an attempt by the Roman church to Christianize the Druids and replace the festival of Samhain; however, the people's superstition continued in the celebration of Halloween. The practices of this holiday today are a direct result of the influence of these pagan cultures on the Church of Rome and subsequently upon the rest of Christendom.

Because of the origin of Halloween in the tradition of the apostate Roman church and because of its practices borrowed from the Druid religion, The Church of God has no recognition of Halloween whatsoever. It recommends to its members that neither they nor their children become involved in the observance of Halloween.

d. Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is named after a Roman priest who suffered martyrdom under the emperor Claudius. The holiday that bears his name, however, has little connection with the Roman saint. The practices of Valentine's Day as a lovers' festival, the exchanging of valentine's cards and the choice of an individual as one's valentine, are customs that are connected with the pagan Roman festival of the Lupercalia which took place in the middle of February or with the spring festivals in general.

The holiday, celebrated on February 14 of each year, is a product of the Roman emphasis on eroticism as personified in the god Cupid. It has been a time for emphasis of western concepts of love, including strong sensual overtones. The festival certainly has no spiritual significance or spiritual benefit to those who observe it.

7. Liturgy

The word *liturgy* means a prescribed form or ritual for public worship in any of the various religions or churches. It derives from the Greek *leitourgeo*, which means to officiate as a priest in a public service. Whether it is a written or prescribed liturgy or a tacit liturgy, every church has one. The general effectiveness of a worship service as a mechanism for the collective worship of God by His people is determined by the amount of preparation that the minister who officiates at that service puts into the development of the liturgy for the service.

One essential element in public worship is the presence of a God-called and ordained minister, a priest who can lead the people into the worship of God. This man should officiate at the altar in the sanctuary of God, the building that is consecrated to His service, offering both gifts and sacrifices of praise to God and God's gift of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to men.

Far too often in the past, ministers have concentrated all their energies on the preaching of the

Word. While the hours of sermon preparation are important, a minister as a priest of God also has the responsibility of leading the people into worship so that they may commune with God and with one another in the realm of the Spirit. This element of the worship service is important in preparing the minds and hearts of the people for the in grafting of the Word of God.

While it is not essential that the minister lead all of the worship service, it is essential that he plan the entire service of what he and the congregation will do in worship of God. This kind of planning is called a liturgy; it provides a systematic, disciplined approach to the worship of God and as such provides a vehicle through which as God is worshiped, the Holy Spirit can move more fully to reciprocate the blessings of God upon the people through whatever means He chooses.

It should be emphasized that a liturgy is not a priestly or ecclesiastical show. It requires the interaction of both the minister and the people to make the worship service effective and meaningful. Only when the minister and the people join in worshipping God in the Spirit and in truth does the liturgy accomplish its desired purpose.

A liturgy provides for variety in worship that keeps the praise of the people fresh and invigorated. By planning and devoting time to developing the liturgy for each service, the minister brings to his attention the need for variety and thereby avoids slipping into a rut that makes worship ritualistic.

Liturgy also provides for visible demonstration. God is a God of demonstration, using the things that are made to reveal the invisible. Having an altar in the church demonstrates the altar in heaven, on which the prayers of the saints are poured out before the Lord. Offering tithes and gifts of the people before the altar demonstrates offering them before the throne of God in heaven. All of these elements have their rightful place in the worship of God.

Unfortunately there has always been a historical polarization in Christian churches between spontaneity and systematic worship. In history there have been large groups of people who were vehemently opposed to having any kind of song or chorus book or hymnal, believing that anything that was prepared before hand was not true worship. The truth is that not only song, but also other aspects of the worship of God's people can be more effectively carried out when advance preparations are made.

Some people and churches believe that no program or order of worship should ever be used, that spontaneity should always be the rule. They say that no one can program the Holy Spirit; they think that it is wrong to plan ahead; and they fear that liturgy will crowd out the Holy Spirit. These objections are easily answered. First, if an order of worship cannot be planned in advance, why announce a worship service at a particular time or a revival for a certain number of days? Second, if planning ahead is wrong, why learn or practice songs or have hymnals? Third, planning and preparing for a service, rather than inhibiting the Holy Spirit, will provide a vehicle through which He can move more effectively and meaningfully if the people expect His manifestation and pray for the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit during the liturgy.

The advantages of the use of a well developed liturgy are that the liturgy provides for advanced planning that helps to give worship service continuity, that it introduces a vehicle for the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, and that it develops a more meaningful way of worshipping God.

The Church of God recommends the use of liturgies that are well planned and developed in all of its churches. This is particularly true of special occasions, the observance of festivals of the church, and convocations. The elements that may be used in these liturgies are as many and diverse as the creativity and inspiration of the ministers who prepare them. The Church of God promotes the use of liturgies because of the fact that when more planning and order are given to a worship service, the people have a more meaningful worship experience in which they are elevated from the mundane surroundings of their daily lives into the majestic presence of the Eternal God.

8. Music

An important part of the worship practices of the church is the use of music in praise to God. Music is as old as heaven itself, for it has always been a medium through which the praises of the creations of God are expressed to the Creator.

In the beginning Lucifer was the angel who had charge over the system of praise and worship in heaven. Before his fall through pride, he was described thus: *"The workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created."* Lucifer was the morning star (Isaiah 14:12) who sang before the throne of God when the foundations of the world were laid (Job 38:4,7).

When Satan fell from heaven (Revelation 12:9; Luke 10:18), he took with him this knowledge of the profound effect of music. It is for this reason that music and song have been polluted and used as devices of Satan in inciting human passions. Music, however, continues to be the province of God despite the fact that it has been usurped by Satan.

Throughout Old Testament history, music and song played an important role in the worship of God. When the exodus was completed, the children of Israel were led by Miriam in triumphant song (Exodus 15:1-19). Later Moses sang a song of doctrine to the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 32). Musical instruments and song were used in the worship of God in Solomon's temple (II Chronicles 5:12,13;20:21;23:13;29:30). They continued to be used when the temple was restored after the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 3:11; Nehemiah 7:1). This practice of having ministers of music and skillful players of instruments continued to be a part of the temple worship, with some of the Levites appointed as singers and musicians.

Music and singing were a part of the life and worship of Jesus (Matthew 26:30). They were a part of the early church (Acts 16:25). Paul instructed the believers to make singing and music a part of their worship (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). James confirmed this practice (James 5:13). The rich heritage of Judaic music continued to be a part of the liturgy of the church, with the use of various musical instruments and singing.

The Church of God continues to seek the restoration of the perfect order of the praise of God that was so much a part of the early church. Singing and the playing of musical instruments continue to be essential parts of the New Testament Judaism order of praise and worship in the church. The Church of God believes that this practice will continue into the millennial reign of Christ when the over comers will sing the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb.

9. Singing the Word of God

The continuing practice of the early church of singing the Word of God is recorded in the New Testament. The very words of Holy Scripture were set to music and were sung by the people. This was the case with Jesus and the disciples who sang a hymn (psalm) at the Passover immediately before Jesus' crucifixion.

The apostle Paul instructed the church to continue this practice of singing the Word of God: *"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"* (Colossians 3:16). The same instruction was given to the church at Ephesus which confirms the fact that singing the Word of God was a church-wide practice. James also instructed the people in this manner in James 5:13.

The first century church sang the Word of God in the form of psalms and hymns of the Scripture and songs of the Word of God rightly divided. The singing of the church was not limited to the psalms alone but was extended to include songs in the spirit.

Singing the Word of God has been restored in The Church of God as a part of the liturgy of New Testament Judaism. Psalms are sung both in minor and major modes, and various hymns that interrelate the Scriptures, rightly dividing the word of truth, are sung. The music program of the church serves two functions, neither of which is entertainment. First, it shows forth the praises of

the Most High God. Second, it instructs the saints in the Word of God through the Spirit of teaching.

10. Liturgical Dancing

When the children of Israel were delivered from Egyptian bondage and crossed over the Red Sea, Miriam the prophetess led the children of Israel in a song of triumph during which she *"took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances"* (Exodus 15:20).

The timbrel is the most ancient of all musical instruments. Today it is called a tambourine. In the Old Testament the children of Israel used this instrument in praise of God. Uniquely the timbrel was most commonly used| together with the dance in praise of God. This close association of the timbrel and dance is found in Psalm 150:4a: *"Praise him with the timbrel and dance..."* Throughout Bible history, the timbrel and the dance were used together in the praises of God.

The Church of God has restored this ancient worship form to its order of worship. Dancing before the Lord is a very appropriate part of the liturgy of the church in light of the scriptural record, for many great and wise men were moved to praise God in the dance (II Samuel 6:14). As with the Old Testament dances which were performed deliberately, so New Testament dancing with and in the Spirit can be planned and practiced and subsequently carried out in worship to God during a collective worship service.

The liturgical dance can be either interpretive or rhythmic or both. Its function is to praise the Lord in a manner in which He prescribed in His Word and to lead the people in a visible exercise of praise. In this way liturgical dancing is a very meaningful part of the worship service when it is used in the church.

11. Communion (Revised November, 2007)

Communion or the Lord's Supper is an important part of the system of worship that The Church of God employs. It is the visible means of worship that Jesus commanded believers to observe in remembrance of His death.

The ceremony of communion involves the breaking and giving of unleavened bread to the communicants and the sharing of the cup of wine with the communicants. This is done in the manner in which Jesus and Paul instructed in Luke 22:19,20 and I Corinthians 11:23-29.

The Church of God does not believe that the bread and wine are changed in substance or transubstantiated by the blessing of the minister, nor does it believe that the bread and wine represent the body and blood of the Lord. The church teaches that the believer's obedience to the commandment of Christ and the application of the authority of the Word of God to the ceremony causes the bread and wine to become to the believer who partakes of them the body and blood of Christ.

The Church of God recognizes that Jesus Christ reformed the observance of the Old Testament Passover and instituted the Lord's Supper as the New Testament observance to be done in remembrance of Him (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20; I Corinthians 11:23-26). The church also recognizes that the Bible is not silent on the frequency regarding the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted the New Testament observance as part of the yearly Feast of Passover which Scripture designates as occurring once-per-year on the 14th day of Abib, the first month of the Jewish religious calendar (Leviticus 23:5; Mark 14:1,12,22-26).

The Church of God does not believe that the terms "breaking bread" and the "Lord's Supper" found in the New Testament are synonymous and thus interchangeable (Luke 24:30,31,35; Acts 20:7;27:35). This has been the basis for the erroneous teaching that the Apostles and the Early Church engaged in daily and/or weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. The church does not believe that the Early Church practiced daily communion and that the reference in Acts 2:42-47 concerning "breaking bread" does not refer to celebrating the Lord's Supper (vs. 46). The church

also teaches that the reference in Acts 20:7-12 of "breaking bread" does not refer to celebrating the Lord's Supper.

The act of celebrating weekly communion is not an instruction found in Holy Scripture. The practice has its origins based in Roman Catholicism which decreed in the 16th century that believers should receive communion during the weekly Mass held each Sunday (The Council of Trent, AD 1545-1563, Session XXII, Chapter VI).

The church does not believe that there is any impartation of salvation or the forgiveness of sins through partaking of communion; however, it does believe that the communion adds strength to the spiritual man through obedience and the calling to remembrance of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

12. Feet Washing

In John 13:4-17, Jesus laid down the example for a basic practice in the worship of the church when He washed the disciples' feet. Jesus performed an act of humility to show the fact that all Christians should feel subservient one toward another. The ceremony of feet washing is an outward sign of love which manifests itself in the desire to serve. In the day of the early church, the washing of one's feet was a task accomplished by the most menial of slaves. Jesus took this means of demonstrating that the believer should have such an attitude of humility toward his fellow believers.

The fact that Jesus intended feet washing to be a continuing practice in the church is revealed in His statement: *"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet."* Then He declared, *"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them"* (John 13:14,17). The Church of God believes that feet washing was more than an isolated incident at the Last Supper and that it was more than a mere cultural practice. It was a continuing exercise in the early church as is indicated by the fact that one of the requirements for admission of a widow into the care of the church was that she had washed the saints' feet (I Timothy 5:10).

The Church of God maintains the practice of feet washing which may be carried out in any worship service in the proper setting or in homes at any time that a significant display of a spirit of service and humility is needed.

13. Bread Breaking

In Acts 2:12,46 the Scriptures declare that the Early Church *"continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart."*

The Church of God believes that the breaking of bread was a continuing practice of the early church that demonstrated the unity and sharing of the church's many members. More than the sharing of a meal, it was a part of the worship practices of the church. The church employs a ceremony at various times in which a loaf (loaves) of bread is broken and distributed among the congregation present for a worship service. The members of the congregation, in turn, break bread with one another, sharing their expressions of love and fellowship.

The symbolism of this worship practice is seen in Paul's statement in I Corinthians 10:17: *"For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."* Though the church is made up of many members, it is one. The act of breaking a loaf of bread and sharing it among the congregation emphasizes the unity of the church. The church continues to maintain this practice in its worship services and in bread breaking from house to house in what is a very meaningful practice.

14. Tithing and Giving

Tithing and giving are very much a part of the worship practices of The Church of God.

While Christians often think of these practices as a paying of their dues to the church, in reality tithing and giving are integral parts of the worship of God. Tithing has always been man's way of returning to God the tenth of his increase as a means of praising Him for that which His bounty has provided.

The term *tithe* means *the tenth*. It originated in Abraham, Jacob, and the other patriarchs when they returned a tenth of their increase to the Lord in thanksgiving for His blessing. The practice continued throughout the dispensation of the law. The last book of the Old Testament still encouraged the people of God to pay the tithe and give offerings in obedience to God.

Jesus continued to give emphasis to the act of tithing and giving. In Matthew 22:17-21, He instructed the people, *"Render therefore unto Caesar's the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."* In Matthew 23:23 He told the Pharisees that they should have carried out the weightier matters of the law (judgment, mercy, and faith), but that they should not have left the other (tithing) undone.

Not only is tithing required by the Word of God, but giving is also required. Paul instructed the church: *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give...not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver"* (II Corinthians 9:6,7).

The Church of God teaches that according to Malachi 3:10, tithes and offerings are to be brought into the storehouse (the local church treasury) and then disbursed to the ministry according to the guidelines established by the Council of Apostles and Elders. Since ministers are not God's storehouse, the tithes of members are not to be paid to ministers but rather to the church.

According to the Scriptures tithes are given for the support of the ministry. Since the ministry of the Word of God includes more than just the livelihood of the minister, himself, it is acceptable for tithes to be used for the support of other parts of the ministry of the church at the discretion of the executive government of the church within the advice of the Council of Apostles and Elders.

The Church of God teaches that every person who is working for his livelihood should give one tenth of his increase to the work of the Lord. Members' tithes are paid into the treasury of the local church of which they are members. Tithes of income that ministers receive from secular employment are paid into the local church treasury. Tithes of income that ministers receive from their ministry are paid to General Headquarters.

Tithing and giving are very important to the church in the terms of receiving the blessing of God. The only scriptural promise of the pouring out of a blessing that cannot be contained is in response to the faithfulness of the people of God in tithing and giving (Malachi 3:10).

C. SYMBOLISM

1. The Church of God Flag

One of the prophetic markings of the church is its flag, the ensign which it displays because of the truth that has been restored in the church in the last days. David declared that God's church would have such a banner: *"Thou has given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth"* (Psalm 60:4). Isaiah predicted the use of an ensign in the day of restoration: *"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people...and he shall set up an ensign for the nations"* (Isaiah 11:11,12).

The use of a flag as a marker has long been a Biblical and civil practice to give identity to a nation or people. Ancient Israel encamped under twelve ensigns for the twelve tribes. Since the church is a *"chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation"* (I Peter 2:9), it is entirely appropriate that it should have a flag. It was concern for this truth and the need for a prophetic restoration in the last days that prompted former General Overseer A. J. Tomlinson to introduce a flag for the church on September 16, 1933. At that time the General Assembly approved a design that symbolized the dominion of Christ, the two nations of the Jew and Gentile, the Holy Trinity, and

the crown of righteousness of the believer. Below is an artist's rendering of the original design for the church flag.



a. Flag Colors and Design of the Original Flag

Red, white, blue, and purple are the predominant colors that were used throughout the Scriptures. The red represents the blood of Jesus which was shed on the cross for the redemption of mankind, The white represents the purity of God's people and the purity that the church must reach before the return of Christ (Ephesians 5:26,27), both of which are accomplished through the application of the blood of the Lamb of God. The blue represents truth, the one thing for which the church stands and for which it displays its banner. The purple represents the royalty and authority of Jesus Christ as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

The three circular designs in the center of the flag manifest the Trinity of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They also portray the central government of God for the millennial reign with Jesus Christ and His two witnesses. In the center circle is the star which reveals Christ as the Bright and Morning Star (Revelation 22:16). The scepter at the right of the star reveals the authority of Christ as the right hand of God. The crown to the left of the star manifests the kingship of Christ and the crown of life which the faithful will receive when He comes in His kingdom. The two horizontal lines in the flag represent the Jews and the Gentiles, the only two distinct and separate peoples in the sight of God.

b. The Perfected Design of the Flag

At the time of the reformation of The Church of God in 1957, Chief Bishop Grady R. Kent introduced changes in the overall design of the flag. As greater light was revealed on the scriptural nature and work of the church, it was necessary for the flag to be altered to reflect that light. (This is much the same as the twenty-six changes that have been made in the flag of the United States of America.) Bishop Kent restored governmental offices and the Judaic heritage of the church, and he proposed a change in the flag which would reflect those restorations. The color gold was added to the flag because of the fact that it was used throughout Bible days to reflect perfection. Gold was used in the perfected flag design in the candlestick, scepter, and crown. The golden candlestick (Menorah) was placed in the center of the blue star. These were superimposed over a white cross on a round field of red. Each of these emblems reveals Jesus Christ: the candlestick shows Him as the light of the world, the star as the Bright and Morning Star, and the cross as the atonement for man's sins.

The background of the former flag was red with the white displayed in the central designs and in the horizontal lines. Since the foremost goal of the church today is perfection, the background was changed to white, with the red demonstrating the blood of Jesus displayed in the prominent circular designs.



The blue lines of the former design were changed to purple, and whereas they did not join together, they were formed into a square, displaying twelve gates (for the twelve apostles), which manifests the foursquare holy city with twelve gates (Revelation 21:16.21) that reveals the church.

The star of the former design was one of five points, which is a world star. In the perfected flag, the star was changed to a Star of David, a six-pointed star. The design of the scepter in the former flag was that of a fleur-de-lis which was used in the coat of arms of the royal family of France. The perfected flag adopted a design that featured the scepter of David with the Star of David on the top of a rod (Exodus 17:9). The scepter is positioned at the right of the star design to indicate that God always manifests His authority by His right hand (Psalm 80:17).

The flag which The Church of God displays today is designed to portray the complete vision and revelation of the Holy Pattern of God's Word (Hebrews 8:1-5). The prophets declare that the church must be rebuilt in the last days according to this pattern and design; therefore, the flag of the church also portrays this same pattern.

The Church of God flag is displayed in all church sanctuaries and other facilities. It is one of the important markers that identify the church as a movement of prophecy.

c. Pledge of Allegiance

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of The Church of God and to all the doctrine for which it stands: One Lord, One Faith, One Pattern, and One Church for all."

2. The Christian Flag



The Church of God recognizes the Christian community as the kingdom of God and glories in the cross of Christ that has made all believers one dominion under Him. It is for this reason that the church uses the Christian flag which displays the cross of red on a field of white (denoting the purity of the believer through the imputed righteousness of Christ).

The church uses the Christian flag in its sanctuaries as a marker of its identity as a part of the kingdom of God and of its association with all believers in Christ.



3. The Church Emblem

The official emblem of The Church of God and of its concept of New Testament Judaism is made up of a golden Menorah candlestick inside the blue Star of David superimposed over a red cross. This emblem indicates that life and renewal through the death of the Messiah transformed Judaism from an ancient and lifeless form into a new and living dimension. The cross represents the sacrifice of Jesus to purchase New Testament Judaism and the church (Acts 20:28). The fact that it does not stand upright reveals that the Savior was offered once for all and that no other sacrifice for sin will ever be required (Romans 6:9,10; Hebrews 9:28). Jesus was the Day Star of salvation, the Bright and Morning Star (Revelation 22:16). He was also the light of the world. The church is to be like Him, becoming living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), having the Day Star arising within it (I Peter 1:19), conforming it to the candlestick pattern (Hebrews 8:5) to be the light of the world (Matthew 5: 12-15). As the Father sent the Son into the world, even so has He sent the church in His stead. The Emblem of The Church of God, then, represents both Jesus and the revelation of the church.



4. The Menorah Candlestick

As a part of the law of God which was given at Sinai, Moses was commanded of God to construct a Menorah (candlestick) after the pattern of that which he had seen in a vision of the heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5): *"And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be the same"* (Exodus 25:31). This candlestick was constructed of beaten gold and was duly placed in the Tabernacle of Witness to be the only light therein.

According to Hebrews 9:23 the candlestick and its accompanying furnishings in the Tabernacle of Witness were only figures of the true candlestick and the furnishings of the true tabernacle, the church, which the Lord pitched (Hebrews 8:2). The church was built up as the temple of God of lively stones, a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). The candlestick of the Old Testament was symbolic of the order and spirit of the church in the New Testament that made it the light of the world.

The pattern of the candlestick reveals the government of the church. The shaft is symbolic of the anointed servant of God. The foundation was of twelve sides and represents the twelve apostles who are the foundational pillars of the church (Ephesians 2:20). The seventy-two knops, bowls, and flowers of the candlestick represent the seventy-two elders or prophets (Luke 10:1). The seven lamps reveal the seven men of wisdom (Acts 6:3).

The Menorah candlestick is the most comprehensive revelation in things that are made (Romans 1:20) of the pattern of the government of the church.



5. The Star of David

The Star of David (Mogen David Star) dates from history and tradition to the days of King David. The Koran speaks of the Mogen David as the "Seal of Solomon" which was used on the official communications of Solomon. Oral tradition claims that the star was used on the shields of David's mighty men and was, therefore, named the "Shield of David." Some suggest that there is a connection between the Mogen David Star and God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:1 where He said, *"Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield."* Archaeologists have discovered that the six pointed star was used as a decorative motif as far back as 3500 B.C. There is extensive historical evidence of the use of the Star of David along with the Menorah candlestick as symbols of Judaism.

The Star of David is made up of two intersecting equilateral triangles; the one represents the Trinity of God-Father, Son and Holy Spirit-reaching down to redeem fallen man. The other represents the trinity of man-body, soul, and spirit-reaching up to God to receive His grace.

The prophetic significance of the symbol of the Star of David was fulfilled when Jesus came into the world: *"There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel"* (Numbers 24:17). At the birth of Jesus a star appeared in the east to guide the wise men to the place where the child was to be found. Subsequently New Testament writers referred to Jesus as the Day Star (II Peter 1:19) and the Bright and Morning Star (Revelation 22:16). The Star of David is not an object of worship, nor does it have any magical qualities, as many superstitious people have thought through the centuries. It is, however, an emblem that is full of meaning to those who are able to understand the invisible things of God through the use of things that are made (Romans 1:20).

6. The Beautiful Garments of Zion

The wearing of special garments by those involved in leading the church in worship and in its outreach ministries is a practice that is well founded in Holy Scripture. Both the Old and New Testaments give examples of vestments that were worn to symbolize positioning responsibility in the ministry and to beautify the appearance of singers and dancers in the worship of God, and they give examples of military uniforms that were used by the people of God in battle.

During the service at the altar of God, the priesthood of the Old Testament was clothed in holy garments designed by Yahweh, Himself. The use of these vestments was obligatory. They were designed as a material manifestation of the priests' offices (Exodus 28).

With the advent of the New Testament there is some evidence that the Melchisedec order of priesthood maintained the use of some vestments. Jesus, Himself, directed the apostles to take with them their cloaks, together with their staves (Mark 6:8). Both the cloaks and the staves symbolized their offices-the cloaks, their prophetic ministry, and the staves, their authority.

The use of vestments was a continuing practice in heaven, for the Son of man in Revelation 1:13 was seen by John as *"clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle."* When he foresaw the return of Christ in Revelation 19, John saw Him *"clothed in vesture dipped in blood...and he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."*

The abuses of office that characterized the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages produced a negative reaction from the people against the use of vestments to identify those who ministered before the Lord. This same reaction has been manifest in subsequent generations in Protestantism as an aversion to the wearing of special garments by the ministry. The attitude has carried over into each succeeding revival, where informality has been the order of the day and the use of vestments has been downplayed. Abuses of anything that God approves in one dispensation do not rule out the continuing use of those things in succeeding dispensations. If such were the case, the church could not use the Star of David, the name Yahweh, altars, and many other things that God has given for His praise, worship, and service because these have been abused and polluted at some time in history.

One of the prophetic works of the last days church is revealed in Isaiah 52:1,2: *"Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for hence forth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem..."* In the time when the spiritual city of Jerusalem, the church (Hebrews 10:22), is to arise and shake itself from the dust of its burial under human tradition in the arise, shine of the last days (Isaiah 60:1), the church is to be arrayed in its beautiful garments.

These garments are of two distinct natures. The first is sacerdotal vestments, those garments which are worn by the ministers, singers, musicians, and dancers who lead the people of God in

worship. The second is military uniforms, those garments which the representatives of the church wear in their public outreach ministry as the spiritual army of God.

The Church of God has no established order for sacerdotal vestments to be worn by its ministry and musicians; however, it does encourage their use according to the opportunities and situations of ministry which are presented to the church. The use of clerical attire, robes, stoles, and other vestments is appropriate in the church.

The military uniforms of the church are of the same recommended design. The church uses the colors red and black in its outreach ministries, with red coats, shirts, or blouses and black trousers or skirts. These generally have insignia which identify the wearers as a part of the outreach army of The Church of God. The color red is used in fulfillment of Nahum 2:1-4 and is symbolic of the blood of Christ.

The use of both sacerdotal vestments and military uniforms is The Church of God's answer to the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the beautiful garments of Zion. They are a part of the symbolism of the church, using things that are made to reveal invisible truths.

7. Staves

The Church of God practices the carrying of staves by its officials in positions of responsibility as outward signs and symbols of their authority and spiritual shepherdship. This practice is well established in the record of Holy Scripture and is a part of the restoration program of the church.

Staves or rods have always been used by God to reveal His power and the delegated authority that He has given to His servants. This was the case with Moses who was told of God to *"take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs"* (Exodus 4:1.7). When the people saw Moses, they recognized his authority because they saw in his hand the rod of God.

In Numbers 17:1, 2 the program of the giving of special staves to symbolize authority and leadership was extended to the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel: *"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of everyone of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, and of all their princes according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod."* The carrying of a rod with the name of the tribe written on it by the heads of those tribes could only have been for the purpose of identifying authority. Later in Numbers 21:16-18 these leaders of Israel used their rods of authority to dig a well to provide water for the people. In Numbers 17 God used these rods to reveal His choice of Aaron by causing Aaron's rod to bud miraculously.

The fact that the staff reveals the authority of its bearer and is not in itself a means of authority is revealed in II Kings 4 when Gehazi tried to sell the power of God by using the staff of the prophet; however, his efforts failed.

There is prophetic evidence that Jesus carried two staves during his Judean ministry. Psalm continued the prophecy of Psalm 22 concerning Jesus and declared that His rod and staff comforted Him. Zechariah 11:7 declared prophetically that Jesus took two staves, one called Beauty (Grace); the other called Bands (Union) and fed the flock. One New Testament witness that Jesus was the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy is the fact that Paul reminded the early church in Romans 8:36 that they were the flocks of slaughter, those whom the prophet declared the Messiah would feed.

When He wept over Jerusalem and announced the cutting off of the Jews, Jesus fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy: *"And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken in that day"* (Zechariah 11:10). *"Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel"* (Zechariah 11:14). Jesus fulfilled these prophecies with a material manifestation to reveal by things that were made that He had broken the covenant with them and was turning to another people. During the ministry of Jesus He gave staves to His twelve apostles, no doubt in

fulfillment of the giving of staves to the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel in Moses' day. *"And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only"* (Mark 6:8). The twelve apostles were not shepherds; however, they were given the emblem of a shepherd to symbolize their authority and leadership over the people.

In fulfillment of Acts 3:20, 21 The Church of God has brought about a restoration of the use of staves as a part of the symbolism of the church. The staves which the officials of the church carry to symbolize their offices are of the proper scriptural length, about three feet. (The Roman church uses staves and crosiers of other lengths.) The precedence for the use of a three-root staff is found in two passages of Scripture. In Genesis 48:1, 2 Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph as he sat upon his bed. Hebrews 11:21 says that the patriarch worshiped, *"leaning upon the top of his staff."* This is an indication that the staff was approximately three feet long. The second confirmation of this length is revealed in the fact that Aaron's rod that budded was placed in the Ark of the Covenant (Hebrews 9:4). According to Exodus 25:10-15, the ark was three feet, nine inches long, and two feet high. From these measurements, the staff must have been similar to the average staff today.

In Revelation 11:1 John was given a rod and was told to arise and measure the temple of God (church) and the altar. This rod showed his authority to rebuild the church and to restore the twelve apostles (altar—I Kings 18:31). John was told in Revelation 2:26-28 that if he would keep the works of Jesus, he would be given a rod of authority over the nations. There is much prophetic information in the symbolism of these passages of scripture.

The Church of God recognizes and practices the carrying of staves on special occasions to demonstrate the authority and shepherdship of its ministerial hierarchy.

D. MATERIAL PROGRAMS

The Church of God makes full use of the important tool that God has provided for the manifestation of His Word and will for mankind. Romans 1:20 reveals this tool: *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."* While God can be worshipped only in Spirit and in truth, His invisible attributes can be revealed only through those material things which He has created and which man has formed through the inspiration of His Spirit.

1. Jerusalem Acres and Fields of the Wood

Jerusalem Acres, the project in Cleveland, Tennessee, on which the General Headquarters of The Church of God is located, was begun in 1958 by former Chief Bishop Grady R. Kent. Designed by Bishop Kent to be a composite portrayal of the pattern of the Holy City of Revelation 21 when it is completed, Jerusalem Acres is a parallel development of Fields of the Wood in Cherokee County, North Carolina.

A major part of Bishop Kent's ministry was his vision to reveal the invisible principles of God through the use of things that are made, particularly through programs of marking locations of prophetic significance and through material witnesses of the coming of Jesus. Shortly before the death of General Overseer A. J. Tomlinson in 1943 Bishop Kent began to work at developing Fields of the Wood to mark the spot where the church arose in 1903 in the fulfillment of prophecy. Some fourteen years of labor were spent in work on Fields of the Wood, with Bishop Kent's vision to make it a virtual display of the Bible, particularly of the principles of the church. Fields of the Wood stands today as a memorial to the vision and dedication of its designer, Bishop Grady R. Kent.

Following the reformation in 1957 Bishop Kent continued his vision by purchasing seven acres in Cleveland, Tennessee, and beginning a marking project there. Jerusalem Acres was designed from its beginning to reveal the principles of the church as the city of God. It was laid out on a roadway that formed a huge cross to manifest that fact that the cross of Christ is the basis of all the work of the church. Twelve Gates were erected representing the twelve apostles through whom

the Gentiles came into joint inheritance with the Jews of the program of God.

An expansive blueprint for the continuing development of Jerusalem Acres was left by Bishop Kent at his death. The Church of God remains dedicated to the completion of that project through which it can make the vision and revelation of the Word of God speak in things that are made.

2. The White Eagle Fleet

An important part of the prophetic witness which Bishop Grady R. Kent brought forth in the church was the program he began in 1948 that involved the use of specially-lettered airplanes that were identified as the fulfillment of prophecy as a sign of the presence of the prophetic church in the last days. The program reached its greatest heights in the mid-1950's; however, the church continues to maintain the vision of the airplane as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy today.

In the 1940's Bishop Kent was inspired with the principles in the phraseology of certain portions of the prophecies of Ezekiel, chapters 1 and 10. He began to preach that Ezekiel 10:2 defined the presence of a man in linen who would go in between the wheels, under the cherub, fill his hand with the coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. He declared this man to be a minister who went between the wheels of an airplane with his hands full of the Word of God (Jeremiah 20:9) and cast that printed word over the cities (Deuteronomy 32:1,3). Bishop Kent fulfilled this scenario with hundreds of other pilots in a program that reached thousands of people with the message of salvation and the end-time revelation of the Word of God.

From one airplane donated in 1948, the program under Bishop Kent's direction grew to over one hundred aircraft and over two hundred pilots. The fleet became known as the White Angel Fleet, and the airplanes were called Ezekiel's Cherubims after the prophetic description that had inspired Bishop Kent to begin this program.

Kent became known as the Flying Bishop of America. He was inspired to use the prophecy of Isaiah 60:1-10 to note that the arise of the church and the age of flight were to be contemporaneous, and he declared that the fact that the church arose in 1903 and the Wright Brothers flew the first airplane in that same year, was no mere coincidence but a fulfillment of prophecy. Then, in 1956, he took a group of airplanes on a flight to the Caribbean Islands in fulfillment of Isaiah 60:9.

After the Reformation in 1957 the airplane program was greatly diminished; however, Bishop Kent continued with his vision. With a new name, the White Eagle Fleet, the church again took to the air. Bishop Kent was recognized as a prophetic messenger, flying with the everlasting gospel of the kingdom of God in fulfillment of Revelation 14:6, and his work was witnessed by Ecclesiastes 10:20 as the voice of the bird of the air.

The Church of God continues to recognize the prophetic significance of the use of airplanes in its ministry, as well as in the ministries of other churches and fellowships that use them to carry the gospel. It has made the promotion of the airplane program one of its four major outreach powers.

3. The Church Navy

The Church of God believes that in the last days the Lord will "shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea" (Haggai 2:6). This prophecy indicates that the message of the church will be spread in the air, on the land, and on the sea. It is in the work of ministering the gospel on the sea that The Church of God Navy comes into play. Part of the vision of Chief Bishop Grady R. Kent was the use of boats as a means of spreading the Gospel on the waterways of the world.

The church has identified its navy program as a fulfillment of the ships of Tarshish that were to bring the sons of God from afar to participate in the resurrecting of Zion (Isaiah 60:1,9). The Church Navy is a part of the church's effort to take the message of the gospel to the people where they are.

4. Church Motorcycle Corps

The Church of God Motorcycle Corps is called the Highway Good Samaritans and Joel's Horsemen. It is made up of those who ride motorcycles as a means of the fulfillment of prophecy that points to the return of Jesus Christ and as a means of sharing the gospel with the public in the streets and lanes of the cities and in the highways and hedges (Luke 14:16-24).

The motorcycle was first used in the church in 1958 when former Chief Bishop Grady R. Kent identified it as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:4: *"The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses...like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble."* The historical fulfillment of this prophecy was Cyrus, who liberated Judah from Babylonian captivity. The spiritual fulfillment is the church, God's spiritual army. Because of this prophecy the church has used motorcycles to attract the attention of the public to a gospel witness and the identification of the fulfillment of prophecy that predicts the soon coming of Jesus.

5. Nahum's Chariot Corps

The Church of God employs specially marked automobiles in its public service outreach ministries. These are identified so as to declare them a fulfillment of Nahum 2:1-4, a passage which predicts the day of preparation for the coming of the one who dashes in pieces. The historical fulfillment of this prophecy was the army of Cyrus, who liberated the Jews from Babylon. The spiritual fulfillment is none other than Jesus Christ, Himself. The prophet said that in the time of His coming the chariots would rage in the streets, jostle one against the other in the broad ways, seem like torches, and run like the lightnings. This vision is certainly descriptive of the automobile.

By identifying the automobile with Bible prophecy, the church makes a compelling and effective witness of the nearness of the return of Christ. This has proven an effective means of outreach for the church that has communicated the message of the coming of Jesus to thousands of people.

6. The Highway Gospel Caravan

The Church of God sponsors periodic excursions for its outreach ministry to spread the gospel message in the streets and lanes of the cities and in the highways and hedges in fulfillment of the commission of Christ recorded in Luke 14:16-24. This ministry uses specially lettered automobiles and motorcycles to parade and travel in a caravan to various parts of the nation, stopping to preach on street corners and other locations and involving itself in the distribution of thousands of pieces of literature.

This public outreach ministry is called the Highway Gospel Caravan. It is made up of ministers and laymen who are dressed in red and black uniforms with appropriate insignia that identifies the nature of their work. Various contingents of the Highway Gospel Caravan have logged thousands of miles sharing the message of Christ and the church. Each unit functions as a military contingent and assumes the posture of the church as the army of God reaching out to conquer the territory controlled by Satan.

E. PROPHETIC PROGRAMS

1. Restoration of the Church among the Gentiles

The early church which Jesus established during the time of His ministry reaped many thousands of members who made up the great "spiritual house," the temple of the Lord (1 Peter 2:5). In its latter years after the death of the apostles and the apostolic fathers, evil men as grievous wolves crept in unawares to overthrow the faith of many by using the grace of God as a pretext for lasciviousness and substituting human traditions for the truths of God. This brought about an eventual revelation in the spiritual realm of the prophetic situation about which Isaiah spoke concerning Judah: *"How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment;*

righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers" (Isaiah 1:21). The great church which Jesus established went down into the darkness and eventual death of apostasy by adopting the pagan traditions of the Roman Empire in return for the safety and wealth that its rulers guaranteed the church. When it sold out the sacred truth of the Word of God which Jesus, Himself, had revealed, the church became Mystery, Babylon the Great (Revelation 17:1-5).

When the early church consummated its union with the state of Rome, the covenant of the body was broken, and the church died. For centuries the light of the church was not seen, though the faith of God continued to be manifest in His kingdom. Finally God raised up brave men to reinstate the doctrines of the kingdom of God and to preach the spiritual rebirth. Other doctrines of the kingdom were reestablished, including sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was about the time when the Holy Spirit began to be poured out that the revelation of the need for a resurrection and restoration of the church in the last days was made known by Bishop A. J. Tomlinson. He implemented his revelation to bring about the resurrection of the church in a small body of people in Cherokee County, North Carolina, in 1903 (Isaiah 52:1, 2; 60:1).

Since that time the doctrines of the early church have been progressively restored to the church in this day. Following the Reformation of the church in 1957, this work was accelerated, with Chief Bishop Grady R. Kent restoring the governmental pattern of the church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. This is in fulfillment of Isaiah 1:26: *"I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, the city of righteousness, the faithful city."*

The restoration of the church among the Gentiles is the focal point of the prophetic programs that God will bring to pass in the time of the end of the age. All other prophetic programs revolve around and are contingent upon the restoration of the church. The one word which characterizes the work of God for this generation is *restoration*, and the restoration of the church leads the way in this work.

The objective of The Church of God is to bring about a complete restoration of the church of the Bible with every doctrine and practice fully implemented and with every gift and office fully operational. This is the prophetic work that is to be accomplished when the spiritual tabernacle of David is restored among the Gentiles in the last days in preparation for the second coming of Jesus (Amos 9: 11; Acts 15: 15-17).

2. Uniting the Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is His dominion made up of those who recognize Jesus Christ as Lord. Jesus explained the entrance into the kingdom of God to Nicodemus as a spiritual rebirth process (John 3: 1-10). Whereas one gained entrance into the kingdom of God in the Old Testament economy through birth to Hebrew parents, entrance into the kingdom of God in the New Testament era was accomplished through the process of being translated into the kingdom through faith in Jesus (Colossians 1:13). With the spiritual rebirth, the kingdom of God came to be in the hearts of those who believed on Christ: *"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you"* (Luke 17:20, 21).

The kingdom of God today is very much divided. This is in fulfillment of the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 13:24-26: *"The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also."* Jesus had sowed the good seed (Word of God), but while men slept, the enemy sowed tares. Paul saw this coming in his day: *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them"* (Acts 20:29). This is what happened with the apostasy of the post-Nicene era and the Middle Ages. The enemy succeeded in polluting the kingdom of God

with all kinds of tares of false doctrines and traditions. Even today nearly all Christian churches are still influenced by these doctrines to one degree or another. It is the fault of Christian leadership since the days of the apostles that the devil has succeeded in sowing the confusion that exists in the Christian world today.

Of this situation Jesus said in Matthew 13:30: *"Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers..."* The deadline for the continuation of the confused condition of the kingdom of God is the time of harvest, which Jesus declares in Matthew 13:39 is the end of the age. Since all prophetic scriptures point to this day as the closing age before the entering into the millennial reign of Christ, it is time for the messengers of God to go forth and proclaim a standard of righteousness and to cause a separation of the wheat (children of God) from the tares (children of the enemy).

Matthew 13:30 declares that the tares are to be gathered first and bound into bundles to be burned. The wheat then is to be gathered into the barn of God. This gathering together of both the tares and the wheat must take place before the time of the resurrection that occurs concurrently with the second coming of Jesus. The process of this gathering is underway with various efforts to unify (gather together in bundles) those in Christendom who do not believe in the foundational and central truths of the faith. This is a false spirit of ecumenism and unity which is based on political power rather than on commitment to truth. All those who do not have a love for the truth will unite with the confederacy which will deny the validity of the Scriptures and the spiritual experiences of the kingdom of God and will involve itself in greater political activism.

In reality this will be a work of God to use men to gather out of His kingdom all things that offend (II Thessalonians 2:11, 12). This is the false ecumenical spirit which was foretold in Isaiah 8:12 and 54:15. Revelation 17 and 18 describe it as a preparation for the pouring out of the wrath of God upon Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations, and upon her daughters. Since women represent churches in the Scriptures, this scenario demonstrates that some churches' systems are in apostasy, having compromised the purity of truth. The cry is being made to those believers who are in these systems to "come out of her, my people" (Revelation 18:4). Those who do not come out of the confusion of Babylonian systems will be joined together in a false spirit of ecumenism that will eventually result in the judgment of God upon those systems.

At the same time that this gathering of profaned forces is taking place, there must also be a gathering together of the wheat or true believers in the kingdom of God. This true spirit of ecumenism is a product of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in this century. Since the love of God is shed abroad by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), the work of bringing God's people who have been so fragmented in the past will be a work of the Holy Spirit. This is the starting point for the quest for true Christian unity, the uniting of the kingdom of God. Paul declared in Ephesians 4:3 that the people of God must endeavor to *"keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

The next step is revealed in Ephesians 4:4, 5: *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism..."* The universal body of Christ that is made up of all true believers in Jesus must recognize the one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. This will be accomplished through the five-gifted ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, who will equip the saints of God forwards of ministry that will ultimately result in the building up of the body of Christ and of its coming into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God (Ephesians 4:11-13). When this condition is realized, the body of Christ will no more be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14).

The work of The Church of God is to be a catalyst in the prophetic program of bringing into one faith the entire kingdom of God. This is the spiritual fulfillment of the message of Ezekiel 37:14-19, where the sticks of Judah and Joseph were made one in the hand of the Son of man. The church (represented by Judah, the sanctuary of God) and the kingdom (represented by Joseph-Israel, His dominion) will become one in the hand of the Lord (Psalm 114:1,2).

The Church of God has pioneered the way and continues to step out into new frontiers of exploration for the cause of unity of true believers in Christ. The prophetic work of the church and the kingdom's being unified in one faith will fulfill the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 that all of His disciples be one.

3. The Salvation of Israel and the Grafting in of the Jews

The blindness of Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles are two of the mysteries in the New Testament about which the Holy Spirit through the apostles sought to bring forth a revelation. The severity of God in rejecting the nation of Israel from recognition as His chosen people because of their unbelief, and the goodness of God toward the Gentiles in allowing them to become recognized as such through their faith, are a part of the great mystery of the eternal plan of God in the Holy Scriptures.

a. God's chosen people.

From the time of their entering into a covenant with Yahweh at Sinai by agreeing to keep His commandments and laws, the Jews enjoyed the esteemed status of being God's chosen people. Due to their willingness to be subjected to the laws of God, the Israelites became a cultivated olive tree in the sight of God. The pruninghook of God's commandments purged out unnecessary and evil things from their midst so that they above all peoples of the earth brought forth fruit unto righteousness.

The success of this people was dependent, however, upon their partaking of the root and fatness of that olive tree by obeying the commandments of God in their dispensation. When the new covenant brought in the dispensation of grace through faith, those branches in that olive tree of God's acceptance that through unbelief refused to accept the Messiah were cut off. When it became manifestly clear that those would not receive Christ through faith, Peter and other ministers of the church turned to the Gentiles and the grafting in of those people to be accepted before God began to take place (Acts 10).

Is it possible for the Jews to be God's chosen people without accepting Jesus Christ as their Messiah? The answer to this question is twofold: 1.) The natural Jews as a nation are still God's chosen people for the fulfillment of prophecy (Romans 11:1,2,28); however, 2.) Individual natural Jews are not God's chosen people without accepting Jesus Christ as their Messiah (Romans 9:4-8; Galatians 3:14-17,27-29; 6:14-16). In other words, God still has a prophetic plan for the nation of Israel; however, individual Jews that do not accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah are not His chosen people. The new requirement to be God's chosen people is stated by Jesus in John 3:3b, *"...Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

In the Old Testament dispensation there was no question as to who God's Israel was. In you were born of Jewish descent, you were God's Israel. In the New Testament we see that the requirements to be called God's Israel have changed. Paul says it this way, *"Not as though the words of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel . . . [8] That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed?"* (Romans 9:6, 8). Who is that seed? *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed which is Christ"* (Galatians 3:16). In other words, you are no longer God's Israel simply because you are born a Jew; you must now be born again in Jesus Christ.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. [15] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Galatians 6:14,15). Who is God's Israel today? It is those who are a new creature in Christ Jesus-both Jews and Gentiles.

b. The blindness of Israel.

The blindness of Israel was a result of God's punishment on them because of their relentless disobedience and rebellion. Consider the prophecy found in Isaiah 3:8,9 (NIV), *"Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling; their words and their deeds are against the LORD, defying his glorious presence. [9] The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves."* In verse 14a Isaiah continues by saying, *"The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people..."* What was God's judgment against Israel? Isaiah 6:9, 10, *"And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. [10] Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."* God's judgment on Israel was that they would be blind and unable to hear.

While some have contended that Israel was only blinded after they failed to recognize Jesus Christ as their Messiah, Isaiah's prophecy clearly states that their punishment was enacted some 700 years before Jesus was born. The Apostle John refers to Isaiah's prophecy as the reason why the Jews did not believe in Jesus in John 12:37, *"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him."* John was saying that they did not recognize the Messiah because they were blinded according to God's judgment which was prophesied through Isaiah. John goes so far as to quote the prophecy (John 12:38-41) and says, *"Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again"* (verse 39).

c. The Jewish remnant.

In explaining what God had done and the mystery of what God would do with regard to the Jews, Paul began his disclosure of Romans 11 by saying that at that very time God had preserved a remnant according to the election or the choosing of grace. It should be noted that the word, election, simply means those who are chosen and can apply to many given situations. For Instance, Israel as a whole was God's chosen people, while the tribe of Judah was chosen from among them for a special work.

The remnant that remained in Paul's day was those Jews who were yet receiving the Messiah and His atonement through the continuing efforts of those who directed their ministry toward the circumcision. The remnant remained according to the election or choosing of God's grace and as Paul noted in Romans 11:6 was a result of grace only and not of any works, showing that it was a process of the gift of salvation. The works to which Paul was referring to had nothing to do with them uniting together in the fellowship of the church. It was a reference about them trying to establish their righteousness by the works of the law (Romans 9:32,33).

In Romans 11:7 Paul declared that Israel did not obtain that for which it sought but that the election or chosen ones did obtain it, and the rest were blinded. Some have used this scripture to say that Israel's blindness occurred at this point-after they rejected the Messiah. It is more accurately interpreted to say that the nation of Israel was already blinded but an election-or chosen group-was able to see and identify Jesus just as prophecy declared and the rest remained blinded. What was the result of Israel's blindness? They could not identify the Deliverer who would remove unrighteousness from them. The bulk of the nation of Israel did not obtain that deliverance and purification from the nature of sin which they sought, but the election or those who were chosen did receive it. The remainder of Israel continued in their blindness.

d. The olive tree.

First of all, it must be noted that a reversal of whatever it was that caused the natural branches (Jews) to be broken off from the tree is that which will cause their restoration or grafting in. *"And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again"* (Romans 11:23). The thing which will cause the Jews to be grafted into their own olive tree is their forsaking of unbelief.

In order to determine what the olive tree is, it must be noted that it was in existence before the coming of Jesus and that the unbelieving Jews, who did not accept Him as the Messiah and who as a consequence were cut off from that olive tree, were at one time a viable part of the olive tree. Since this was the case, the olive tree can only be a symbol of the recognition as God's chosen people.

The other passage of prophecy to which Paul referred is Psalm 69. This entire Psalm is relative to the rejection of Jesus and His death on the cross. *"The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up... When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach...I made sackcloth also my garment... They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink...Let their table become a snare before them...Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not...pour out thine indignation upon them...Let their habitation be desolate...For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten...Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous."* This prophecy is evidently a description of Israel's rejection of the Messiah, the Son of God, of their subsequent rejection from recognition as righteous (symbolized by their being cut off from the tree of salvation, and of their being blinded. David went on to declare, however, that after this rejection, *"God will give Zion...the seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein."* Again the restoration of Israel to acceptance before God is noted.

e. Salvation for the Gentiles.

In Romans 11:11 Paul says concerning Israel, *"Through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy."* This passage has been misinterpreted to say that the Jews had to fall so that salvation could come to the Gentiles, implying that the Jews' blindness was simply a part of God's master plan and their fall was through no fault of their own. The scriptures do not support such a scenario. Israel was blinded as a result of God's punishment on them because of their continued disobedience and rebellion. The truth is that Israel's blindness caused them to fall or stumble over the Lord Jesus, the stumbling stone about which Paul spoke in Romans 9:32,33.

This scripture does not say that it is the responsibility of the Gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy, though Paul does imply in Romans 11:31 that Israel will be extended mercy by the Gentiles. It does say that God brought salvation to the Gentiles as a means of provoking the Jews to jealousy. This is in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 32:21: *"They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities...and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."* God is the one who does the provoking, and He does it by extending His salvation and recognition as His chosen people to the Gentiles.

Paul continued his discourse by noting that the blindness of Israel and their stumbling brought riches unto the Gentiles. This was the fact that the Gentiles were permitted to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. It must be noted that in order for the Gentiles to partake of the cultivated olive tree, they first had to be cut out of the wild olive tree to be grafted in among the cultivated. (This, of course, was contrary to the laws of horticulture; however, God did it.) This is why throughout the book of Romans that Paul noted that in the grace dispensation fleshly lineage does not suffice to be accepted before God. His thesis was that true Judaism is not of fleshly origin, but rather through following the example of Abraham in having faith in the promises of God (Romans 4:1-25).

The Israeli people made the mistake of thinking that their own personal works of righteousness sufficed as the righteousness of God. Paul asserted that Christ had become the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believed, declaring that *"if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is*

made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9,10).

The lack of the Jewish people's faith to believe God caused their rejection from being His chosen people and their removal from the cultivated olive tree.

f. The Gentiles are grafted in.

When the Gentiles were grafted into the cultivated olive tree through faith in the root and fatness of that olive tree, they became Jews in deed or true Jews (Romans 2:28,29). They were no longer dogs or "no people." They were God's chosen people because they were children of faith. The Jewish branches that were broken off were rejected because of unbelief and failure to accept the Messiah. The Gentiles who were grafted into the cultivated olive tree were accepted as true Jews because they had the faith to receive Him whom God had sent.

In verse 15 of Romans 11, Paul noted that *"if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"* This is a reference to Ezekiel 37:1-11, in which God revealed the reconciling of the spiritually dead Jews to the newness of life in the Spirit. Again, the life-giving thing is faith in their Messiah. Verse 16 says: *"If the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches."* Since the root and the firstfruit must be the same thing and the lump and the branches must be the same thing in order to preserve the parallel structure of the analogy, it must be said that Christ is the root and the firstfruit of the Kingdom of God and of the resurrection. Because He is holy, the lump and the branches are also holy.

Paul continued to warn the Gentiles in verses 17-22 not to boast of their newfound status or to look down on those who had been broken off: *"Because of unbelief they were broken off and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear."* He continued to show that God was able to graft the Jews into their own tree again, and indeed would do so in fulfillment of prophecy: *"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion a Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins"* (verses 25- 27). God's promise to return to Israel was directly resultant from His love of their fathers and because *"the gifts and calling of God are without repentance"* (verse 29).

g. The fullness of the Gentiles (updated November, 2015).

Jesus made it very clear that He came to the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5,6). He also made it clear that the majority would not receive Him (Matthew 13:10-13). The Jews inability to recognize their Messiah is directly linked to the judgment of God upon the disobedient tribes of Israel (Jeremiah 3:6-13).

In Romans 11:25b the Apostle Paul says that *"...blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in."* According to this scripture, we can expect that the nation of Israel will be blinded until the *"fulness of the Gentiles be come in."* So, to determine when Israel's blindness will be lifted, we must define when and/or what is meant by the term *fulness of the Gentiles*.

The term *fulness of the Gentiles* refers to God's prophetic program amongst the Gentile people and will be complete when God's plan for the Gentile Dispensation believers is concluded at the 7th Trump return of Jesus to this earth.

While Gentiles were excluded in the Old Testament, Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, paid the price for both Jews and Gentiles to become one. Ephesians 2:11-16, *"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have*

been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity."

The Church of God believes that the phrase *the fullness of the Gentiles* is completed at the end of the last 7 years at the 7th Trump return of Jesus Christ to this earth. This will be the conclusion of God's prophetic program which is geared specifically for the Gentile people (much like God's Old Testament program which was geared specifically for the Jewish people).

Upon the 7th Trump return of Jesus, the 2 parts of God's Bride body—the Jewish Dispensation 144,000 (Revelation 7:4-8) and the Gentile Dispensation 144,000 (Revelation 14:1-5)—will be united as one and presented to Jesus for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9).

The church also believes that the prophetic conclusion of *the fullness of the Gentiles* includes the following:

- 1) The completion of the Gentile Dispensation Bride of Christ in the middle of the last 3 ½ years when she is hid away in the wilderness (Revelation 12:14), and,
- 2) The last 3 ½ year period when the Gentile Dispensation believers become martyrs (Revelation 6:9-11) because they refuse to take the Mark of the Beast and are beheaded for Christ (Revelation 20:4).

As a matter of clarification, The Church of God also believes that the phrase "*the times of the Gentiles*" found in Luke 21:24—which was uttered by Jesus Christ, Himself—is completed at the end of the last 7 years at the 7th Trump return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

Once the fullness of the Gentiles is complete at the 7th Trump return of Jesus, the blinded eyes of the nation of Israel will be opened (Romans 11:25b). This will be a time of opportunity for the Jewish people as a nation to receive their salvation through Jesus Christ, whom they will recognize as their Messiah.

h. Israel's National Day of Salvation.

The salvation of national Israel, as opposed to the grafting in of individual Jews into their own olive tree of sonship to God or recognition as God's chosen people, involves a great deal more of prophecy. The grafting in of individual Jews into their own olive tree, the one which is dominated by Gentile branches in this day, is a direct result of the acceptance of their Messiah. The day of Israel's salvation as a nation will be a result of the work of God among the Gentiles to rebuild the church of God, as well as the fulfillment of the time of Jacob's trouble which is designed to bring the Jews to an awareness of their need for a deliverer.

Many have misinterpreted Romans 11:26a, "*And so all Israel shall be saved...*" to say that at a certain point in time every living natural Jew will be automatically saved. Scripture does not teach that there is an automatic salvation for anyone. In the middle of the last seven years after the completion of the Gentile-dispensation 144,000, the nation of Israel's blinded eyes will be opened; however, the Jews must still make a conscious decision to accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Isaiah 59:20 says, "*And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.*"

It is important to note that in Romans 9:6b, Paul makes a statement concerning who God's Israel is: "*...For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.*" Paul was making it clear that the requirements necessary to be part of God's Israel had changed—natural birth no longer made you automatically part of Israel. Paul clarifies this statement in Galatians 6:15, 18, "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. [16] And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy and upon the Israel of God.*" Who comprises God's Israel today? Those Jews and/or Gentiles who have become "new creatures" by being born again by accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior. So when Paul says that "all Israel shall

be saved," he is simply saying that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be saved.

Since the time of Christ, individual Jews have always had access to salvation through Jesus Christ. It is the nation of Israel as a whole that has been blinded to their Messiah. Once this blindness is lifted, they will have an opportunity to turn from their transgressions and accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah. At this time Zechariah 12:10 will take place, *"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourners for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn "*

All of these events are prophecies given to the nation of Israel as God's chosen people. Zechariah 13:1, *"In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."* Some have implied that this fountain is only opened in the Last Days. The scriptures tell us that God is the Fountain of Living Waters (Jeremiah 17:13). This Fountain has been open to Israel since they were first chosen. The nation of Israel made the mistake of forsaking their Fountain of Living Water. *"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water"* (Jeremiah 2:13).

When Jesus Christ took on the form of human flesh and walked on the earth, He was once again the Fountain of Living Water being offered to Israel. John 4:10, *"And Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water."* Although Jesus did not use the word fountain to identify Himself, He made it clear that He was the source of Living Water. Jesus Christ is the Fountain which was opened to all mankind at Calvary regardless of their nationality. John 3:16 makes it clear that God's plan of salvation is an all-encompassing plan to reach every living soul.

In Zechariah 13:1 it speaks of a fountain being opened once again to the House of David and Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness. This will take place at the completion of the Gentiles and the eyes of Israel will once again be opened and they will be able to see their Messiah, the Fountain of God. The Jews who repent at this time will be cleansed from their sins and uncleanness. Thus, Romans 11:25,26 will be fulfilled.

The prophet who comes before the Deliverer comes out of Zion will be the son of man of Ezekiel 43:10 who is commanded to *"show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern."* The house to which the Lord referred in this prophecy was the temple of Zerubbabel which was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity. It was to be shown to the nation or house of Israel so that they might be ashamed of their iniquities. The temple of Zerubbabel was a type of the rebuilding of the church of God among the Gentiles. When it has reached its full measure, its pattern and the obvious glory of God that overshadows it must be shown to the house or nation of Israel so that they may be ashamed of their separation from God and receive Messiah.

All of these things will be taking place during the most eventful period of human history. The nations of this world will be arming themselves and planning to do battle against Israel. The world will be in a state of political upheaval as the nations prepare to fight against the Lord and His Christ and the coming kingdom. At this time two-thirds of the Jewish population in Israel will be killed and the third part that remains will be brought through fire (Zechariah 13:9). The fulness of the Gentiles will take place and the blindness of natural Israel will be lifted and all of God's Israel (Romans 9:6; Galatians 6:15,16)—who call upon Jesus Christ the Messiah—will be saved.

4. The Fall of Babylon the Great

The word *Babylon* means confusion and originates from the confusion of languages that Yahweh God brought upon those people who were building a tower to the heavens (Genesis 11:1-

9). It was the name of one of the great cities of ancient civilization that was the fountainhead of the polytheistic system of religion that dominated all of the eastern cultures except the Hebrew people. Founded by Nimrod, one of the cursed grandsons of Ham (Genesis 10:6-10), Babylon exalted itself to promote the false religion that worshiped many gods through witchcraft and divination in opposition to the religion of Yahweh.

It was the same Babylon that destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of Solomon and carried the children of Judah captive during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. During this conquest all of the sacred vessels of the temple were carried into Babylon, where they were polluted by being used in the worship of heathen gods.

The Babylonian destruction of the temple and the pollution of its vessels are a prophetic type of the events which were to happen in the grace dispensation with regard to the church. The same Babylonian religion, duplicated in Roman mythology and polytheism, was brought to bear upon the Early Church, which was a perfect fulfillment in the spiritual realm of the temple of Solomon. The temple (church) was destroyed by Rome and its vessels (doctrines and practices) were taken captive and polluted by being intermingled with the practices and concepts of heathen religions.

The degeneration of the Early Church into a state of Babylonian confusion was predicted in Isaiah 1:21,22: *"How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water."* The church that had been the faithful city of God (Hebrews 12:22,23) compromised its truth to the point of actually being recognized by God as a harlot, the wine of its spiritual truth was diluted, and the silver vessels became tarnished.

When the church deteriorated into this condition, it matched the prophetic description that John the Revelator had given it: *"I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth"* (Revelation 17:3-5).

The Roman Empire was the beasts and the woman was the church which had become the Roman Catholic Church, (Women in Bible typology represent churches.) She was identified as Mystery, Babylon the Great, because of the confusion that she had allowed to be introduced into the church. She had the golden cup in her hand, which represented the vessels of the Lord that she controlled; however, it was full of the abominations of false doctrines and practices. The worship of the early church was polluted by Roman Catholicism by the addition of practices that originated in worship of the sun, moons and stars and that denied the spiritual rebirth of justification by faith that was the very foundation of the Christian experience.

Rome was called the Mother of Harlots because of the fact that there were many other churches that shared in her confusion and pollution. Many of these are Protestant churches that have long since lost their protest and have continued Babylonian tradition and adopted abominable concepts, calling good evil and evil good to accommodate the unregenerate masses.

This religious system was a powerful influence in the world through its political connections (Revelation 17:2), and it held great sway over multitudes of people (symbolized by waters in Revelation 17:1,15). It was drunk with the blood of martyrs, millions of whom were slaughtered through the centuries under its auspices. Its power was to continue until the end of the age.

John predicted that there would be a prophetic work in the last days of calling the people of God to come out of the Babylonian religious system and the confusion of her daughters (Revelation 18:4). At this time there is to be a proclamation of the message that "Babylon is fallen" (Revelation 14:8). Finally, at a time very near the second coming of Jesus, the entire Babylonian system will be destroyed as the very political kingdoms which have supported it turn against it (Revelation 17:16). This will be the judgment of the Lord that will reward the entire Babylonian system double

for the evil that it has brought upon the church and upon the kingdom of God (Revelation 18:6,20). Babylon the Great (the Roman Catholic system) and her daughters (nominal Christian churches) will be destroyed near the time of the end.

The so-called Christian Church, of which Roman Catholicism predominates, is a conglomeration of the doctrines of men and numerous pagan traditions that are united with enough of the truth of the New Testament church to deceive the masses. There are more conflicting doctrines, more opposing teachings, more unharmonious gospels preached in the name of Christianity than in any other religion on the face of the earth. This is all the product of Rome and her many daughters and is the epitome of confusion that is rightly called Babylon today.

It is the prophetic work of the church to issue the clarion call to the entire kingdom of God that is held captive in Babylonian tradition that it comes out of the Babylonian system into the truth of the Word of God. The bride body must make the midnight cry (Matthew 25:6) in the day of preparation for the return of Christ so that the kingdom of God may arise from sleep, trim their lamps (Word of God-Psalm 119:105), and go forth to meet the Bridegroom. When God's people are called forth from Babylon, the prophetic event of its destruction will take place.

5. The Isles of the Sea

The Church of God believes that there is a prophetic program that is involved in the ministry of the church in the isles of the sea, particularly in the Caribbean Sea. Isaiah 60:9 foretells this program: *"Surely the isles shall wait for me and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far."* Historically this prophecy spoke of the return of the Jewish people from the distant coasts to which they had been scattered in the day when the Lord restored Jerusalem and the temple. Spiritually it speaks of the time when in the restoration of the church among the Gentiles man: believers would be added to the church from the islands of the sea.

The fact that the predominant inhabitants of the islands are of the black race is also predicted in prophecy: *"Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof, Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit"* (Isaiah 42:10,11). The black race and its inheritance in the church in the last days are revealed in the blessing of God upon Kedar, the son of Ishmael, the natural progenitor of the Arab peoples. The flocks of Kedar (Isaiah 60:7) are to come up with acceptance upon the altar of the Lord in the time of the arise, shine of the Church in a spiritual fulfillment as the black race is made equal participants in the church. The Church of God promotes a prophetic program that involves the effort to minister the blessing of God among the black race in the islands of the Caribbean. A.J. Tomlinson initiated this program in 1911 and 1913 in the Bahamas. Grady R. Kent continued this program in the church when he visited the Caribbean with a fleet of small aircraft and proclaimed God's blessing upon the people of the islands. The church continues to make efforts to bring the truth to the isles of the sea.

F. POSITIONS ON SECULAR ISSUES

There are many issues that confront Christian believers with d to the society in which they live. Since all members of The regal Church of God live in secular environments that are controlled by political systems and influenced by cultural and social conditions, the church has the responsibility of identifying its position on secular, political, cultural, and social issues. The Church of God believes that it is the responsibility of the church to shape the moral fiber of its communicants and to influence proper moral conduct in society in general; however, the church does not believe that its responsibility extends to social or political activism in causes that are not clearly and specifically addressed by the Holy Scriptures. While it does not restrict its members from expression of their position on political, social, cultural, or secular issues, it does not involve itself officially in these issues except where public policy is in contradiction to scriptural morality.

1. Voting and Participation in Politics

In nations where the people have the right to vote for the leaders who determine public policy, The Church of God encourages its members to exercise that right and to vote according to the dictates of their consciences. The church does not seek to promote the election of a particular candidate for public office, nor does it seek to influence its members to cast their votes for a particular candidate. The church does, however, suggest that its members carefully evaluate the candidates for office on the basis of their positions on moral issues that are clearly defined in the Holy Scriptures.

The Church of God believes that the church and the governments of the nations in which it ministers should maintain their separation from one another. The doctrines and practices of the church must never be submitted to the alteration of officials of civil governments. The church's belief in separation of church and state should not be misinterpreted to indicate that it forbids its members from becoming involved in political processes as candidates for public office or as appointed officials of established governments. The church believes that Christians and Judaeo-Christian morality should be strongly represented in every level of government and in every branch of government; therefore, it encourages those in its ranks who are qualified for public office to seek it.

The church does not encourage its ministers to become candidates for elected office, although in certain circumstances it permits them to do so. The church believes that the work of its ministry is to preach the gospel for the saving of souls and the molding of private and public morality; therefore, church ministers should exercise moral influence on the affairs of those political systems where they live rather than seeking to exercise legislative, judicial, or executive authority over the morality of the citizens of those municipalities, territories, or nations.

The Church of God does not believe that the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of Christ through exploitation of existing civil political processes. The coming kingdom will begin with a great warfare and upheaval of those systems that are in place at that time, and the governments of the nations will be dashed in pieces at the second coming of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:11-21; Psalm 2:8, 9). The church's denial of a human-produced takeover of world governments does not, however, restrict its permitting, and even encouraging, the involvement of its members in political processes as civic leaders.

2. Conformity to Civil Laws

According to the New Testament, the Christian is obligated to be conformable to the civil powers of the nation in which he lives, as long as the laws of that nation do not conflict with the ordinances and commandments of the Holy Scriptures or with the Christian's worship and service to God. The words of Jesus in Matthew 22:17-21 lay the foundation for the teaching of the church on this issue. When confronted by the Pharisees and Herodians with the question, *"Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?"* Jesus answered, *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."* This self-explanatory statement of Jesus is sufficient proof for The Church of God that matters that are not directly related to God and the worship of His name may be controlled by civil governments. Members of the church are therefore responsible to render unto civil governments the respect and dues that pertain unto them (Matthew 5:25, 26).

Peter confirmed this to be the position of the early church on this issue in I Peter 2:13,14: *"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."* Peter declared that the purpose for which civil authorities are established is to praise those who do well and to punish evildoers; therefore, the Christian is to submit himself to the ordinances and laws of civil governments. In Acts 5:29, 30 Peter also confirmed the second part of the position that Jesus set forth regarding civil obedience. In

situations where the edicts of governments interfere with the preaching of the Word of God or require the believer to violate the laws of God, Peter declared, *"We ought to obey God rather than men."*

Paul established this same teaching among the Gentiles with his instruction to Titus: *"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work"* (Titus 3:1). In Romans 13 he declared that civil authorities were even ministers of God in the sense that those powers that are in authority are controlled by God and in the sense that civil governments are established by God for the purpose of providing public safety by punishing those who violate the universal laws of public morality. *"For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil...For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil...For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour whom honour"* (Romans 13:3, 4, 6, 7). Paul quoted the words of Jesus regarding taxation as a conclusion to his assertion that Christians should be obedient to the civil authorities that are over them for their protection.

The Church of God encourages the conformity of its members to the laws of the lands in which they live that are made for the public good and do not violate the commandments of God.

3. Service in Armed Forces

The Church of God believes that the use of force to settle differences between individuals or nations is not in keeping with New Testament principles of mutual love and respect that should exist between men and nations. If possible, any differences should be settled peacefully. The church recognizes the fact that as long as there are sin, greed, and the lust for power in the world, there will be acts of aggression that cannot be settled peacefully. It is for this reason that civil governments are responsible for maintaining defensive forces for the protection of their citizens from foreign aggression and for maintaining police forces for the protection of their citizens from crimes against persons and property. The force which they bring to bear in the proper execution of their responsibilities for the protection of society is ordained of God and demands the support of the people of God (Romans 13:1-7).

Matthew 24:43 reveals the necessity of the preservation of one's family from criminal trespass. I Kings 2:5 shows that Joab was guilty of murder in killing in a time of peace while Abner was justified in killing Asahel in battle (II Samuel 2:20-23). Ecclesiastes 3:3, 8 reveals that there is a time when war is necessary and just. The protectors of their lands are justified in fighting, and killing in time of war to protect one's nation from aggression is not murder when one is in the armed forces of his nation.

The Church of God is not opposed to its members' participation in the support of the armed forces of those nations which uphold the name of God and freedom of worship. This is in proper conformity with the attitude of God toward the armies of His people Israel who protected their land from the invasion of the heathen nations. Wherever possible, church members should seek to fulfill their civil responsibilities for military service in contingents which care for the sick or wounded and supply and support the active warfare. The church does not object to its members' involvement in active military service.

4. Integration and Racial Equality

The Church of God believes in the inherent equality of all men before God, regardless of their race, color, or nationality. All men were created by God of one blood and are one in the brotherhood of mankind (Acts 17:26). Peter made this same observation in Acts 10:34, 35: *"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."*

Because of its belief in the inherent equality of all men before God, The Church of God also denounces the repression of any man because of his race, color, nationality, or handicap. No race of people should be discriminated against either politically, socially, economically, or religiously, nor should society be segregated by race, social class, economic status, or religious affiliation. The church believes that all people should be given equal opportunity for education, employment, housing, and other necessities of life. The church also denounces the use of tokenism rather than equal opportunity for all people. Any action that is not conformable to this position is categorized as a violation of the will of God that His people not have respect of persons (James 2:1-9; Deuteronomy 16: 19).

The Church of God does not recommend that its members, regardless of their race or nationality, become involved in overt political activism in promotion of one race or nationality to the exclusion of other races or nationalities. It also categorically denounces any overt or covert promotion of racism by any race, ethnic, or political group.

a. Racism (November, 2021)

The Church of God Jerusalem Acres opposes and denounces racism in any form. Racism is a sin and God despises it. Its origins are rooted in hatred. God's Word commands that we love one another just as Jesus has loved us.

The Church of God believes that all of us—every man, women, and child—were created in God's image according to Genesis 1:27; therefore, we are all God's children. God created us with an eternal soul and He created us as equals worthy of respect and honor. Jesus instructed us to reach out to all nations to share the Good News of the Gospel. God's church consists of *"a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands"* (Revelation 7:9b).

The Church of God Jerusalem Acres affirms that:

- **WE BELIEVE** that racism is nothing more than hatred expressed toward our fellow man thus making it a sin that is despised by God and The Church of God.
- **WE BELIEVE** that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.
- **WE BELIEVE** that God is not a respecter of persons.
- **WE BELIEVE** that God made all mankind of one blood.
- **WE BELIEVE** that we are all created equal in God.
- **WE BELIEVE** that Jesus Christ died for the sins of all mankind regardless of race, color, or creed.
- **WE BELIEVE** that if God accepts us, then we are His children and the seed of Abraham.
- **WE BELIEVE** that God's plan includes all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.

The Church of God Jerusalem Acres condemns racists acts against any and all people. God's Word tells us that we as believers will be identified by the love we have for one another. People of all races must be protected, respected, and be able to live without fear. The Church also recognizes that racism is a global problem and calls on members everywhere to oppose such practices.

5. Women's Rights

After God created Adam (Genesis 1:27), He made the subsequent observation that it was not good for man to live alone. God's solution to man's aloneness was woman. Eve, however, was more than just another being; she was to be a *"help meet for him,"* or a *"helper comparable to him"* as the Hebrew text is literally rendered (Genesis 2:18). The very essence of this description of the woman conveys the dual nature of woman's role as companion and helper.

The idea of gender superiority, male over female or female over male, was not God's plan for mankind. Man and woman were to have a shared potential in being God-created that would bring

them into a perfect state and a perfect union. Paul underscored the interdependence of the man and the woman in I Corinthians 11:7-12, noting that the man was created first and given dominion over all that God had created but confirming the fact that the man also does not exist without woman. From the time of Adam and Eve man has not existed without woman, for he comes through her; and woman's presence is both from and for the man.

In the creation God set forth the divine law principle of shared cherishing of man and woman one for the other. Ephesians 5:28, 29 confirms this truth: *"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."*

The Scriptural rights of women in relationship to their husbands include the following:

- (1) The right to be loved (Ephesians 5:25-33) Colossians 3:19).
- (2) The right to be honored (I Peter 3:7).
- (3) The right to fidelity (Malachi 2:14,15; Proverbs 5: 18, 19).
- (4) The right to confer with her husband (Genesis 31:4-16).
- (5) The right to be provided for (I Timothy 5:8).
- (6) The right to be advised and instructed (Genesis 3:16; I Corinthians 11:3; I Timothy 2:11-13; Colossians 3:18; I Corinthians 14:34, 35).

Women also have scriptural responsibilities to their husbands. These include the following:

- (1) The responsibility to be an assistant (Genesis 2:18).
- (2) The responsibility to care for her household and children (Proverbs 31: 10-31; I Timothy 5:14).
- (3) The responsibility to be the glory of her husband (I Corinthians 11:7-9).
- (4) The responsibility to be subject to her husband (Genesis 3:16).

The Church of God believes in the principle of headship for protection. This principle applies to women in the following ways: unmarried women who are not of legal age are under the headship of their fathers. Unmarried women who are of legal age are under the headship of their leaders in the church. Women who are married are under the headship of their husbands.

The church denounces discrimination against women in employment, education, and religious opportunities based solely on their gender. It does not, however, sanction the involvement of its members in political activism regarding women's rights, especially when those promotions violate the Scriptures in denying women's rights to headship and protection. The church views the women's rights political movement as being in violation of the fundamental principles of the Scriptures that require headship, as well as those that mandate chastity and morality.

The Church of God maintains its position on the rights and responsibilities of women in the church on the basis of the record of Holy Scriptures. It believes that women are in no way to be restricted because of their gender from involvement in the life and ministry of the church, provided that they are in subjection to their husbands (if married) and to the judicial and executive leadership of the church. The only area of ministry that is scripturally reserved to men is the role of bishops. The rights of women to involvement in church life and ministry extend to their being licensed and ordained ministers in the church and to their right to administer the sacraments of the church.

6. Employment, Welfare, and Public Assistance

When Adam fell by transgression, God pronounced a sentence of hardship upon him in the form of a command: *"In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou return unto the ground"* (Genesis 3:19). Since that time, God has expected every man to earn his living by his labor. As the society of man developed, the necessity for thinking workers arose. Solomon showed in

Ecclesiastes 2:21 that the "thinking man" who exercises acquired knowledge and wisdom is a laborer: *"For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity."* Paul also observed in I Timothy 5:17 that there are those who labor in the Word of God (ministers of the Gospel) in which one can fulfill God's requirement of Adam and his progeny that they work for their living.

The Scriptures contain strong rebukes against those who will not work for a living. Solomon declared that *"the desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour"* (Proverbs 21:25). Paul labeled the failure of individual members of the church to labor with their hands to provide for their families as disorderly conduct in II Thessalonians 3:11, declaring, *"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies."* He commanded the church to *"withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us,"* noting of his own conduct, *"We behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you"* (verses 6-8). Then Paul exhorted those who were not worrying that *"with quietness they work, and eat their own bread"* (verse 12). This instruction confirmed that which Paul had previously given to the church at Thessalonica in I Thessalonians 4:11,12.

It is a scriptural requirement upon Christians that they function as a contributing unit of society by working either physically or mentally for their living. Any man who is physically or mentally capable of working and through laziness or slothfulness fails to do so is not scripturally justified in his actions. Paul expanded the emphasis of this truth when he spoke of men's responsibility to support their families: *"But if any provide not for his own, and specially of those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"* (I Timothy 5:8). The way in which one who fails to provide for his family is worse than an infidel is the fact that he becomes a burden on the church or on society which the infidel does not become.

If during his younger working years, an individual has participated in a plan for retirement, he is perfectly justified before God to live the remainder of his life by that which he has saved through the work of his hands. Such programs are the result of wisdom in planning and are acceptable.

In cases where individuals are physically or mentally impaired, whether through congenital defect, accident, sickness, or old age, and are, therefore, incapable of labor, both the church and society have the responsibility to come to their assistance with welfare and public assistance programs. Widows with young children, older widows without children, and orphans are also to be supported by the church and by society. In cases where individuals are unable to secure employment because of a depressed job market or because of a lack of skills, their acceptance of relief payments from governmental agencies and assistance from the church is both proper and desirable. It is the duty of the church and of society to reach out to those whose circumstances have made it impossible for them to provide food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and for their dependents and to do everything in their power to see that these needs are met.

Only when an individual is fully capable and has sufficient opportunities for working for his living and then willfully refuses to do so does he violate the Scriptures and bring an open reproach upon the church. The Church of God, therefore, recommends that every member of the church be a worker, whether a manual laborer, a mental laborer, or a laborer in the Word. This fulfills God's requirement upon Adam and his descendants and relieves the church of reproach.

7. Financial Responsibility

The Church of God believes that it is the New Testament responsibility of its members to maintain fiscal integrity in all of their dealings. It is a scriptural requirement upon believers that they pay their bills and fulfill their contracts both with other believers and with the world at large (Psalm 15:4; Romans 13:8). When such is not the case, an open reproach is brought upon the gospel and upon the church.

Members of the church should exercise caution in obligating themselves financially to see that they give their word to repay those things which they are reasonably able to repay. When unforeseen circumstances develop which preclude the possibility of maintaining the exact letter of their contracts, Christians should communicate with their creditors, advise them of their circumstances, and seek their patience and extension of time.

As long as one has faithfully met his responsibilities of repaying loans on schedule and of making installment payments on contracts that require it, he is in fulfillment of the injunction of Paul in Romans 13:8: *"Owe no man any thing; but to love one another."* When one willfully fails to maintain his financial obligations when he has the means of doing so, he is guilty of violation of the commandments of God.

G. SCRIPTURAL REVELATIONS AND ALLEGORIES

1. The Holy City

The holy city of Revelation 21, as well as being a vision of a literal city which will be established in the new earth, is also a revelation of the complete and perfect church, both Jew and Gentile. Hebrews 12:22, 23 state that the heavenly Jerusalem is the church. The fact that the holy city represents the church is clear from Revelation 21:9 where John told that he would be shown *"the bride, the Lamb's wife."* Instead of seeing a woman, however, John viewed *"the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (verse 2). The city of God, new Jerusalem, is the true tabernacle of God, the church, the bride of Christ. The true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man (Hebrews 8:2) is the tabernacle of lively stones that are built up a spiritual habitation for the Lord (1 Peter 2:5). The tabernacle of Jesus is the church of God, half of which was erected in the first century by the Jewish apostolic ministry, and the other half of which is to be erected in the last days by the Gentile apostolic ministry.

There are many aspects of the description that John gave of the holy city that reveal offices in the church. The gates of the city represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and the angels at the gates are the twelve apostles of the early church. The twelve foundations of the wall of the city were declared to be the apostles of the Lamb, and the garnishment of the foundation was of precious stones that represent the twelve Gentile apostles. This is revealed in Isaiah 60:10 where the Gentiles were declared to be builders of the walls of the city of God. The four-square measurement of the city of 12,000 furlongs (verse 16) represents the 144,000 of Revelation 7:4, the elect firstfruit of the early church. (Twelve edges of the cube-length, breadth, and height-multiplied by 12,000 equals 144,000.) The wall of the city was measured as 144 cubits, which represents the 144,000 of Revelation 14:1, the elect firstfruit of the Gentile church.

The nations of the redeemed who walk in the light of the holy city (verse 24) represent the wise virgins of the kingdom of God who will accept the midnight cry message of the church and receive the light for salvation in the end time (Matthew 25:1-13; Isaiah 33:6).

The Church of God believes that the divine law principles of the Scriptures that declare that God never changes mandate the presence of a spiritual city of God in the earth that parallels the pattern and structure of the heavenly Jerusalem and the holy city which will be manifest in the new earth.

2. The Golden Candlestick

As a part of the law of God which was given at Sinai, Moses was commanded of God to construct a candlestick (Menorah) after the pattern of that which he had seen in a vision of the heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5) *"And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be the same"* (Exodus 25:31). This candlestick which was constructed of beaten gold and was placed in the Tabernacle of Witness to be the only light thereof is one of the most complete revelations of the pattern and structure of the church and its ministry that are manifest in the Holy

Scriptures.

Since the events and programs of the law were only shadows of good things to come in the dispensation of grace (Hebrews 10:1), the candlestick which God commanded Moses to construct was symbolic of the better things to come in the new covenant. In Hebrews 9:23 the significance of the material things of the tabernacle of witness is revealed: *"It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."* The patterns of the heavenly things were the candlesticks and other instrumentals the tabernacle as was noted in Hebrews 9:2-5. The heavenly things are those spiritual fulfillments in the dispensation of grace that were purified by the blood of the New Testament which Jesus shed. So the candlestick and its accompanying furnishings of the tabernacle were only figures of the true candlestick and furnishings of the true tabernacle, the church, which the Lord pitched (Hebrews 8:2).

Since historical records prove that Jesus at no time attempted to build a material tabernacle or temple, the temple which He constructed must have been the church which He built during His incarnation ministry. Peter revealed this to be true in I Peter 2:5: *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house..."*

Jesus emphasized the importance of the light of the candlestick in Matthew 5:14-16: *"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* Jesus explained that the light of God cannot properly serve the household of God until such a time as it is placed upon a candlestick. As with the candlestick in the tabernacle of witness, the candlestick of the New Testament *"giveth light unto all that are in the house."*

The candlestick of Moses with its pattern is symbolic of the pattern of government in the New Testament church and sets forth those offices which are necessary for the most effective shining forth of the light of God's Word to the house and to the world. The shaft of the candlestick is symbolic of the anointed leader of the church, its Chief Bishop, who is the channel of the revelation or meat in season that is the light of the house (Matthew 24:45-47). The foundation of the candlestick of Moses was constructed with twelve sides (as depicted on Titus' Arch of Triumph in Rome) or with twelve stones (as Josephus described it). These twelve represent the twelve apostles whom Jesus chose and ordained to be the foundation of the early church and the twelve apostles who are the foundational pillars of the last days church (Ephesians 2:20). The bowls, knops, and flowers of the candlestick were seventy-two in number. They represent the seventy elders or prophets and the two leaders of this body which Jesus sent out in Luke 10:1 and which the church has restored in the last days. The seven lamps on the candlestick represent the seven men of wisdom appointed by the apostles in Acts 6:3 to be responsible for administering the business of the church in reaching the world with the gospel. These officers have been restored in the church in the last days. The candlestick of the Old Testament, then, is a revelation of the pattern for ministering the light of the New Testament.

In Zechariah 4:2-14 a vision of the prophet predicted the fact that the light of the candlestick would be sponsored among two different peoples, represented by the two olive trees. These are the Jews who made the light of the candlestick shine in the early church and the Gentiles who make the light of the candlestick shine in the last day's church. The early church light was snuffed out by human tradition; however, it was destined to arise again in the last days when the salvation of God would go forth again as a lamp that burneth (Isaiah 62:1).

Jesus Christ came into the world and built His candlestick government with twelve apostles, seventy-two prophets, and seven men of wisdom, and He turned that government into the hands of an anointed leader. According to prophecy, however, the early church was destroyed in the same way in which Solomon's temple was destroyed. In the last days the time has come for the rebuilding of the true tabernacle and candlestick by restorers like Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4:6). When this program is completed, it will duplicate the same pattern and works that the early church

accomplished, and the Gentile olive tree will make the candlestick light shine as brightly in the world as the Jewish olive tree did in the first century.

The candlestick is also a manifestation of the Son of God, who was seen in the book of Revelation as being manifest in the midst of seven golden candlesticks (Revelation 1:13). It is also a revelation of the Seven Spirits of God or the seven channels through which the Holy Spirit manifests His gifts and graces.

3. Zechariah's Vision (The Candlestick and the Two Olive Trees)

Following the seventy years of Babylonian captivity, the men of Judah were in dire need of divine encouragement in the face of the seemingly impossible task of the rebuilding of the once glorious temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Zerubbabel and Joshua, the leaders of the people, were determined that this work should be accomplished; however, many of the obstacles seemed insurmountable.

It was to this situation that God addressed Himself through the prophet Zechariah. First He gave the prophet a comprehensive vision: "...a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof" (Zechariah 4:2,3). Then the Lord gave Zechariah this prophetic message: "*This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts...the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it...*" (Zechariah 4:6,9).

While both the vision and the prophetic message of Zechariah had their impact upon the work of restoration that was then taking place in Jerusalem the more far-reaching consequences of the prophet's declaration were for the time of the end when the spiritual fulfillment of this utterance would take place. The last days would be the time of the restoration of the spiritual temple, the church which Jesus established and which was subsequently buried by the same Babylonian tradition which destroyed the temple of Solomon. Zechariah's vision is profound in that the various elements of the vision contain the revelation of the heavenly pattern and reveal the work of theocratic government for the entire New Testament era. The candlestick in the vision is the pattern for government, and the olive trees reveal the two-fold application of God's government.

The pattern of theocratic government is manifested in the pattern of the candlestick: (1) the shaft represents the anointed leader of God's people; (2) the twelve foundations represent the twelve apostles; (3) the seventy-two bowls, knops, and flowers represent the seventy-two elders or prophets; (4) and the seven lamps represent the seven men of wisdom. The second major element in the vision of Zechariah was the two olive trees. These two trees reveal the Jewish and Gentile nations (Romans 11:17) both of which were to participate equally in providing oil for making the candlestick the light of the world. The church which Jesus established among the Jews is to be restored in the Last Days among the Gentiles (Amos 9:11; Acts 15:15,16). The church in this generation is to be the candlestick light of the world, and the Menorah pattern is to be manifested in the Gentile church.

The third elemental Zechariah's vision is the two olive branches which through the two golden pipes provided oil to cause the candlestick to burn. The Lord, Himself, clearly explained this part of the vision: "*These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth*" (Zechariah 4:14). This statement reveals the fact that there are to be two anointed prophets who are to cause God's candlestick to shine, one from among the Jewish olive tree and the other from among the Gentile olive tree.

4. The Two Temples

In the Old Testament account of the building of the temple in Jerusalem by Solomon, of its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, and of its restoration by Zerubbabel is a great prophetic type that reveals the building of the church in the days of Jesus, its destruction by the Roman Empire, and

its restoration among the Gentiles in the last days.

The temple which Solomon built was prophetic of the spiritual temple which Jesus, the true Solomon, built during His Judaeian ministry. Peter declared the church to be that temple: *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 2:5). Paul confirmed this truth in Ephesians 2:20-22: *"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye are also builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."*

The early church as the spiritual temple of God was manifested in all of its prophetic glory as the residence of the spirit and power of God in the first century. In subsequent generations, however, there was a gradual deterioration of the church, a problem which Jude (Jude 3, 4) and Paul (Acts 20:28,29) foretold. Eventually the church was swallowed up in death by the Roman Empire and lay in the grave of the Dark Ages. Constantine was the primary agent in the destruction of the church as Nebuchadnezzar had been in the temple. It was the same Babylonian polytheistic system of religion which Constantine forced upon the early church in the form of pagan holidays and practices that brought about its destruction. When Constantine, the high priest of the Roman religion, assumed the leadership of the church, the church ceased to exist just as surely as the temple in Jerusalem ceased to exist when Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army destroyed it. This event was prophesied by Isaiah 1:21 and Revelation 17,18 in terminology which declared that the faithful city (the church) would become an harlot by compromising its virtue and truth.

The rebuilding of the temple by Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4:9) was prophetic of the rebuilding of the church in the last days among and with the help of the Gentiles (Isaiah 44:28). James, the Chief Bishop of the early church, had used the prophecy of Amos 9:11,12 to confirm the fact that the Gentiles would be a part of the church, and the prophecy of Amos further declared that there would be a restoration of the tabernacle of David that had fallen down and that this would take place among the Gentiles. The tabernacle of David was the temple of Solomon. Its spiritual counterpart was the early church. That it had fallen down is a fact of history. That it is to be restored among the Gentiles is a fact of prophecy.

Isaiah 1:26 confirmed the fact that there would be a complete restoration of the faithful city following its judgment for becoming a harlot. This restoration work was predicted by Peter in Acts 3:20,21 as taking place immediately prior to the return of Jesus: *"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."* This prophetic restoration was to encompass the complete rebuilding of the spiritual temple which Jesus had constructed, with all the practices, teachings, offices, and gifts that made up that temple. This work is now being accomplished among the Gentiles, with The Church of God being a focal point of activity in that behalf.

The two temples, one built by Solomon and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the other built by Zerubbabel with the help of Cyrus, king of Persia, are typical of the church that was built by Jesus, destroyed by Constantine and the Roman empire, and rebuilt in the last days among the Gentiles.

5. Isaac and Ishmael

In the promise of God to Abraham regarding his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, is contained the revelation of the blessings of God upon the Jews and the Gentiles. God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that in him would all the nations of the world be blessed. This truth is confirmed in Galatians 3:8 where the natural blessing of Genesis is translated into a spiritual blessing of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Abraham was to be the natural father of many nations; however, through his faith all the nations of the world would be blessed spiritually.

The promises of God to Abraham concerning his two sons that are allegories of the blessings of God upon Jew and Gentile are recorded in Genesis 17:19,20: *"And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant*

with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation."

Isaac, the promised seed and heir of Abraham, was a type and shadow of the coming of Jesus, the Son of God. There are many striking and obvious parallels between Isaac and Jesus. Both were sons of promise. Both were offered as sacrifices, Isaac to test Abraham's faith in God's promise, and Jesus to atone for the sins of all mankind. Isaac became the father of the Hebrew nation through the twelve princes that his son Jacob fathered while Jesus was the founder of the spiritual kingdom of God and of the church with its twelve apostles, the Judges of the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Simply stated, Jesus fulfilled spiritually the natural promises of God to Abraham regarding Isaac. The blessing of God upon Isaac's children was fulfilled in the true seed, believers in Christ (Romans 9:7,8).

Abraham's other son, Ishmael, was born of a Gentile woman, Hagar. In a natural sense, the blessings which God pronounced upon Ishmael were fulfilled in his becoming the progenitor of the Arab nations of the Middle East. Many of the peoples in this area trace their lineage to Ishmael. Since the natural lineage of the true Isaac, Jesus Christ, revealed the spiritual blessing of God upon believing Jews, then the lineage of Ishmael must also represent God's spiritual blessing upon another people, and Abraham's prayer, *"O that Ishmael might live before thee!"* has more far-reaching consequences than the mere preservation of the life of the son of the bondwoman (Genesis 17:18-20).

A key passage of scripture in identifying the spiritual blessing of God that was foreshadowed through Ishmael is Genesis 16:9-14, where Hagar was instructed of the promises concerning her son. In verse 12 God declared, *"And he will be a wild man..."* *Wild* is a term often associated in the Scriptures with the Gentiles. Consider, for example, the fact that Paul compared the Gentiles with the wild olive tree in Romans 11. The Jews were the tame olive tree because they had been subjected to the pruning-hook of the law of God. The Gentiles, on the other hand, were wild because they had not been brought under this covenant.

It was a part of the plan of God that the wild Gentiles should become joint heirs of the promises of God (Ephesians 2:12-19) and be subjected to the cultivation of the Spirit of God that would make them a productive tame olive tree also. This plan was revealed in prophecy in Isaiah 60:1-10: *"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee...the Gentiles shall come to thy light...All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee; they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory."* At the time when God would bring about a resurrection of the church (spiritual Zion) in the last days among the Gentiles, both Kedar and Nebaioth would be accepted on the altar of God and would minister before Him to the church. Kedar and Nebaioth were the two eldest sons of Ishmael; therefore, Ishmael is a type and shadow of the involvement of the Gentiles in the rebuilding of the church.

Ishmael was the father of twelve princes as God had predicted that he would be. Since the twelve princes of Israel were typical of the twelve apostles of the early church, the twelve princes of Ishmael are typical of the twelve Gentile apostles of the last days church. These two sets of twelve princes will comprise the manifestation of the twenty-four elders of the millennial kingdom.

In reality there are only two nations of people in the eyes of God, the Jews and the Gentiles. The Word of God speaks of the blessings and cursings of God upon only these two peoples (Romans 2:1,10): It is only fitting that God's blessing upon both of these nations should have been foreshadowed in Abraham and his two sons. Isaac and Ishmael are prophetic shadows of the acceptance of Jew and Gentile churches.

6. Kedar: The Blessing upon the Black Race

The promises of God to Abraham with regard to his sons Isaac and Ishmael reveal the

blessings of God upon the nation of the Jews and the nation of the Gentiles. A further prophetic type is manifested in the two eldest sons of Ishmael, Nebaioth and Kedar, who reveal the two prominent Gentile races, the white and dark-skinned races. In reality all Gentile peoples can be seen to fall in one of these two classifications. The importance of the prophetic type laid out in Isaac and Ishmael and in Nebaioth and Kedar is to confirm the fact that God's spiritual Abrahamic-faith blessing through Christ would come upon all the nations of the world, both Jew and Gentile, both black and white.

The truth of this assertion can be seen in the fact that Kedar was black. The name Kedar means black, dusky, or dark-colored. Solomon's Song confirms this truth; *"I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me..."* (Song of Solomon 1:5,6).

This is not to say that all dark-skinned people today are descend- ants of Kedar any more than all Gentiles are of Greek extraction, the term which Paul used to stand for the Gentile nations as a whole in Romans 1:16. It is evident that much of the African continent is descended from Ham, one of the sons of Noah, after the flood. Egypt in northern Africa is called the land of Ham in Psalm 105:23;106:21,22. The fact that one of the sons of Ishmael was called black, however, helps to confirm the fact that black-skinned people are blessed equally with white-skinned people in the prophetic promise of God to Abraham concerning the Gentiles.

This truth is further confirmed in Isaiah 60. While this passage does reveal the natural return of the Jews to their land, it also reveals the spiritual resurrection of the church in the last days among the Gentiles. Verse 7 states that two Gentile people will be prominently involved in this prophetic work: *"All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee; they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory."* The Gentiles that come to the brightness of the arising of the church (verse 3) will be made up of Kedar and Nebaioth, black and white people, and they both will share equally in the blessing of God upon the Gentiles by being accepted on God's altar and by ministering to Zion (the church).

While in Christ all men are one and the same (Acts 10:34,35;17:26) and in salvation there is neither Jew nor Gentile, black nor white, male nor female, (Galatians 3:28), God has foreshadowed in His Word His blessing upon each of these peoples so that each would have prophetic identity and promise of inheritance in His church. God not only includes every race and nationality as one, but He also makes it clear that each is involved in His predestined prophetic program.

All believers in Christ become spiritual Jews when they are begotten by the Word of God unto the lively hope of the resurrection (Romans 3:28,29). Prophetically speaking, however, both Jew and Gentile and both white and black races have a particular role to play in the formulation of the church and the bride that is to be joined to Christ at His coming. The Gentile peoples, both black and white, are not just heirs of salvation by grace through faith. The promise of inheritance in the bride of Christ is also confirmed to them in the prophetic Word of God that is sure and inviolable. Kedar and Nebaioth, the two eldest sons of Ishmael, the Gentile son of Abraham, clearly set forth in prophetic types the surety of God's blessing upon all of the Gentile peoples, both black and white.

7. The Two Loaves

The Feast of Pentecost in the Old Testament was an agricultural celebration of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest. This celebration involved the baking and waving before the Lord of two loaves of bread made from the firstfruits of the harvest. In the New Testament, Pentecost was the time of the enduement of the early church with power to reap the spiritual harvest of souls that would make up the church. The operation of the Holy Spirit to bring forth the firstfruits of the church among both Jews and Gentiles was revealed in the two loaves. Leviticus 23:15-17 outlines the instructions of Yahweh with regard to the Old Testament celebration of Pentecost. As is the case with the rest of the law, this story is prophetic of events that occur in the dispensation of grace.

Paul taught the early church from these prophetic types. In Romans 11:7,16 he said, *"What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it and the rest were blinded...For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches."* The firstfruits of the harvest are the election or choosing of God that confirms the fact that a general harvest is forthcoming. This is the case with the firstfruits of the early church. James addressed the twelve tribes of Israel (James 1:1) and declared that the early church was a *"kind of firstfruits of his creatures."* This election of firstfruits in the Church obtained that for which they sought. The record of their accomplishment is found in Revelation 7:1-4 where the angel of the Lord administered to 144,000 Jews of the early church the seal of the Lord that made them a part of the bride body that would be married to the Lord. This 144,000 election was one of the two loaves of the prophetic type of Pentecost. After the 144,000 were sealed as the firstfruits of the harvest, the bulk of the church harvest was reaped with millions of members added to the church.

According to Leviticus 23:12-17, the wave offering of Pentecost consisted of two wave loaves, both of which were identical to the other. It was a two-part offering that was waved as one before the Lord. Revelation 14:1-4 reveals a second group of 144,000 made up of people who are redeemed from among men. This group of people is called *the firstfruits unto God* in verse 4. The timing of their sealing as a part of the election of God among the Gentiles was to take place during the harvest (verses 14-16), which is at the end of the age (Matthew 13:39). This group of 144,000 is the Gentile loaf, the firstfruits of the Gentiles. This election of firstfruits confirms the fact that there will be a bulk harvest of souls for the church from among the Gentile nations.

The two loaves of 144,000 firstfruits each make a total of 288,000 elect people who receive the seal of God to be the Bride of Christ. There is some question as to whether there are one or two sets of 144,000. This question is answered in the makeup of the throne of Christ which will be parallel with that of David his father: *"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David"* (Luke 1:32).

First there is a principle revealed in the make up of King David's musicians which is a type and shadow of the 288,000. When the singers and musicians were set up for the worship of God in David's day, there were 288 of them. The second evidence in the throne of David that is even more compelling is recorded in I Chronicles 27:1: *"Now the children of Israel after the number, to wit, the chief fathers and captains of thousands and hundreds, and their officers that served the king in any matter of the courses, which came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year, of every course were twenty and four thousand."* By multiplying 24,000 by twelve months of the year, the number of people in the election of Israel in David's day is determined to be 288,000. The rest of Israel was not numbered. Since Jesus is going to sit on King David's throne, then Jesus must also have 288,000 or two sets of 144,000 people directly involved in ruling the world during the millennial kingdom. An additional unnumbered multitude will also be involved in that kingdom (Revelation 7:9).

The two loaves represent the two sets of 144,000, one from among the Jews and the other from among the Gentiles, which make up the firstfruit election of the bride of Christ. They are manifest during the dispensation of grace when the work of the Holy Spirit is to bring about a perfect church first among the Jews and then among the Gentiles. When the second of the two loaves is completed, both will be waved before the Lord as the elections that make up the bride of Christ. This will be the time when Christ brings together into one all things in heaven and in earth (Ephesians 1:10).

8. The Two Sticks

In Ezekiel 37:15-19 the prophetic Word of God sets forth a demonstration of the work that will be accomplished in the last days to bring Jew and Gentile into one body and to bring the kingdom and the church into unity. The prophet Ezekiel was instructed to take one stick and write upon it, *"For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions."* Then he was instructed to *"take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his*

companions" (Ezekiel 37:16) Then the prophet was to join the two sticks together as one stick. This demonstration is a revelation of the fact that in the last days God will take the Jewish people (symbolized by the stick of Judah) and join them with the Gentile people (symbolized by the stick of Joseph for Ephraim). Ephraim was the tribe that became essentially gentilized and, therefore, represents the Gentiles in typology.

The timing of the unifying of Jew and Gentile is immediately after the event of the spiritual resurrection of the Jewish people from the death of their disobedience and failure to recognize their Messiah, Jesus Christ. This resurrection is discussed in Ezekiel 37:1-14. At the time of Israel's national day of salvation, the Jewish people will be joined with the Gentiles as one people in the hand of the Lord.

A part of the work which will bring about the awakening of Israel and their unity with the Gentiles is the program of Ezekiel 43:10 in which the son of man is to show the house (church) of God to the house of Israel so that they may be ashamed of their unbelief and share in the prophetic work of the church. This is a part of the work that God will do when He provokes the Jewish people to jealousy with those Gentiles who were not a people but are now the people of God.

The second revelation that can be seen in the two sticks of Ezekiel 37 is the work that God will do in bringing the church and the kingdom of God into a unity of the faith. The church is symbolized by the stick of Judah, the sanctuary of God (Psalm 114:1,2). The kingdom is symbolized by the stick of Joseph for Ephraim. These two will become one in the hand of the Lord.

The third dimension is the natural joining of Judah and Israel in preparation for the complete restoration of the nation of Israel.

The two sticks of Ezekiel 37, then, reveal unity in the hand of God and of both Jew and Gentile, the church and the kingdom of God, and of the Jewish people in Israel.

9. The Restoration of All Things

If there is one word which encapsulates the work of God in the last days, it is the word *restoration*. The work of the church today is that of bringing about a complete restoration of all the things that the early church believed and practiced that were destroyed or tarnished during the Dark Ages.

Acts 3:20,21 reveals the fact that there will be such a complete restoration in this dispensation: *"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."* Jesus will remain in heaven until the time when all of the things that God has spoken by all His holy prophets have been fully restored to the church.

This restoration work was predicted by Jesus in Matthew 17:11. Speaking of the ministry of John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah, Jesus noted that what John had accomplished was not the complete fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi 4:5 that promised the return of Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the second advent of Christ. Jesus declared *"Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things,"* and then He continued to show that Elijah had come already in the ministry of John the Baptist.

The reason that Elijah was used in the prophetic type for restoration is revealed in the fact that it was Elijah of old who restored the altar of the Lord after it had been broken down by the prophets of Baal (I Kings 18:31-33). After his work of restoration, Elijah witnessed the manifestation of the fire of God upon his sacrifice. In a parallel operation it is the work of the church to bring about a complete restoration of those things that the false prophets of spiritual Babylon destroyed or polluted during the Dark Ages.

The work of the Elijah ministry in the Christian community and in the church is one of bringing about a complete restoration of every doctrine and practice and every office and gift of the first century church. This includes a revival of the manifestation of divine power that accompanied the

ministry of the early church. This work of restoration will continue until it can be said that all things have been restored.

10. Ruth, a Type of the Gentile Church

Ruth was a Moabite (Gentile) woman who came with her mother-in-law Naomi to the land of Israel. She believed in the Jewish faith so much that she left the traditions of her fatherland and became a Jew. The story of the book of Ruth took place during the time of the barley harvest. After Ruth had gleaned one measure of barley from that which had been left in the fields at the instruction of Boaz, a wealthy leader in Israel, she succeeded in gaining the favor of Boaz through the wisdom of Naomi and was given six more measures of barley by Boaz, giving her a total of seven measures of barley. Then Ruth was married to Boaz.

Ruth is a type of the Gentile church which has left the traditions of nominal Christianity that have been inherited from heathen Gentile customs. Like Ruth, the church has embraced the Judaic faith of the Bible in its New Testament order. It is a prophetic promise to the church that its work is to glean one measure of barley, which symbolizes people in the spiritual harvest. After gaining the favor of the Lord Jesus Christ, the church is to receive six additional measures of the elect of Christ. These seven measures will bring it to the measure of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11,15). Then the Gentile church will be married to the Lord Jesus to begin the Sabbatical Millennium of peace.

The prophetic type of Ruth reveals a promise of God to the Gentile Church of the blessing that it will receive from God to accomplish its work of bringing forth the firstfruits of souls that will make up its election.

11. Reformation

Reformation is a continuing principle of God that is manifest in every generation in which His work is being accomplished in the earth. God is a reformer. He never simply discards what He is doing and begins anew with different material. This truth is revealed in Jeremiah 18:1-6 in the story of the potter and the work on the wheel. God declared Himself to be like the potter. When the vessel that the potter was making became marred, he made that same clay again into another vessel. He did not take a new lump of clay to make another vessel.

From the most ancient of times, the work of God with mankind has been a work of reformation. The reforming work of Jesus is of particular note. God did not discard the Jewish religion or people when they became marred in His hand. He simply sent Jesus to be a reformer of Judaism and of the hearts of the people to bring them to conformity to His will (Hebrews 9:9,10).

After a time the church which Jesus established as a reformation in Judaism became marred and polluted through the introduction of false doctrines and traditions borrowed from the heathen nations and their religious systems. Again, God did not simply discard that clay on which He had been working and start over with something totally different. He began a reformation by placing in the hearts of the Protestant reformers the need to restore New Testament truth to Christianity.

In each succeeding generation since the Protestant Reformation began, men have become crystallized and marred by their refusal to continue to be molded by the potter. In each case God has taken a part of the same lump of clay that had become marred and has begun to work with it on His prophetic wheel of restoration to reform it according to His will.

In one of these reformations The Church of God arose in 1903. It too has not been spared the pain of reformation, for in 1922 and in 1957 it was necessary for the prophets of God to initiate a reformation to restore the church to proper Biblical order. Since 1957 the church has continued in a work of reformation, constantly examining its teaching and practice to see where areas of refinement and restoration can take place. The Church of God believes that it always has the chance of reaching the goal of Bible perfection if it is prepared to admit that it has not yet reached that goal and if it is prepared to make whatever changes that God may require of it to maintain its course toward that goal.

Reformation is a divine principle through which God continues to mold those who will be flexible and pliable in His hand until He has completed the work of making them a vessel of honor in His house.

12. The Two Anointed Ones

Editor's Note: Please refer to Section V, G, 3:3 Zechariah's Vision (The Candlestick and the Two Olive Trees) for information on this topic.

13. The Spirit and Power of John

The special relationship which John the beloved disciple had with Jesus Christ during His incarnation ministry is a matter of record in the Scriptures (John 13:23;21:20). It is obvious from the writings of John that he had a revelation of the nature of Jesus as both God and man that superseded the understanding of the rest of the apostles. He led the way in the clear identification of Jesus as the Son of God, an inherent part of God who had existed from eternity. The Gospel of John, his three epistles, and the Book of Revelation give illumination on the important truths of the nature of God and the divinity of Jesus Christ.

There was indication in statements of Jesus that there would be something unique about the ministry of John. In John 21:22 He told Peter, *"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me."* The result of this statement was the projection of some of the leaders of the early church that John would not die. John clarified this misconception in John 21:23, noting that Jesus did not say that he would not die.

The mystery of this unusual statement by Jesus is clarified in the Book of Revelation. John was given the same revelation that the Father had given to Jesus during His incarnation (Revelation 1:1). He was commissioned to write in symbolic language the understanding of that revelation (Revelation 1:19). Then, in Revelation 10:8,11 John was commanded to eat the little book of the revelation of Jesus Christ and was told that he *"must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings."* This prophetic declaration of the angel to John added further to the mystery of the will of God for this man of God, for John died shortly after his experience on the Isle of Patmos. How was John to prophesy again or how was he to be tarrying when the Lord returned? The answer to this enigma is realized in the scriptural principle of the return of the spirit and power of one prophet in the ministry of another prophet in a subsequent dispensation. This principle is revealed in the New Testament in Luke 1:13,17: *"But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John ...And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."*

There are many other examples of this principle. Elisha was in the spirit of Elijah (II Kings 2:15). Jesus Himself was thought by the Jewish people to be the return of the spirit of Elijah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist (Matthew 16:14).

John the Baptist was in the spirit and power of Elijah. This truth is further confirmed in Matthew 17:10-12: *"And his disciples asked him, saying, why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed."* Jesus also declared in Matthew 11:13,14, *"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come."*

The scriptural principle of the return of the spirit and power of one prophet upon another requires clarification. The return of Elijah was not a resurrection, for it was John the Baptist, who was in the spirit of Elijah. The return of Elijah was certainly not a reincarnation of the prophet, for the soul of every man is reserved to its reward at the time of his death and is judged according to the deeds done in the body. If reincarnation or transmigration of the soul were possible, then the

souls of sinners in one life would have a chance at redemption in another. The truth of the nature of the return of Elijah is clearly revealed in the fact that the Word of God usable to divide asunder soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12). The way in which the Word of God separates the seemingly intertwined soul and spirit of man takes place at death, when the soul of man goes to its reward and the spirit of man returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The spirit of man is that power of reason that is a gift of the nature of God. It is that element of man that returns to its Giver.

The spirit of Elijah that prompted him to be a restoration prophet was returned by God to John the Baptist, enabling him to restore the hearts of the fathers of Israel to the children and prepare for Jesus. He was like Elijah, a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord (Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3). In order to appear like Elijah (a hairy man) he was clothed in camel's hair and a leather girdle, and he ate locusts and wild honey. All of these works that John accomplished were inspired by the spirit of Elijah.

The use of this same principle of the return of the spirit of one prophet in the ministry of another is the solution to the mystery of John's being promised that he would prophesy again. The Church of God believes that founder Chief Bishop Grady R. Kent was the prophet who ministered in the spirit which inspired John the Revelator to write the Book of Revelation. It was he who unlocked the mysteries of the work of the church and of the Seven Spirits of God, explained them to the church, and initiated programs to establish those truths in the church among the Gentiles. It is the spirit of John the Revelator which influences the work of the church in bringing forth the revelation of the bride body, to fulfill all the words of the prophets spoken of it, of which the Book of Revelation is a composite. When this work is complete, Jesus Christ will return according to Acts 3:20,21. John the Beloved, therefore, will be tarrying when the Lord returns, not in flesh and bone, but in spirit and power.

14. The Right-Hand Principle

The position of the right hand is a manifestation of the chain of command in the authority of theocratic government. The principle is revealed in heaven where Jesus Christ is the right hand of God and is the Mediator between God and man, possessing all power in heaven and in earth. It is a continuing principle in the government which God established for the protection and discipline of His people: *"And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself...Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself"* (Psalm 80:15,17).

The anointed leader of God's people always functions in a right-hand capacity, regardless of the position which he may have occupied before he was chosen to be God's anointed. The right-hand principle is not a rule for succession to the seat of anointed leadership over God's people, for examples of the ascendancy of men of other positions are abundant in the Scriptures (James held no position in the early church before he became Chief Bishop, and David was the seventh son of Jesse before he was anointed king.) The fact remains that the leader of God's people is a right-hand office in relationship to Jesus, the Head of the church.

The authority of theocratic government flows from the Chief Bishop to the right-hand witness of his office. It is the duty and responsibility of the right hand to uphold the work that the Chief Bishop is led of God to promote in the church and to serve as a chief advisor in the formulation of church doctrine and in the carrying out of church policy through executive government.

15. Joel's Army

In the prophetic writings of Nahum, Joel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, there is a recurring theme foretelling the coming wars in which the nation of Israel would be directly or indirectly involved. They speak of the corrective destruction from the Lord at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, of the subsequent overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by Cyrus, King of Medo-Persia, and of the releasing of the Israelites held captive in Babylon for seventy years. These events foreshadow the great warfare which is to take place in this generation in which the children

of God will match forces with the hordes of Satan in the spiritual battle which will affect the establishment of the Sabbatical Millennium and the enthroning of Jesus Christ (John 18:36; Revelation 17:14).

The Prophet Joel gave a panoramic view of the events that would happen some three hundred years later in the lives of the Israelites. In chapter 1, he viewed the coming armies of Nebuchadnezzar: *"For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion"* (Joel 1:6). Jeremiah foretold of this great lion, who was in fact Nebuchadnezzar, saying that *"the lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant"* (Jeremiah 4:7). This was precisely the manner in which Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem and destroyed the city, taking the people captive. Jeremiah and Joel continued in their prophecies to tell of the destruction of the land that was to come from this great army, urging Israel all the while to repent so as to avoid the impending wrath of God.

Chapter 2 begins with the sounding of the trumpet and the declaration that the day of the Lord is nigh at hand. Joel's description of the day of the Lord in verse 2 was of that of a great people as the morning spread upon the mountains, a people the likes of which had never been seen nor would ever be seen for the years of many generations. This verse holds the key to the identification of the army spoken of in this chapter. This people spread upon the mountains could only have been the army of Cyrus, the Persian King, who destroyed Babylon and its tyranny. Isaiah was describing this same Cyrus and his host when he said, *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publishes peace...that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"* (Isaiah 52:7).

The fact that the army of Joel 2 was that of Cyrus is also established in verse 2 where it was said that there had never been such a great army before, nor would there be for many generations afterward. This could only have been Cyrus, for Cyrus began his conquests only slightly more than fifty years after King Nebuchadnezzar's army. The phrase, until *"the years of many generations,"* would not have been applicable, because Cyrus came too soon. From the beginning of the great Persian Empire under the reign of Cyrus, it was 228 years, or *"many generations"* before Alexander the Great mustered an army comparable to that of Cyrus. History also records that Cyrus never had an equal in the ancient world for concentrated military power and absolute control over his subjects. As Joel 2:3 accurately predicted, there was nothing that was able to stand before the forces of Cyrus. This could not be said of Nebuchadnezzar, whose conquests were not to be compared with the extent of the Mede-Persian Empire.

It was in the plan of God for Israel to be held in captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, but it was also in His plan to destroy Babylon at the hand of Cyrus who liberated Israel and set in motion the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. Isaiah spoke concerning the destruction of Babylon in Isaiah 21:2,9, *"A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer [Nebuchadnezzar] dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, O Elam [Persia]: besiege, O Media; all the sighing [from Babylonian oppression] thereof have I made to cease...and, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen..."* In his vision of the destruction of Babylon, Isaiah saw the same thing that Joel saw in chapter 2, chariots of men and paired horsemen (as the Hebrew is more accurately rendered). His message, *"Babylon is fallen,"* is as distinct and clear as Joel's, *"I will remove from thee the northern army."*

Jeremiah, who saw more clearly than any other prophet the coming destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, also envisioned the complete overthrow and destruction of Babylon in Jeremiah 50:2,3,9. This prophet saw Joel's horsemen: *"They shall hold the bow and the lance: they are cruel, and will not show mercy: their voice shall roar like the sea, and they shall ride upon horses, every one put in array, like a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Babylon, The king of Babylon hath heard the report of them, and his hands waxed feeble; anguish took hold*

of him, and pangs as of a woman in travail. Behold, he shall come up like a lion [Nebuchadnezzar] from the swelling of Jordan unto the habitation of the strong: but I will make them suddenly run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? For who is like me? And who will appoint me the time? And who is that shepherd that will stand before me?" (Jeremiah 50:42-44). Isaiah 44:26-28 identified this shepherd as Cyrus. It was he who was the man chosen before his birth (Isaiah 45:4), the man like the Lord, who was appointed over Judah.

Nahum had a vision of this army of Cyrus in its attack and overthrow of Ninevah, the seat of power of the Assyrians. He saw Cyrus and his armies as *"He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face...The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation..."* (Nahum 2:1-4). He described them as an army of *"prancing horses, and of jumping chariots"* that would cause a multitude to be slain (Nahum 3:2,3). He showed that Ninevah would be destroyed by the same army that Isaiah saw, for he described Cyrus, saying, *"Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!"* (Nahum 1:15). This was that great army that was arrayed in scarlet, spread upon the mountains, and commissioned to destroy the very enemies of Israel, Assyria and Babylon, thereby bringing peace to Jerusalem. Cyrus was the man who was called to dash in pieces the enemies of Israel and brings peace to the land. In Isaiah 45:1, he was called the Lord's Anointed *"whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him."*

Habakkuk saw God's overthrowing Babylon's power: *"Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? Was thine anger against the rivers? Was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?...Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine appointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck"* (Habakkuk 3:8,12).

The prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, and others regarding the oppression of Babylon foreshadow the armies of Satan in this day which are conquering the multitudes in the name of the great lion, the devil, himself (I Peter 5:8). The prophecies of the coming of Cyrus and his forces of righteousness that overthrew Babylon are shadows of the great army of God which is scheduled to appear in this last day to vanquish evil and establish righteousness in the earth prior to the return of Jesus Christ. God did not declare in vain that Christ would remain at His right hand in heaven until His enemies be made His footstool (Hebrews 1:13;10:12,13). He gave strong indication throughout His word that the world would be subjected to righteousness at Christ's return, at which time the military and political systems of the nations would be dashed in pieces by Jesus, Himself (Revelation 19:11-16).

The righteous army is that of which the Apostle Paul spoke in Ephesians 6:12 and II Corinthians 10:4,5, where he outlined the nature of the struggle of God's army as being a spiritual warfare against the forces of evil in this world. It is God's army that will wage a war against the confusion and spiritual slavery brought upon the world and especially upon the Christian world, by the pagan forces of Babylonian confusion.

God's Cyrus of this day, whose responsibility it is to rebuild the temple of God among the Gentiles (Acts 15:15,16) and to restore all things as they were in the early church (Acts 3:20,21) in this rebuilt church of God, is the man who will muster an army of great spiritual warriors from the mountains of Zion to end the Babylonian captivity of God's people (Revelation 18:1-7).

God has determined to use certain instruments as His vehicles of warning to awaken the world and help overthrow Babylon. This truth is confirmed by the principle of using things that are made to reveal the invisible things of God (Romans 1:20). Two of these *"things that are made"* which God will use today are described in Habakkuk 3:8: *"Thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation."* Here we are shown that two of the vehicles to be used in the salvation program and the destruction of evil are described as being chariots and horses. This quite closely parallels the writings of Isaiah 13 and 21: *"Chariots of men and horsemen in pairs, saying, Babylon is fallen."*

A close inspection of the prophecy of Nahum regarding the coming of the man *"that dasheth into pieces"* reveals that certain of the phrases used in describing the armies of Cyrus portray the

modern- day automobile, which could well be said to *"be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation."* It does, indeed, *"rage in the streets...jostle one against another in the broadways, seem like torches, run like the lightnings."* These mighty men of whom Nahum spoke must then be the servants of God. Their medium for making the admonition of the soon coming of Jesus is the automobile. The fact that there are no chariots of war available to make this cry of warning is evidence enough that the chariots of the Lord's salvation today are automobiles.

Joel's prophecy takes on new meaning when examined in the light of possible twentieth century fulfillment in this same warfare Cyrus' spiritual armies of righteousness against the forces of evil. In the time when all the land is enslaved in the imperialism of Babylonish Rome's spiritual captivity, a great people will arise in the mountains in the time when the day of the Lord is nigh at hand. *"The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run...like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble..."* (Joel 2:4,5). These people will ride what appears to be horses, but which in reality are their motorcycles. It is the motorcycle which makes the popping and cracking sound of burning stubble, and it is also the only vehicle that God can use in his day to reveal His righteous horsemen of salvation (Habakkuk 3:8).

God has foreordained that in this day there should be a great army of righteousness, using the things that are made to reveal His power to the world so that they are without excuse. This army of God's soldiers, riding upon horses and chariots of salvation, proclaim the message of God's salvation to the nations so that those who will hear may escape His wrath. This work is in fulfillment of the commission of Jesus in Luke 14:21,23: *"Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city...into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."*

These twentieth century chariots and war horses of Joel's Army are the automobile and motorcycle-the instruments of the Lord's salvation (Habakkuk 3:8).

16. Joel's Revival

The last days' revival of renewal and restoration is the theme of the prophecy of Joel 2:21-32. While many Christian teachers expect the condition of the world to worsen until it becomes so terrible that the Lord will rapture the church from the midst of the trouble and take it to heaven, the truth is that the last days are destined to be the time of one of the greatest revivals in the history of the world. Joel's revival will be one of restoration of the Word of God and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Joel declared that the experience of revival would be like the outpouring of the former and latter rain upon the land of Israel that produced the bountiful harvests of grains and fruit of the earth. In the spiritual realm, this rain represents the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and its accompanying Word of God (Isaiah 55:10,11). Peter confirmed the former and latter rain as an outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 3:19: *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."* He also declared that the outpouring of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the speaking with tongues on the day of Pentecost was the signal for the beginning of the last days and the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy: *"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy"* (Acts 2:16-18).

It is the watering of the Holy Spirit anointing that causes the seed of the Word of God to produce that which God has intended. In the last days, when a great prophetic program of the Word of God is scheduled to be manifest, it will be an equally great manifestation of the Spirit and power of God that will provide the thrust that will bring that work to pass (Zechariah 4:6).

The result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be that the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. Wheat represents people who are harvested for the Lord. The wine and the oil represent the joy and anointing of the Holy Spirit that will overshadow and characterize the work of the church in the last days.

Along with the outpouring of the Spirit, Joel's Revival will also witness a restoration. *"I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you"* (Joel 2:25). Those truths of the Word of God which were destroyed by the forces of evil in the Dark and Middle Ages will be restored to the church. This restoration of truth is the part of the rain of God that has to do with doctrine (Deuteronomy 32:2). This is the restoration that Peter predicted in Acts 3:20,21: *"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."*

A great world-wide revival of the renewal and outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the restoration of the Word of God is in store in the last days. It is the work of the church to lead the way in this revival by believing in it and experiencing its continued manifestation in the earth.

17. The Prophetic Era of Flight

On December 17, 1903, a momentous event of profound prophetic significance took place on the chilly, windswept Outer Banks of the North Carolina coast when Wilbur and Orville Wright made man's first flight in a heavier-than-air craft. Though that first flight was short and reached very little altitude, it nevertheless marked a great milestone of prophecy.

Over 2,500 years before this time, several Hebrew prophets had caught a glimpse of this era of flight. Solomon, Isaiah, and Ezekiel had visions of manned aircraft in connection with other events that are presently transpiring in the world. In ancient times men dreamed of soaring through the heavens with the ease of birds. Many wrote about it, and still others experimented, some fatally, with the proposition of flight. In more modern times the genius of Leonardo DaVinci was directed toward the concept of flight, and in the sixteenth century, he formulated some of the principles upon which it was finally achieved. Though he was resigned to the fact that the technology and mechanization necessary for such a wonder were not possible in his day, DaVinci boldly predicted: "The Spirit cannot lie; there shall be wings."

Near the turn of the twentieth century, the spirit of prophecy seized upon the Wright Brothers, and they began to work at developing a craft that could fly. On December 17, 1903, they took to the air and began the modern era of flight. This twentieth century wonder is a part of the fulfillment of Daniel 12:4: *"...the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."* The explosion of knowledge in the twentieth century has been the result of the inspiration of God upon mankind to bring about those things that will fulfill His Word (Job 32:8). The introduction of the era of flight is no coincidence but a part of the plan of God to bear witness to His prophetic Word. The spirit of flight itself is not as important as that spiritual work to which it bears witness.

In Isaiah 60:8, the prophet caught a glimpse of the era of flight: *"Who are these that fly as a cloud?"* At the same time that he wrote concerning flight, he also prophesied of the resurrection of Zion, which represents the church. In the day of flight, God predicted this of His church: *"Arise, shine; for thy light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee"* (Isaiah 60:1). The uniqueness of Isaiah's prophecy is the fact that both elements of its fulfillment happened during the same year and in the same state. First, as with the prophet's declaration, the church of God was resurrected by A. J. Tomlinson in Cherokee County, North Carolina. Then six months later on December 17, 1903, the Wright Brothers accomplished the first flight of man at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

The greatest sign of the end of this age is the work that God is doing in the midst of the Jewish people in the land of Israel. Israel is the nation that was born in a day in fulfillment of Isaiah 66:8. It has been in the plan of God for this people to be restored to their land in the era of flight and for the airplane to be used as a means of their defense. Isaiah 31:5 declares, *"As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it."* It was with the bird of the air, modern aircraft, that Yahweh, the Almighty God, brought

about the deliverance of the city of Jerusalem in 1967 and has maintained its protection since that time.

The prophet Ezekiel also had a vision of modern flight. He described the airplane as being a living creature, or a cherub. *"Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city"* (Ezekiel 10:1,2).

Ezekiel predicted that the time would come when men would go between the wheels, under the wings of airplanes and take the Word of God (coals of fire) to scatter over the cities. Other portions of the prophecy describe in graphic detail the flight of man in this century. Ezekiel 10:17 speaks of retractable landing gear: *"When (the cherubims) stood, (the wheels) stood; and when they were lifted up, these lifted up themselves also."* Ezekiel 10:1 describes an airport control tower: *"Above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne."* Other facets of modern flight were described by this and other prophets, including multi-engine craft, propeller-driven planes, and jet aircraft.

Solomon predicted in Ecclesiastes 10:20, *"A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter."* Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for the first coming of Jesus as the voice of one crying in the wilderness in fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3, so the voice of the bird of the air identifies flight with the word of prophecy as a sign of the second coming of Jesus.

In Revelation 14:6,7 the beloved disciple John described his vision of the last days of the dispensation of grace in this manner: *"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."*

Since heavenly angels or messengers do not and cannot preach or minister the gospel of the kingdom (I Peter 1:12), this angel that John saw flying in the midst of heaven was a minister of the gospel who was to take to the air to carry the message of the judgment of God upon the world and of the coming of the kingdom of Christ upon the earth.

In 1948 former Chief Bishop Grady R. Kent led the church in the use of aircraft as means for conveying the gospel. This ministry was unique in that it identified specifically with the prophecies of the Scriptures which predicted the use of aircraft in the work of God. In accordance with Ezekiel's prophecy, millions of pieces of gospel literature were dropped from small airplanes to waiting crowds below. Public address systems were used to proclaim the good news of the coming of Christ in accordance with Ecclesiastes. Ministers flew in airplanes carrying the message of the restoration of the church. But, most of all, the message of the everlasting gospel of the kingdom of God was preached by means of aircraft in fulfillment of Revelation 14:6.

H. DOCTRINES

1. Declaration of Faith (Articles of Faith)

ARTICLES OF FAITH

1. WE BELIEVE in the eternal existence of one God in three Persons—namely, God the Father (Yahweh), God the Son (Yahshua or Jesus), and God the Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) (Matthew 28:19; 3:16,17).
2. WE BELIEVE in the eternal pre-existence of the Son of God as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8) and as the Creator of all things, both visible and invisible (John 1:1-3).
3. WE BELIEVE that Jesus Christ was miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit by the Virgin Mary (Isaiah 7:14) and that He was both God and man—God in the sense of His ever-inherent divinity shown by His resurrection from the dead, and man in the sense that He voluntarily made Himself lower than the angels that He might suffer and taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9).
4. WE BELIEVE that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, overcoming every temptation that is common to man; that He died on the cross to atone for the sins of all men; that He was buried on the day of Passover (Wednesday—Abib 14); that He was in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40); that at the end of the Sabbath (Saturday) He rose again; and that He ascended into heaven, to sit at the right hand of God as the only Mediator between God and man (Romans 8:34).
5. WE BELIEVE that on the Day of Pentecost Jesus confirmed His High Priest ministry by filling the church with the Holy Spirit; thereby giving them power for service (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4).
6. WE BELIEVE that the whole Bible is the inspired Word of God and that true doctrine for faith, practice, government, and discipline must be determined from the New Testament, witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (II Timothy 3:16,17).
7. WE BELIEVE that God is the Author of one eternal religion—Judaism—set forth and systematized at Mount Sinai by Moses, reformed and perfected at Calvary by Jesus Christ, believed and practiced by the New Testament Early Church, and restored and observed among the Gentiles by the Last Days' Church (Malachi 3:9; Hebrews 9:11-15; 13:8). We call this reformed Judaism, “New Testament Judaism.”
8. WE BELIEVE in the total brotherhood of the Christian community and in the higher calling of the Bride (Firstfruits—Revelation 14:1-5) which distinguishes it from the Kingdom of God.
9. WE BELIEVE that Jesus Christ came into the earth not only to die for man's sins but also to establish the Church of God according to the divine pattern (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 8:5,6).

10. WE BELIEVE that the Church was and is an organism for the fulfillment of prophecy and that prophecy is the primary witness and identification of the Church (Revelation 19:10).
11. WE BELIEVE that Jesus established the apostolic order of government for the Church with one Anointed Leader (example of James—Acts 15:13-21), Twelve Apostles (Matthew 10:1), Seventy-Two Prophets (Luke 10:1), and Seven Men of Wisdom (Acts 6:3), and that this order is to be restored in the Last Days' Church (Ecclesiastes 1:9; Matthew 19:28).
12. WE BELIEVE that all matters of doctrine and practice of the Church (called Apostles' Doctrine) have been and must be settled in the Council of Apostles and Elders, in which the Anointed Leader is the moderator and final authority (Proverbs 15:22; Acts 15:13-21).
13. WE BELIEVE that all men err and that Jesus Christ alone proved to be infallible; therefore, we do not equate verbal utterances (prophesying) with the written Word of God (I Corinthians 13:12; I John 4:1).
14. WE BELIEVE that both the Old and New Testaments predicted the apostasy of the Early Church and that although the kingdom of God continued through the Dark Ages, the Church as an organism ceased to exist in A. D. 325 with the uniting of Church and the Roman State (Isaiah 1:21).
15. WE BELIEVE that following the restoration of the fundamental doctrines of faith through the Protestant Reformation, The Church of God was resurrected from the Dark Ages (Isaiah 60:1) according to prophecy in 1903, by A. J. Tomlinson near Murphy, North Carolina, a place now called "Fields of the Wood" (Psalm 132:4-7).
16. WE BELIEVE in water baptism by immersion according to the example of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17).
17. WE BELIEVE in the full restoration of the gifts to individuals in the Church, both the nine gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12:1-9) and the five gifts of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11,12).
18. WE BELIEVE in the New Testament observance of the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) and of the three primary Feasts of the Lord (Leviticus 23): Passover (the Lord's Supper and washing the saints' feet—John 13:1-17), Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), and Tabernacles (John 1:14; 7:2,37-39).
19. WE BELIEVE that marriage is an institution of God between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24) and that no one has the right to divorce their companion and be remarried except for the cause of fornication (the act of adultery—Matthew 19:9) or abandonment (I Corinthians 7:15); however, we believe that converts should remain in the marital state in which they are called (I Corinthians 7:26,27; Matthew 5:32).
20. WE BELIEVE that Israel will be fully restored, that their land (or inheritance) will be given to them as a nation (fulfilled in 1948). Also, the remnant of Israel—those who accept Jesus as their Savior—will be saved with an everlasting salvation before the return of the Jesus (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1). Furthermore, we do not believe in

“replacement theology” regarding Israel. The scriptures tell us that we are “joint/fellow heirs” with them (Ephesians 3:1-7; Galatians 3:26-29; 6:15,16).

21. WE BELIEVE that the Bride will be supernaturally protected during the period of Great Tribulation, prior to the return of Jesus at the Last Trumpet (Revelation 12:14; I Thessalonians 4:16; I Corinthians 15:52).
22. WE BELIEVE in the pre-millennial second-coming of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom in Jerusalem, Israel, where the resurrected and living saints will reign with Him for one thousand years (Zechariah 14:16-21; Revelation 20:4).
23. WE BELIEVE in eternal life for the righteous and eternal punishment for the wicked (Revelation 20:15).
24. WE BELIEVE that there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17) after the Millennial Kingdom and that the righteous will inhabit the new earth forever (Revelation 21:1).

2. The Godhead

Monotheism is the cornerstone of the Judaeo-Christian faith. The *Shema*, the first and greatest commandment of Judaism, encapsulates this most fundamental of all teachings: "*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might*" (Deuteronomy 6:4,5). This is the commandment that Jesus singled out as the first of all commandments (Mark 12:29,30). It was the uniqueness of Judaism in that it taught the existence of only one God in contrast to the polytheism espoused by the other religions of the world.

At the very time at which the one God of heaven and earth thundered forth this first commandment, however, He also began to set the stage for the manifestation of one who would be the Messiah. In answer to Israel's request that they "*not hear again the voice of the Lord,*" God declared that Israel would no more hear His voice in its glory. Instead, He would raise up a Prophet from their midst and would put His words in His mouth (Deuteronomy 18:15-18).

As time progressed, revelation concerning the identity of this Prophet was given to Israel's prophets and wise men. It became more and more clear that there would be something about this Prophet that would transcend mere humanity. The Messiah was to be a divine person.

David began to receive this revelation: "*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed... Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him*" (Psalm 2:2,6,7,12).

David's understanding of this Divine King became crystal clear in Psalm 110:1,4,5: "*The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool... The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent. Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.*" God said to David's Lord, "*Sit at my right hand,*" and He declared David's Lord to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Then He predicted that the Lord at His right hand would strike through kings in the day of wrath.

Isaiah shared David's vision of a Divine King, calling Him the Branch of the Lord (4:2), predicting His virgin birth (7:14), and naming Him God with Us (Emmanuel). Then he further described Him: "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom...*" (Isaiah 9:6,7). The prophet Micah also predicted the coming of this divine Ruler, declaring that He would be born in Bethlehem. He unmistakably ascribed deity to this Ruler in Israel by indicating His eternal preexistence: "...*whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*" (Micah 5:2).

Jeremiah also caught a glimpse of the divine nature of this coming Messiah: "*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and*

prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jeremiah 23:5,6). So that no one would mistake the intention of this prophet to reveal the coming of a divine King, he repeated this declaration almost verbatim in Jeremiah 33:15, 16.

Zechariah predicted that the coming Prophet would be a Shepherd who would be termed *the fellow of God* (13:7). He also predicted that He would be pierced and mourned as an only son (12:10). Isaiah also shared this vision of a suffering Messiah who would be offered for the sins of the people but who would be resurrected (Isaiah 53).

Finally, the last of the minor prophets, Malachi, made this declaration: *'Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts'*" (Malachi 3:1).

In addition to making these predictions of the coming of a divine King and Prophet, the Hebrew Scriptures also often referred to the manifested God as the Word of God, and gave to Him individual subsistence (Psalm 33:6; 119:89; Isaiah 40:8). The Word of God was said to personify God and to reveal Him to man.

If the eternal God could not lie and the words of His prophets were true, then there was to be a King who would come to Israel who would be of divine origin and substance. But, how could this be? Was it to be that God the Heavenly Father, Himself, was to take on the flesh of man, His creation? Or, was it to be that He would glorify a human being and ascribe to Him the nature and attributes of God? Or, was it that He was to send a part of His divine essence, His Son, as it were, to partake of the flesh of man and become the King and Redeemer of Israel?

This is the question which is the basis of the mystery of Deity: *"And without controversy great is the mystery of the Piety (God): who was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory"* (I Timothy 3:16, literal translation).

Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the coming Prophet King. The question of His divine nature, however, was the stumbling block on which the leaders of Israel fell. Their staunch belief in monotheism, the most basic of scriptural teachings, and their inability to comprehend the mystery of how Jesus could be both man and God and how He could be the Son of God without the existence of more than one God was simply more than they could receive.

With the disciples of Jesus, however, there was no question as to His divinity. Even the doubting Thomas, given physical proof of the resurrection of Jesus, recognized His deity and exclaimed, "My Lord, and My God!" The problem for the apostles, as well as for the millions who subsequently believed their report of the Good News, was not one of belief but one of definition.

Since Jesus did not set forth the nature of His existence in the clearest of terms, it remained the task of the apostles to define His person and the nature of His divinity. This was the avowed subject of the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation in which John took the Jewish concept of the manifested Word of God and declared that Word to be Jesus, the only begotten Son of God: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...All things were made by him...In him was life...And the Word was made flesh...No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him"* (John 1:1,3,4,14,18).

a. Godhead-Understanding Terminology

The question of whether or not God can be defined depends largely on what is meant by *definition*. In the sense that God is infinite and man is finite, it is impossible for man to know all that is proper to God; therefore, no man could possibly give an exhaustive statement of all that God

is. For the purpose of stating His characteristics, insofar as man can know them, however, God may be defined.

God is defined as "the one Supreme Being, self existent and eternal; the infinite creator, sustained, and ruler of the universe: conceived of as omniscient, good, and almighty" (*Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary*). Probably the best theological definition of God is found in the *Westminster Catechism*, which says, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

The next term which requires definition in undertaking a study of God is the word *Godhead*. This word occurs three times in the Authorized Version of the Bible in Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20, and Colossians 2:9. It is a translation of three related Greek words taken from the same root. The term *Godhead* means the essential nature of God, or the fullest essence of that which makes God what He is.

The passage in Acts declares that man should not think of the Godhead in terms of men's creations and images, for, whether physical or mental, they cannot possibly depict the Godhead. The passage in Romans tells us that the nature of the Godhead is revealed and can be understood by means of the things that God has made. The passage in Colossians declares that Godhead, the essential nature of God, was manifest fully in the person of Jesus Christ: *"In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."*

The third term which demands definition is the word *trinity*, which means "A threefold personality existing in the one divine being of substance, the union in one God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three infinite persons" (*Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary*). *Trinity* is distinct from *triad*, which means three persons or things which function as one unit.

b. The Eternal Father

Of Yahweh, the Father, the Scriptures declare: *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God"* (Psalm 90:2). The Father God, therefore, has existed from eternity past and will continue to exist into eternity future. He is God, the Creator of all things, and Judge of all creation. Besides Him there is no other God. It is He who sends forth His Spirit and His Word, directing and controlling the Godhead.

God the Father *"only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see"* (I Timothy 6:16). Since no man has seen Him or can see Him, God the Father is unknown and unrevealed of Himself. The only way in which we may know Him is through the manifestation of the Son.

The Father is also immutable: *"...the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"* (James 1:17); *"I am Yahweh; I change not"* (Malachi 3:6). He is unchanging in His "being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (*Westminster Catechism*).

God the Father is not, nor can He be, man (Numbers 23:19). As the heaven is above the earth, so are His ways above man's ways. If He had not chosen to manifest a part of His being and essence, the person of the Word, as the Son of God, He would still be unknown and unrevealed.

c. The Son of God

The concept of the Son of God was first set forth by David in Psalm 2:7: *"I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."* Isaiah expanded upon the Son of God, saying, *"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given...and his name shall be...The mighty God..."* (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus Christ, throughout His life, made declarations that He was the Son of God, the Messiah who had come to save His people from their sins. The apostle John revealed the function of the Son as the person of the Word of God: *"No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him"* (John 1:18).

The writer of Hebrews further explained the Person of the Son of God and His work and

function in the realm of Godhead: *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person...sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"* (Hebrews 1:1-3). The Son of God is declared to be the exact expression (express image) of the essence (person) of the Father, or "the representation of His reality" as the Greek is literally rendered.

d. Father and Son—A Comparison of Attributes

Now let us note the comparison of the characteristics and natures of the Father and the Son, who though they are two, are of one essence and nature. Of the Father we read, *"Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting"* (Psalm 93:2). Of the Son we read, *"Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"* (Micah 5:2). Psalm 90:2 defines "from everlasting" as from *"before...thou hadst formed the earth and the world."* So, the Son existed before the time when *"in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1).

Of the Father we read, *"Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting"* (Psalm 93:2), while of the Son, Paul tells us that *"unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever"* (Hebrews 1:8). Isaiah declares that the Father said, *"I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God"* (Isaiah 44:6); while John reveals that Jesus said, *"I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead"* (Revelation 1: 17,18).

The Father says, *"I am the Almighty God"* (Genesis 17:1); while the Son says, *"I am...the Almighty"* (Revelation 1:8). Of the Father we are told, *"I am Yahweh thy God, the Holy One [agios] of Israel"* (Isaiah 43:3), of the Son Peter said, *"Ye denied thy Holy One [agion] and the Just"* (Acts 3:14). Of the Father John says, *"The only true God [ton monon alethinon Theon]"* (John 17:3); while of the son he states, *"...his Son Jesus Christ. This [person] is the true God [outos estin o alethinos Theos] and eternal life"* (I John 5:20).

The passages of scripture noted above outline the distinct parallel between the attributes, powers, and natures of the Father and Son. Both are said to be eternal, to have existed from everlasting. The Scriptures assert that the Son, equally with the Father, is the First and the Last, is omnipresent, immutable, and omnipotent, the Creator and Director of all things in heaven and earth, the final Judge, the Awarder of everlasting life and death. Both, therefore, must needs be God. Since there cannot be two Gods, the Son is, therefore, one with the Father and both are one God.

e. Prophecy Witnesses Christ's Deity

There are certain prophetic declarations in the Old Testament which speak specifically of Yahweh which were fulfilled in the New Testament by Jesus. This is perhaps the most conclusive evidence which could be presented to corroborate the fact that the Son, the Eternal Word, is God, for the word of prophecy is more sure than any other witness (II Peter 1:19).

Isaiah declared, *"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Yahweh, make straight in the desert a highway for our God"* (Isaiah 40:3). The fulfillment of this prophecy is noted in Matthew 3:3: *"This is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord."* Jesus then was the Yahweh (Lord) of whom Isaiah prophesied. John the Baptist was the voice crying in the wilderness preparing the way of Jesus.

Isaiah also declared, *"Sanctify Yahweh of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel"* (Isaiah 8:13,14). Peter declared the fulfillment of this prophecy: *"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but...a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient"* (I Peter 2:7,8). Jesus then was the Yahweh who became the stone of stumbling and rock of offence.

Zechariah 12:1,10 prophesied: *"The burden of the word of Yahweh for Israel, saith Yahweh, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him...And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced..."* John declared this prophecy to be fulfilled: *"And again another scripture said they shall look upon him whom they pierced"* (John 19:37). The Prophet predicted that the one who would be pierced would be Yahweh, but according to John's interpretation, Christ crucified was predicted by Zechariah. Christ, therefore, is the *"Yahweh which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth."*

Yahweh said in Isaiah 45:23, *"I have sworn by myself ...that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."* Paul declares the fulfillment of this prophecy to be related to Jesus and a still future event: *"We shall all stand at the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God"* (Romans 14:10,11). Paul establishes his declaration that we shall all stand at the judgment seat of Christ by quoting this solemn oath of Yahweh recorded by Isaiah. Christ, therefore, is the Yahweh who said, *"There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me"* (Isaiah 45:21).

f. Christ's Deity Confirmed In the New Testament

As a general rule the statements of the New Testament writers concerning the deity of Christ were made without explanation or the offering of proof. There is, however, one outstanding exception to this rule and that is the book of Hebrews, the whole of which is written to reveal and prove to the Jews the deity of Jesus, His condescension to man, His efficacious atonement for sin, and the eternal nature of His priesthood as the Mediator between God the Father and man. Listen to this writer's argument in behalf of the deity of Jesus Christ: *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail"* (Hebrews 1:1-12).

This passage of scripture confirms a number of things concerning the nature of Jesus as God. First, it declares that because He is called the Son of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, He must be greater than the angels. Since angels are the highest order of the created beings, Jesus, Himself, cannot be a creature. Second, all the angels are required to worship Jesus, which indicates their submission to His authority. Third, while the angels are identified as messengers of God, the Son is Himself addressed by God as God: *"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever."* Fourth, to the Son are ascribed the divine characteristics of having brought forth the creation and of being eternal.

The writer continues in chapter 2 to urge obedience to the faith of the Son of God on the basis of the argument establishing His divinity in chapter 1. He then calls to witness the perfect example set forth by the divine Being when He was made lower than the angels so that He might taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9) as further evidence that believers should be faithful unto His teaching.

Other New Testament writings are equally emphatic in their declaration of the deity of Christ. Colossians 2:9 says, *"For in him [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily."* This statement is remarkable in its precise accuracy. It does not say that the Godhead dwelleth bodily in Jesus; it does say that the fullness of the Godhead or the essential being and essence of deity dwelleth in Him.

Titus 2:13 declares, *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ...."* This writing very clearly provides the identification of the One who is both God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I John 5:20 says, *"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This [person] is the true God, and eternal life."* The implication of this verse of scripture that the Son of God is true God is established by the fact that He is also called "eternal life." John emphatically declared Jesus to be eternal life in I John 1:2: *"The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."*

In I Timothy 3:16 Paul made this declaration: *"And confessedly great is the mystery of the Piety [Deity]: who was manifested in the flesh, was justified in spirit, was seen by angels, was proclaimed among nations, was believed in the world, was taken up in glory"* (Literal Greek Translation). The mystery of God, according to Paul, then, was how the Son of God was manifested in the flesh.

g. The Theophanies of the Old Testament

The eternal Word of God is that part of the Godhead which is manifested to men. This manifestation can take many shapes, the two most prominent of which are the forms of angel and man. Before the incarnation of the Word in the Person of Jesus Christ, God is said to have appeared to various men. These are the Theophanies of the Old Testament, which demand explanation.

When we consider the statements of the Father, *"Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live"* (Exodus 33:20); and of John, *"No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him"* (John 1:18); and of Paul, *"Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see"* (I Timothy 6:16), we must admit without further argument that the Eternal Father has at no time been seen by anyone nor shall ever be seen by anyone. He simply is unknown and unrevealed except through the Person of the Word, His Son.

This truth is manifest when we examine the last of the Theophanies of the Old Testament, that of Isaiah 6, and compare it with its avowed New Testament explanation. Isaiah described his experience thus: *"In the year that king Uzziah died I also saw Yahweh sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim....And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory...Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts...I heard the voice of Yahweh, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their eyes heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed"* (Isaiah 6:1-10). When the Prophet Isaiah saw Yahweh enthroned, with the seraphim worshipping Him, he recognized his unworthiness, whereupon his lips were touched with a live coal from the altar. He was subsequently commissioned with a message for Israel.

The fulfillment of this prophecy was noted in the Gospel of John in this manner: *"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias*

said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Then the apostle made this startling statement: *"These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory and spake of him"* (John 12:37-41). John clearly states that the One whose glory Isaiah beheld as He sat enthroned, high and lifted up, was the person of Jesus, the Word of God.

Abraham sat in the heat of the day in his tent door when he beheld three strangers approaching (Genesis 18:1-8). After he ran to meet them, he prostrated himself in worship before one of them and addressed Him as Yahweh (the Lord). The one was God the Son, who was accompanied by two literal angels. Abraham entertained these "men," and "the Lord" (Yahweh) promised a son to Abraham, His friend. Then Yahweh said, *"Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?"* (Genesis 18:17). This same Lord told His disciples, *"I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"* (John 15:15). The two angels then departed, but Yahweh remained with Abraham.

Next in the sequence of events, Abraham addressed a prayer of intercession for Sodom to Yahweh as He stood before him in angelic form. Then Yahweh left and went towards Sodom, where the two angels had already preceded Him to warn Lot and his family (Genesis 19:1). Finally, *"Yahweh rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Yahweh out of heaven"* (Genesis 19:24).

Jacob knew Yahweh the Son very well, for he wrestled with Him at the ford of Jabbok. After he had wrestled all night with the "angel," Jacob demanded of Him a blessing, to which He replied, *"Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed"* (Genesis 32:24-32). Jacob knew with whom he had been face to face for he called the place, "Peniel," meaning, "I have seen God face to face." And, Hosea confirmed the truth of Jacob's claim that he had seen God, saying, *"Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him [the angel]: he found Him in Bethel, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of hosts; Yahweh is his memorial"* (Hosea 12:3-5). As Hosea declared, Yahweh had appeared unto Jacob in a dream and then told him, *"I am the God of Bethel"* (Genesis 31:11,13). Jacob later spoke concerning this Being who appeared unto him, saying, *"The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads"* (Genesis 48:16). Since the only Redeemer is Jesus, God the Son, this "angel" then was God the Word.

These examples, together with the fact that the prophecy of Jesus in Malachi 3:1 declares, *"And Yahweh, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts,"* obviously reveal the Lord Jesus, Yahweh the Son, to be the part of the Godhead who reveals Himself to mankind, whether it be in the form of an angel or in the form of a man. The Son, then, is the Body of God that is manifested to the creation.

h. The Acceptance of Worship

The fact that the Theophanies were that of God and not merely of an angel is also established by the fact while the worship of angels is strictly forbidden, this Being received worship and adoration from those whom He visited. He made no attempt to restrain them from this worship. If He had been an actual created angel, His actions would surely have solicited the extreme wrath of the Father upon both the angel and the worshipper.

In the New Testament this same God the Word was worshiped while in human form. If he had not been God in the flesh, His acceptance of this worship would have approximated idolatry. The ruler worshiped Him and sought His help in Matthew 9:18. The leper worshiped Jesus and sought His superhuman intervention: *"Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean"* (Matthew 8:2). We as Christians are directed to pray to the Son, God the Word, and to implore Him. *"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Acts 2:21). Paul declares that *"them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours"* (I Corinthians 1:2). Paul further declared of Jesus

Christ that *"God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:9-11).

i. The Incarnation of the Word

God the Son was manifested in the flesh for the express purpose of dying (Hebrews 2:9) to provide the blood sacrifice that would meet the demands of divine justice upon the fallen human race and reconcile man to God (Romans 5:9,10). He was willing to condescend to the low estate of mankind because of His love for His creation which had fallen prey to the Tempter. In order to affect this release of the captives who had been sold into the slavery of Satan by their father Adam, it was necessary for someone in the veil of that same flesh to overcome the temptation of the devil in every way. God the Father, therefore, prepared a body of flesh for His Son, the Word, just as we are told in Hebrews 10:5.

In order for this great example to be set forth for the over comers who would believe in His name to the saving of their souls, it was necessary that God the Word, the Son, should deny Himself access to His majestic splendor and His co-equality with the Father in favor of the limitations of human frailty. He who was the only begotten from the Father forsook the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). Being eternally in the form of God, He of necessity *"emptied himself"* and *"took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men"* (Philippians 2:6-8, literal translation). *"Being the brightness of his glory...forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver, then who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"* (Hebrews 1:3;2:10,14,15).

God sent His only begotten Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3) to suffer death upon the cross and to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9,10). Since the Scriptures reveal that Jesus became very man in the flesh, it must be concluded that He laid aside His sovereignty by limiting Himself to the confines of human flesh and mentality. The precise accuracy of the wording of Romans 8:3 is clear. Jesus did not assume the likeness of flesh nor did He become sinful flesh. He was in every sense a proper human being, except that, because of His virgin birth, He knew no sin; therefore, He came in the likeness of sinful flesh.

In the words, *"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14), there is a divine condescension that nothing can equal. God was made man. By Himself, by His friends and disciples, and by His enemies and persecutors, Jesus Christ was spoken of as a proper human being. In His childhood He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51). His intellectual powers, like those of other children, were progressively developed: *"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature"* (Luke 2:52).

As a Jew He was made under the Law (Galatians 4:4). Jesus said, *"I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"* (John 6:38). As a man Jesus worked His miracles not by the virtue of His ever-inherent Divinity but by virtue of His perfect faith in the Father and the Word; for He had voluntarily limited His deity to human flesh and mental faculties. This is the reason for His statements: *"I can of mine own self do nothing"* (John 5:30); *"The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works"* (John 14:10); and *"The flesh profiteth nothing"* (John 6:63). When Peter recognized His divinity and exclaimed, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,"* Jesus said, *"Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee"* (Matthew 16:17). The mortal flesh in which the Word dwelt could reveal nothing more than any other flesh.

Throughout His life Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and no stranger to reproach (Isaiah 53:2-5). Even in His last hours, with bitterness of soul more excruciating than all the bodily sufferings that the whole world had ever known, as the sins of all mankind were laid upon

Him and the Father turned His back upon Him, Jesus cried out, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46).

The man Jesus died, but He rose again that He might be Lord both of the dead and living (Romans 14:9), and then He ascended to His Father. After His death and resurrection, the Son was glorified with the glory which He had with the Father from the beginning (John 17:5). He returned to heaven to reclaim His co-equality with the Father. Because of His existence as man, He can now be the Mediator between man and God (Hebrews 2:17,18). We are told that this Mediator is the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:5,6).

The foregoing passages outline Jesus' proper humanity, and His humble mission as servant. Since His human existence was a pre-condition of His prophetic office (Deuteronomy 18:15), Jesus voluntarily limited Himself by taking on the limitations of human faculties. It was only by this limitation that He could be said to have overcome sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3). This is why we are told that *"in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him"* (Hebrews 5:7-9).

j. Jesus, Very God and Very Man

In all of this, Jesus is both God and man, very God and very man. As man He said of a truth, *"My Father is greater than I"* (John 14:28). As God it was said of Him that He was equal with God (Philippians 2:6). As man it was said of Jesus, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"* (John 3:16). As God, it is said of Him, *"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"* (Ephesians 5:25). It was said of Jesus as man, *"It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin"* (Isaiah 53:10); as God, Jesus declared, *"I lay down my life that I might take it again. No one taketh it from me...I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again"* (John 10:17,18). It is said of Jesus as man, *"Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death"* (Acts 2:24); as God, Jesus proclaimed, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2:19). As man Jesus said, *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Matthew 27:46); as God Jesus promised paradise to the penitent thief who suffered with Him and believed in Him.

In all of these passages, on the one hand Jesus as man is subordinate to the Father and at His disposal; on the other hand, as God, Jesus gives Himself, raises Himself, and ascends in His own might. In every sense, then, Jesus was both God and man, not part God and part man, but all God and all man.

k. The Third Person

Let us now consider the Holy Spirit and show that He, too, is a Person and is God. Personality is understood to include intelligence, will, and individuality. The most obvious argument from the Holy Scriptures which establishes the personality of the Spirit is the fact that He is consistently referred to with the personal pronoun *He*.

When speaking, He says of Himself, *I*. Admittedly, there is an oft-used rhetorical figure of speech called personification in which inanimate things are referred to by personal pronouns; however, this is generally done in cases where personification leaves no doubt as to the fact that a figure of speech is being employed. Such is not the case with the Holy Spirit, for He is repeatedly and consistently referred to with the masculine singular personal pronoun.

The classic example of this truth is found in John 15:26, *"When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me."* The Greek word for *Comforter* is masculine, as is the word for *whom*. It could be argued that *He* would be the logical masculine pronoun to agree with the antecedent, *Comforter*. Since the term *Spirit of truth* is interposed in apposition to *Comforter*, however, the pronoun *he* should agree in gender with this term (as does *which*), if *Comforter* were not understood to be a

Person. This is not the case, for *Spirit of truth* and *which* are neuter in gender. *He* is used then as a personal pronoun to identify a Person, not a thing.

The grammatical accuracy of the original Greek in giving a specific gender to personal pronouns again reveals the Person of the Holy Spirit in the literal translation of Ephesians 1:13,14: "*Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who [hos] is the earnest of our inheritance.*" If the Holy Spirit were a thing, the Greek word would have been neuter in gender and would have been translated, "which" as it is mistakenly done in the Authorized Version. Since it is *who* (masculine singular), it serves further to establish the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Personal acts are constantly attributed to the Holy Spirit throughout the Scriptures. We are told that Holy Spirit speaks: "*The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*" (Acts 13:2), The Holy Spirit searches: "*But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God*" (I Corinthians 2:10). The Spirit testifies: "*And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth*" (I John 5:6). The Holy Spirit leads and guides: "*When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...and he will shew you things to come*" (John 16:13).

One of the essential attributes of personality, the element of will, is one of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit: "*But all these [gifts] worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will*" (I Corinthians 12:11). A thing or an attribute cannot be possessed of a will; therefore, the Holy Spirit must be a Person.

Added to this evidence are the occasions of the personal manifestations of the Holy Spirit in bodily form. These were not apparitions, but rather were tangible, bodily manifestations which only a Being could assume. The most prominent of these incidents took place at the baptism of Jesus: "*And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased*" (Luke 3:22). The dove-like creature which descended upon Jesus was a bodily manifestation of the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Another case of the visible appearance of the Holy Spirit occurred on the day of Pentecost: "*And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*" (Acts 2:3,4). The Holy Spirit took on Himself the visible manifestation of cloven tongues of fire, and in turn, He sat upon each of the disciples, filling them with the Spirit, and informing them of what to say in other tongues.

The Holy Spirit also appeared in a bodily shape in the Old Testament as the *Shekinah*, first as God, Himself, manifest in the burning bush, in the awesome display at Sinai, then in the pillar of fire which guided Israel in the wilderness; and finally in the glory which manifested itself between the cherubim on the mercy seat of the ark in the tabernacle and the temple.

The other possible question that could be posed concerning the personality of the Holy Spirit is the contention that the Holy Spirit is indeed the Father, Himself. This, however, is not reasonable, since the Spirit is called the Spirit of God (Genesis 1:2), and the Spirit which is sent forth from the Father and from the Son (John 14:16;15:26; Galatians 4:6). John 15:26 is clear on this truth: "*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.*" There can be no question, then, that the Spirit is a different person from the Father and the Son, though they are of the same essence and substance. The fact that Jesus promised to send the Comforter from the Father reveals that they are separate Personalities, though they both are one-Word is Spirit and Spirit is Word (John 6:63; I John 5:6).

Because Jesus said in John 4:24, "God is a Spirit," it has been asserted that the Father and the Holy Spirit are the same Person. When this statement is more accurately translated, however, it reveals just the opposite. The Greek, "Pneuma ho Theos," should be translated, "God is Spirit," just as "Theos en ho Logos," is translated "The Word was God," in John 1: 1. God is Word, and God is Spirit; however, there is just as much a Person in the Spirit of God as there is a Person of

the Word of God. The Father, therefore, is no more the Holy Spirit than He is the Word.

The Father and the Holy Spirit then are two distinct, separate personalities, yet at the same time they are of one essence and are coequal. Both have existed from everlasting and will continue so unto everlasting. It is, then, an undeniable fact that the Spirit is Yahweh God and is one with Yahweh God the Father. This, together with Jesus' statement that the Word is Spirit, shows undeniably that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all three are of one and the same essence.

I. Three-Fold God Revealed In the Scriptures

The most commonly used Hebrew term for God is *Elohim*. The word is the plural of *Eloah* and is understood to mean singularity of substance with plurality of person. In truth, the *Shema*, God's great declaration of monotheism, itself, teaches the concept of the Trinity. A literal translation of this commandment is *"Hear, O Israel: Yahweh, our Gods [Elohim], is one Yahweh"* (Deuteronomy 6:4). The word for *Gods* is *Elohim* (plural). Either this is a mammoth paradox, or it indicates that there is more than one personality involved in Yahweh.

Since the nation of Israel was separated from the Gentiles for the express purpose of standing for monotheism and against polytheism, what explanation could be more reasonable for the repeated use of a plural word in reference to the One God? The Hebrew language was certainly rich in words that could have been applied. Indeed, the singular form of *Elohim*, *Eloah*, is used elsewhere in the Scriptures, though not as frequently. As the statement stands, it appears to be a definite expression on the part of the One God that notwithstanding the plurality of Persons suggested by the word *Elohim*, Yahweh is still One.

The first statement of creation leaves the same implication: *"In the beginning Elohim created"* (Genesis 1:1). The divine grammar, then, was perfectly accurate when God said, *"Let us make man in our image,"* not *"I will make man in my image."* The three personalities of God were present from the beginning and effected the creation: *"One God, the Father, of whom are all things"* (1 Corinthians 8:6); *"The Word...all things were made by Him"* (John 1:1,3); *"The spirit of God hath made me"* (Job 33:4). Three Persons were responsible for the creation.

The prophecy of Isaiah 48 is also a beautiful depiction of the threefold God in the Scriptures: *"Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I am also the last...Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and his Spirit hath sent me"* (Isaiah 48:12,16). In this prophecy the Messiah, the Son of God, is commissioned by both the Lord God and His Spirit.

Another outstanding example of the simultaneous manifestation of the three Persons of the Godhead occurred when Jesus was baptized: *"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened: and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, 'Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased'"* (Luke 3:21,22). On this occasion three distinct personalities of God were manifest together: The Son was baptized; the Holy Spirit assumed a bodily shape like a dove; and the Heavenly Father spoke His approval upon the Son.

m. Things that are Made Reveal the Godhead

The greatest key to being able to understand the Godhead is not the exegesis of scriptural passages or the exposition of the doctrine. It is found in one simple passage of scripture in Romans 1:20. *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."* This one passage of scripture is of more value to the comprehension of the Godhead than any other. It says, quite simply, that the one manner in which the Godhead can be understood is through the things that are made, the creation.

(1) The Universe a Tri-Universe

Surely nothing could more clearly reveal the nature of the Creator than His creation.

Interestingly enough, we call the creation a *universe*, not a *multi-verse*, for it is indissolubly one. For thousands of years, however, men of scientific acumen have acknowledged this universe to be composed of three parts, space, matter, and time.

Space is everywhere in the universe. Matter (which includes energy as Einstein's theory of relativity proves) exists everywhere in the universe. Time also exists everywhere in the universe. The universe is a continuum of the three, each distinct and yet each inseparably interrelated with the other two and occupying the whole of the universe.

Space can be understood to reveal the Father God, for it, like He, is unknown and unrevealed. Space can be understood only in terms of the entities of matter (or energy) which exist in it and the events which occur in it. Though space is everywhere, it is invisible and seemingly unreal, except for the fact that matter and energy are everywhere in space, manifesting its existence. Even the atomic structure of matter, itself, when examined closely enough, is found to be composed almost entirely of space.

Just as space can be perceived only in terms of matter, likewise the only way in which the Father is revealed is through the Son, the Person of the Word. John declared *"No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [revealed] him"* (John 1:8). Just as the phenomena of matter and energy represent and reveal intangible space in a form that is comprehensible to us, so the Son manifests the Father.

Time is the universal concept within which space and matter are interpreted and applied. Time itself becomes meaningful only in the terms of matter and events which occur everywhere in space. Likewise, matter, its related events, and the space it occupies are inconceivable except in terms of the individual segments of time during which they are manifest. Just as matter and space can be fully understood only through time, so also the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son with the function of interpreting and applying the will and nature of the Father and the Son to the creation in its individual allotment of time. In the creation of the universe the Father brought forth the Word which created and revealed. Then the Spirit subsequently moved upon what was created molding it in time to the will of the Father and the Son.

The physical universe, then, is amazingly parallel to the nature of the Creator. Indeed, it fully reveals His nature. The tri-universe of space, matter, and time, each distinct and yet each inseparably interrelated with the other two, each and all occupying the entire universe, is a perfect revelation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each distinct, yet each inseparably interrelated with the other two; all co-equal, co-eternal, and consubstantial.

(2) The Three Dimensions of Space

There are exactly three dimensions in space, no more and no less. These three are length, width, and depth (or height). There is no reality in a line or in a plane, both of which are merely mental concepts which can have no real existence alone. Real existence requires the presence of three dimensions. And, these dimensions reveal the trinity of the Godhead.

One of these dimensions, however, cannot exist without the others. If a line is drawn to reveal length, no matter how thin that line may be, it must have some width in order to be seen. The reality of the one dimension can only be comprehended in the presence of two dimensions. Width must be present for length to be revealed.

The manifestations of matter in space can be visualized with the aid of two dimensions. Most of the representations of reality which we see and use are two dimensional. Photographs, drawings, even books are visible and comprehensible to the mind when produced in the dimensions of length and width.

The Heavenly Father, like the dimension of length, is discernible only when demonstrated and represented visibly by the Word of God, the Son. It is the Person of the Word who makes the Person of the Father comprehensible and understandable.

We may be able to see or visualize reality with two dimensions; however, in order to have reality which can be felt or experienced, we must have the presence of the third dimension, depth (or height). A plane with the dimensions of length and width can be seen, but it cannot be touched or experienced. Likewise, the Father and the Son can be seen and understood, but they can be known experientially only through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. For mankind, the experiential reality of God requires more than the recognition of the Father's existence through the revelation of the Son. Man must experience the real presence of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which gives his life depth and meaning.

The dimensions of space—length, width, and depth—then, reveal the nature of the Creator. Just as length can be observed and understood only in terms of width and can be experienced only in terms of depth, so the Father can be revealed only through the Son, and the Father and Son can be experienced only through the Spirit.

(3) The Three Colors of Light

We can come to an even clearer understanding of the nature of the Trinity of Godhead when we consider the pure white light of the sun to which God compares Himself (John 1:9;8:12; I Timothy 6:16; I John 1:5). This light of the sun seems indissolubly one, so much so that an unscientific mind without hesitation would declare it singular and would deny that any plurality of color could be present in it. When science analyzes the one white light through prismatic refraction, however, it finds that in reality it is composed of three spectra of nearly equal length, each of uniform color. These three colors are superimposed one upon another so that the seven colors (seen in the rainbow) which the actual spectrum exhibits arise from the mixture of the three uniform colors. The colors of these three elementary spectra are red, yellow, and blue. The light of the sun, therefore, is white because it is made up of three constituent lights—red, yellow, and blue. Without prismatic refraction, the light appears as one white light.

The Godhead is much the same. Without the division of the Word of God, it is practically impossible to distinguish the difference between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, but an analysis of the Holy Scriptures such as we have herein outlined separates that glowing white light of the Eternal God into three distinct individual colors of beauty that are readily visible to the eye.

The Creator, then, like His creation, is made up of three distinct, equal parts, all having the same essence and characteristics, all having the same powers and the same glory, all being One God.

n. The Name of God—A Revelation of Deity

When the time came for Israel's exodus from Egyptian bondage, God equipped Moses with an infallible witness for his authority to organize such a momentous event: He revealed to him the meaning of His secret name, the name by which He was to be known forever. Listen to His conversation with Moses in Exodus 3:14,15: *"And God said unto Moses, YHWH; and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, YHWH of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations."*

In this experience before the burning bush, Moses was given the understanding of the proper name of the Deity which theretofore had been kept secret but which was to stand forever as a memorial of the Almighty. That name is YHWH, the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. Of course, YHWH, the English equivalent of the Hebrew letters *yothe, hay, waw, hay*, cannot be pronounced because it has no vowels. On this technicality of the usage of vowels and their placement with the Tetragrammaton, there is much controversy; however, the consensus of scholarship concedes that the most likely pronunciation is Yah-weh.

The Authorized Version gives this name as I AM THAT I AM and occasionally refers to Him as Jah (Psalms 68:4) or Jehovah (Exodus 6:3). Most often it names Him as *the Lord*. When one reads the Hebrew Scriptures, however, the constant and perpetual use of YHWH in reference to Deity is unmistakable, appearing some 7,000 times in the Hebrew Bible.

The Hebrew word Yahweh can be compared with the word for being, *hayah*, to gain the full significance of the meaning of the divine name. *Hayah* means "I am." Yahweh means "I am because I am," "I am that I am," or "I cause myself to be." It is literally a formation from the causative conjugation of the verb and is intended to reveal the cause of existence. Yahweh's choice of this verb is intended to reveal the cause of existence. Yahweh's choice of this name to express His being then was highly accurate, for He alone is the cause of His own being or existence. While everything else that exists does so because the Creator brought it into being, He alone is of un-derived existence—He exists of Himself, and He is in the sense that His being is in Himself or that He causes Himself to be. The word *Yahweh* has also been translated, "I will be what I will be," which is obviously a statement of God's immutability, a characteristic which He alone possesses.

Every Old Testament writer, with the exception of the author of the Book of Esther, used the name *Yahweh* in referring to God. Hosea reconfirmed Moses' account of God's name: "*Even Yahweh is Elohim [God] of hosts; Yahweh is his memorial [name]*" (Hosea 12:5). Isaiah 42:8 corroborates this: "*I am Yahweh: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another.*" Jeremiah 16:21 adds confirmation: "*They shall know that my name is Yahweh,*" as does Amos 5:8, "*Yahweh is his name.*"

The account of Zechariah is most unusual. When telling of the second coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah of Israel and the King of the world, Zechariah declared, "*Then Yahweh shall go forth...and his feet shall stand...upon the Mount of Olives...in that day there shall be one Yahweh, and his name one*" (Zechariah 14:3,4,9). The Jesus of the New Testament, then, was the Yahweh who revealed Himself to mankind in the Old Testament. When the Son of God appeared to man in the Old Testament, He did so as Yahweh. In the case of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Scriptures declare that "*Yahweh [on the earth] rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Yahweh out of heaven*" (Genesis 19:24). This certainly suggested the existence of more than one Person in Yahweh.

When this Son of Yahweh, who was named Yahweh in the Old Economy, was brought into the world in the role of Savior, He maintained the name of divinity by which He had revealed Himself to Moses. The name which the angel instructed Joseph and Mary to call Him was Yahshua, which simply means the Eternal Savior. The English word by which we refer to the Son of God is Jesus, which is a transliteration of the Latin *Iesus*, which comes from the Greek *Iesous*, which in turn is a representation of the Hebrew word *Yahshua*.

There can be little doubt that the apostles of the early church represented the name of the Savior as *Iesous* in their writings to the Greeks. He was, no doubt, called Yeshua by many of His disciples in that day, however, the absolute of His name was Yahshua because His name was above every other name that is named among men (Philippians 2:9). He was not simply another Joshua or Yeshua; He was Yahshua, God the Savior.

The Appendix of The Emphatic Diaglott (a translation from the Vatican Manuscript No. 1209, page 897) confirms this conclusion: "For *Isoua* among the Hebrews is salvation, and among them the son of Nun is called Joshua; and *lasoue* is the salvation of Jah." *lasoue* is obviously a transliteration of *Yahshua*.

The very name, by which the Savior was known, then, was a further identification of His divine nature as being one with Yahweh, the Eternal God of Israel. And, it was the name and its meaning in the life of Jesus which brought great consternation to the leaders of Israel in His day.

Jesus made a point with the meaning of the name of God in His debate with the Jews in John 8:56-58: "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.*" This statement of His eternal nature brought violent reaction from the Jews, and they sought to stone Him. Jesus claimed to be the "I Am" here and in six other places in the Scriptures. Interestingly enough, Jesus did not say, "Before Abraham was, I was," but "Before Abraham was, I am." He was declaring that He was the

I AM of the Old Testament, Yahweh the Son in the role of Savior, called Yahshua. Jesus claimed one of the singular attributes of Godhead, existence in the eternal present, with no past or future. And, this was what His very name indicated.

o. A Declaration of Faith

Probably the confession of faith that best encapsulates the truth of the Doctrine of the Trinity is the one called the "Creed of Athanasius" which dates from the fourth century. It makes the following statement:

"And the Catholick Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confusing the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the God-head of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father un-create, the Son un-create, and the Holy Ghost un-create. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals: but one eternal. And also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three un-create: but one un-create, and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighty; but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God, So likewise, the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Ghost is Lord.

And yet not three Lords: but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity: to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord:

So we are forbidden by the Catholick Religion: to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none: neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, not created, nor begotten, but proceeding. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers: one Son, not three sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.

And in this trinity none is afore, or after other: none is greater or less than another; but the whole three Persons are co-eternal together: and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid: the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation: that he also believes rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right Faith is that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance of His Mother, born in the world;

Perfect God, and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; Equal to the Father, as touching His God-head: and inferior to the Father, as touching His Manhood. Who although He is God and Man: yet He is not two, but one Christ; One; not by conversion of the God-head into flesh: but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance; but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our Salvation: descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty: from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting: and they that have done evil into everlasting fire."

p. Conclusion

The Godhead, then, is made up of three distinct, equal Persons, all having the same

essence and the same characteristics, all having the same powers and the same glory, all being One God. The Oneness or Unity of God is distributed into the Trinity by placing in their order the three Persons of the one essence. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three, not in condition, but in degree; not in divisions but in distinction; not in substance, but in form; not in power or ability, but in aspect of authority. In this way, the One God is understood in terms of three divine Persons, not in terms of three Gods.

The concept of monotheism was misunderstood by the Jews who glorified the Father, but gave Him not thanks, for they did not recognize the Son. The disciples likewise received the Son, but they denied Him, because they did not recognize the Holy Spirit. This is the reason for the commission of Jesus to the apostles, *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"* (Matthew 28:19). By this commission, Jesus revealed the fact that whosoever omits any of these three, either the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, fails in glorifying and serving God perfectly. It is only through the Trinity of the Godhead that God the Father is properly glorified, for *"every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."*

The mystery of the Godhead is clearly revealed to anyone who will accept the truth of the Trinity that is outlined in the Holy Scriptures. It has been the accepted teaching of the church since its inception and will remain so, revealing forever to the believer the true nature and essence of the One God whom he worships.

They who are baptized *"in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"* are they who accept the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, believing them to be One God. They are they who receive the threefold benediction: *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."*

3. The Divine Law of Immutability

The single most important tool for understanding the will of God for any dispensation is the divine law of immutability. This divine law is essential to the comprehension of the whole Bible, particularly the more far-reaching truths which it contains. Without this basic key to the knowledge of God, one cannot help but stumble blindly about in the Scriptures, spasmodically achieving a limited knowledge of dispensational truth. With the understanding of the divine law of immutability, however, one has the stability to undertake a progressive, systematic search of the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation and thereby arrive at eternal, unchangeable truth.

It should be noted initially that divine law is not the Ten Commandments, the Law of Moses, the law of the Spirit of life, or any other law that relates to the affairs of man. Divine Law is the one law which Yahweh, the Eternal God, established to govern His own actions. It is the nucleus and governing factor for any action of God. The term *divine law* means *the governing element of that which pertains to or proceeds from the nature of God*.

Divine law is that principle of God which is perpetual and immutable (unchangeable) regardless of time, people, or circumstance. It is set forth simply and clearly in Ecclesiastes 3:14,15: *"I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever... That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past."* This scripture states that God is not subject to change. He does not change because He cannot change. Though His fundamental and basic plan for the ages may be altered for the purpose of bringing forth perfection to the human situation, that plan is not subject to change in the sense of its revocation and the introduction of another totally different one.

Even the name which God chose for His own identity is a revelation of the fact that He never changes. The name *Yahweh* is translated to mean either "I Am That I Am" or "I Will Be That I Will Be" (Exodus 3:14). This name, while it is a statement of its Bearer's underived existence (He causes Himself to be), also reveals His characteristic of immutability in contrast to the changeable ways of the gods of the heathens. Since God dwells in the eternal present (I Am), there is no past to forget and no future for Him to look to; therefore, there is no chance of His changing.

The fact that the invisible principles of God from the foundation of the world are clearly understood by the things that are made (Romans 1:20) provides means of confirming the divine law of immutability. The order and constancy of the laws that govern the material creation are testimony to the unchangeableness of its Creator. Life and orderly existence would be impossible without the controlling factor of Newton's laws of gravity: what goes up must come down, and for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. The fact that these laws are constant and unchangeable makes it possible for life to exist on the earth.

Another marvel of science, electricity, can be beneficial to mankind because of the unchangeable laws that govern its conduct. Electricity has been harnessed to bless mankind because Ohm's law of resistance charts an unchangeable course of action for the flow of electrical current. Even the very interaction of the masses of the universe, from the tiniest hydrogen atom to the black holes, is regulated by inalterable laws of nature which literally hold the universe together.

Another of the great visible testimonies to the immutability of God is the continuing existence of the Jewish people and the restoration of the nation of Israel in the twentieth century. Though countless attempts have been made to obliterate the Jewish people from the face of the earth, the immutability of God has kept the remnant of them in the earth, maintained their identity in spite of all the social norms for assimilation of conquered peoples, and established them again in their own land. Malachi 3:6 declares that this is testimony to the immutability of God: *"For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."*

When the Son of God came into the world, it was only natural that this same principle of divine law be applied to Him. And so the Scriptures declare, *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever"* (Hebrews 13:8). This passage of scripture cites the continuity and unchangeable nature of Jesus as an example for believers.

God does not and indeed cannot abandon His counsel or will for one day to adopt a totally new and different plan for another time. James 1:17 declares: *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* Even the very giving of the gifts of the new covenant—the gift of eternal life, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the ministry—was done according to His eternal, unchangeable will. Since there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning with God, the gifts and callings of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29).

Since what God does is forever and the laws by which He operates are not subject to repeal or abrogation, it is logical to look for the duplication of fundamental principles in the work of God in succeeding dispensations. While time, people, material, and circumstance may vary, the underlying concept remains constant. It is by this principle of immutability that a common denominator of the actions of God may be found in every era. This principle is stated in a well-known saying, "History repeats itself." World history is filled with examples of the repetition of circumstances and events governed by the same laws indifferent eras. The birth, rise, decline, and fall of empires in succeeding generations have followed a strikingly similar pattern, revealing the fact that a given set of circumstances applied to the frailties of human nature will bring forth the same results regardless as to the time.

History repeats itself not only in the secular realm but also in the spiritual world. It is the most basic of divine principles that prompted Bildad to rationalize in Job 8:8-10: *"For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:) shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their hearts?"* According to this principle of immutability, if God's people want to learn something of the will of God for their day or for the future, they need only search the past. In this way they arrive at the understanding of the will of God by learning the principles by which He operated in a previous dispensation. The fact that the immutability and faithfulness of God are revealed in the events of the past is confirmed in the statement of Balaam to Balak: *"God*

is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19).

It is from the principle of immutability that the life and ministry of Jesus found prophetic witness in the events and people of the Old Testament, from Adam (I Corinthians 15:45), to Isaac (Romans 9:7), to Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), and so forth. The immutability of God is the underlying principle of Bible typology, which through types, shadows, allegories, analogies, and other principles enables one to understand the workings of God in one dispensation through what He has done in previous dispensations.

The divine law of immutability is also the principle for the repetition of various numbers in Holy Scripture. This is why the number twelve is found when judgment is set (Numbers 1:44; Matthew 19:28). It is why the number seven is seen when power and perfection are manifested (Joshua 6:4,5,8,15; Judges 16:19; Proverbs 9:1; Zechariah 3:9; Revelation 1:4;5:6;8:6;10:4). The repetition of other numbers is equally prominent.

It is from the application of the principle of divine immutability that searching the Holy Scriptures is helpful to the believer: *"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come"* (I Corinthians 10:11); *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope"* (Romans 15:4); *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come..."* (Hebrews 10:1); *"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets"* (Romans 3:21).

It is also on this most fundamental of divine principles that the Lord Jesus could assert: *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill"* (Matthew 5:17). It is on the authority of the divine law of immutability that it may be established that if Judaism were ever God's system of praise, worship, and service, it must remain so in some form.

God's people can know what pleases God today. They can do so because the divine law of immutability requires that God never change. What pleased Him in the past must in some form or in some manifestation please Him today. Though the manifestation may change, the underlying principles that govern the conduct of God never change. This is the divine law of immutability, the most basic of all keys to understanding the will of God.

4. Theocratic Government

God is the author of discipline and order. He is not, nor can He be, the author of confusion. The material creation, which mirrors His infinite wisdom and reveals His characteristics and attributes to mankind, is designed with complete attention to detail and precision and exists only because of the unchanging laws which govern its interaction. Since God is completely consistent in all that He does, it follows that He never leaves His people without guidance and discipline. The order provided by the governing principles of the universe is also reflected in God's system for governing the religious activities of His people, a system called theocratic government. This order of government is established on the biblical premise that God has always used men to provide direction, discipline, and protection for His chosen people.

The proper order and implementation of theocratic government have always been subjects of vigorous debate. Throughout religious history there have been those who believed in democracy—that the people should decide for themselves what they should do religiously. On the other hand, there have been those who believed in autocracy—that one man should have complete and total authority in unrestrained dominance over the lives of others, religiously, socially, and economically. As is generally the case in such polarized issues, the truth lies between these polarized extremities.

Some have argued that God has never had government for His people, which all men should be free to do as they please without any oversight. This argument, however, is an exercise in futility. The truth is that He has always had some form of government for the affairs of those who served Him. In some cases theocratic government extended to civil and social affairs as well as

religious activities. In other cases, theocratic government has been reserved to the guidance of religious and spiritual affairs. The one thing that is consistent in the record of all the manifestations of God's government is that God has always had an anointed leader whom He appointed over the affairs of His people. While the order of government and the delineation of delegated authority may have changed, the appointment of an anointed leader as the highest authority has remained consistent. The office of the anointed leader, then, is the hallmark of theocratic government, the one factor without which it cannot exist.

The government of God's people was manifested in the Old Testament, where in succeeding generations God appointed one man to be the anointed leader. From the sheikdom of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the prophets Moses and Samuel, to the judges Samson and Gideon, to the monarchy of Saul, David, and Solomon, theocratic government functioned in the Old Testament in such a way that the anointed of God had virtually total authority over the domestic and spiritual affairs of the people.

The introduction of the New Testament brought reforms to God's system of praise, worship, and service, reforms which were extended to theocratic government as well. Just as there had been a change in the priesthood to provide for involvement of all believers, there was also a change in theocratic government. Since the New Testament kingdom of God was a spiritual kingdom, the people of God were given individual control over their own domestic affairs (within the confines of righteousness and holiness of the Word of God), and theocratic government was transformed into a controlling factor for the religious activities of the people. In the governing of their religious activities, the people were also given opportunities through their representatives to serve in advisory capacities to the anointed leader, who remained the highest authority in the church on earth.

One of the ways in which God chose to reform theocratic government in the New Testament was to broaden the base of the exercise of power to include greater input from a larger number of people. This followed the advice of Solomon: *"In the multitude of counselors is safety"* (Proverbs 11:14). This is not to say that God's government took on the form of democracy (with all the people having an equal voice) or republicanism (with representatives of the people having an equal voice) or even an oligarchy (with a group of men ruling collectively). The perfection of New Testament theocracy came in the introduction of the concept of anointed leadership as a final authority but not the total authority.

The New Testament church established the precedent for the proper operation of theocratic government in the dispensation of grace. The church had an anointed leader, the Chief Bishop, who was James, the brother of Jesus. He was the highest authority in the church both in judicial and executive government. He was responsible for making the final decision in matters of doctrine and practice for the church (judicial government) and in matters of administration of the church (executive government). In neither of these positions of authority, however, did James seek to exercise total authority, choosing rather to meet with advisors to weigh the various aspects of each decision before establishing a course of action for the church.

Such was the case in Acts 15 when the question of whether or not circumcision should be required of the Gentiles came before the church. As Chief Bishop, James convened a Council of Apostles and Elders, over which he served as moderator. The council heard doctrinal presentations and testimonies from various leaders of the church, and the record states that there was much disputation. After the various aspects of the issue were thoroughly discussed, "they held their peace." Then James brought prophecy to bear on the subject and decided the issue with the four requirements that would be placed upon the Gentiles. Whether James merely summarized the agreement that had already been reached or whether he made a decision because no agreement could be reached, the fact is that he rendered a final decision by saying: "Wherefore my sentence is..." This was a manifestation of the proper operation of theocratic government in the judicial affairs of the church where the laws and will of God were interpreted and applied to the situation or circumstances that the church then faced. James did not assume total authority to make a

decision without counsel nor did he allow the ministers of the church to make a democratic decision for themselves. He guided the council through deliberations that presented all sides of the issue and then made a decision based on the discussion and the witness of prophecy.

In the operation of executive government of the church, James also established the precedents for proper manifestation of theocratic government. In the recognition of ministerial appointments and ordinations, James used a presbytery to serve in an advisory capacity similar to that of the Council of Apostles and Elders in matters of doctrine and practice. After Paul and Barnabas were commissioned of the Holy Spirit to go to the Gentiles, the presbytery of James, Peter, and John gave them the right hand of fellowship and approval to continue that work. James, of course, was the final authority; however, he sought and used the advice of the presbytery (or body of elders).

Another area of executive government in the church is its business affairs. In this case the early church also established a system which involved the input of a multitude of counselors. In Acts 6 the church was instructed to choose seven men to be administrators of the business of the church. These men were ordained and appointed by the apostles over the business. The business administration of the church, therefore, requires the interaction of counselors to the Chief Bishop, who still is the final authority.

Each area of operation of theocratic government is designed in the New Testament to provide for collective deliberation in the decision-making processes and for the rendering of a final decision by the anointed leader. Whether it is the establishment of doctrine and practice by the judicial branch of church government or the administration of the ministry or business of the church, New Testament theocracy provides for a multitude of counselors and the final authority of the Chief Bishop.

New Testament theocracy is constituted by the rulership of God through a divinely appointed anointed leader and a scriptural pattern of bishops appointed under him. The New Testament officers of theocracy are (a) the Anointed Leader, (b) the Twelve Apostles, (c) the Seven Overseers, (d) the Seventy-two Prophets, and (e) the seven-fold ministry of five gifts (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher) and two degrees (bishop and deacon).

a. The Anointed Leader

The Scriptures reveal the fact that for every dispensation of time God has always had one man who was designated as the leader of His people. Known more specifically as the Anointed Leader, he is a man appointed of God and endowed with the revelation and program of God for the particular dispensation in which he lives. The Anointed Leader is appointed for life and may be removed only by a sovereign act of God in connection with His will or by reason of sin and then only by the unanimous agreement of the Council of Apostles and Elders.

It is the unique responsibility of the Anointed Leader to give direction to the church. This principle is found in Matthew 24:45,46: *"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing"* There can be no question but that the ruler over the household (church) of God is none other than one man, the Anointed leader. He is the servant of God. The peculiar function of the Anointed Leader in the words of Jesus is to "give them meat (food) in due season." The work that is reserved to the Anointed Leader is that of bringing forth the sustenance for the church that is in season. The type of food, the quality of the food, and the seasoning of the food are all matters that are left in the hands of the Anointed Leader, for different foods are required at different times and in different amounts to be "in season."

The primary function of the office of the Anointed Leader in New Testament order is to provide seasonal direction and sustenance to the church. It is this function that is reserved to him alone. It is his responsibility to lead the church in the prophetic work that is to be done at a particular time, and it is he alone to whom God communicates that sense of direction that the whole church should take. While others may contribute advice and counsel through their gifts and callings in God, the decisions for the course that the church will take in a particular dispensation rest finally upon the

Anointed Leader.

An example of the nature of the Anointed Leader's responsibility for knowing the will of God for a particular time in God's program and leading the people in that allotment of the program of God is found in Noah. By the anointing of God, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and received from Him the revelation of the plan for the salvation of his household. As God's Anointed Leader, he received the plan for the building of the ark and led the household of faith (his own family) in the development of that plan that resulted in the saving of his house.

In the New Testament James was the Anointed Leader of the church. In Acts 15 he exercised the final authority of setting the prophetic course of the church in its work of bringing the Gentiles into the blessing of the church. The authority of James as the servant of God to give seasonal direction to the church is seen in Galatians 2:1,2, where the apostle Paul who was uniquely called of God and given a prophetic office, found it necessary to go to Jerusalem to confer with James regarding the validity of the work that he was doing among the Gentiles to discover whether he "should run, or had run, in vain." In Acts 21:17-25 James instructed Paul to shave his head and submit himself to the rites of purification in the temple as a sign that he had not violated the commandments of God. Peter instructed the people in Acts 12:17 to report to James the fact that he had been forced to withdraw himself because of circumstances that confronted him.

The Scriptures confirm the fact that there must be an Anointed Leader over the church in the last days: *"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods"* (Matthew 24:45-47). When Jesus returns, He will find the man whom He has appointed as Anointed Leader over the church fulfilling his responsibilities to lead the church in the Word and will of God.

The Anointed Leader can best be described as the man who is chosen of God to lead His people in a particular dispensation, who is spoken to directly by God and given the answers which are needed in that hour, and who has the vision and revelation of the overall program of God and knows the dispensation allotted to him to bring about the climax of that program.

b. The Twelve Apostles

The offices of the Twelve Gentile Apostles of The Church of God are prophetic in nature. While it is true that the offices of the twelve apostles are restored in the church in the last days because they were a part of the governmental pattern of the church in the first century, the primary reason for the ordination of these officers in the government of the church today is the fact that the prophetic word calls for their appointment.

In Genesis 16:11,12 the prophetic type for the setting up of the church among the Gentiles is set forth: *"And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man...."* The description of Ishmael as a wild man is the key to the identity of Ishmael as a type of the Gentile church, for the Gentiles were called the wild olive tree in Romans 11:24.

Since the early church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:19-22) it is reasonable to expect that the restored church among the Gentiles should be built upon the same foundation. Amos 9:11 (quoted in Acts 15:14-18) predicted that the tabernacle of David that had fallen down would be rebuilt among the Gentiles. Acts 3:20, 21 prophesied of a restoration of all things in the day immediately preceding the coming of the Lord Jesus. Isaiah 1:26 declared that one of the major parts of this restoration would be the reestablishing of the judges who represent the twelve apostles (Matthew 19:28).

In Genesis 17:18-20 the prophetic promise of the establishment of Twelve Gentile Apostles is set forth: *"And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! And God said...as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation."* Just as Isaac through Jacob had produced the twelve princes of Israel who were the prophetic types

of the twelve apostles that Jesus established, so Ishmael produced twelve princes who were the prophetic types of the Twelve Gentile Apostles.

The Twelve Apostles are judges under the Anointed Leader who help to determine the course of the church and establish its doctrine and practice. The three senior officers in the Twelve Apostles who lead the apostleship in this work are the Two Witnesses of the Chief Bishop's office and the Spokesman for the Twelve. Together with the Anointed Leader they make up the four principal men in the government of the church

The Twelve Gentile Apostles and the Twelve Jewish Apostles make up the Twenty-four Elders who share in the dominion of the kingdom of God during the millennial reign. Since Jesus promised His apostles that they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, the remaining positions of those twenty-four elders (Revelation 4:4) in the millennial throne will be reserved for the Twelve Gentile Apostles who will judge the Gentile nations.

c. The Seven Overseers

The Seven Overseers of the Seven Spirits of God are governmental officers of the church who are directly under the office of the Anointed Leader and are responsible for the operation of the Seven Spirits of God in the church.

The Seven Overseers were first appointed in the early church in Acts 6. This was done in the fulfillment of the prophecy of Proverbs 9:1 which reveals the fact that the seven overseers are foundational pillars in the church. They are a part of the system of delegated authority in theocratic government for the church.

d. The Seventy-two Prophets

The Seventy-two Prophets are counselors together with the Anointed Leader and the Twelve Apostles of the doctrine and practice of the church. Their offices in the last days' church are prophetic in that they are the counselors that Isaiah 1:26 declared would be restored as they were in the beginning before the early church went into apostasy.

The Seventy-two Prophets are men who have received the spirit of the Anointed Leader by virtue of ordination as is clearly seen in the Old Testament example of the setting up of the seventy (Numbers 11: 16,17). The Seventy-two Prophets are foundational officers in the flow of theocratic government to the people.

e. The Ministry in Theocratic Government

Theocratic government is extended from the hierarchy of the church to the membership of the church through the seven-fold ministry that is made up of five gifts and two degrees. It is through the manifestation of these gifts and degrees of ministry that the oversight and protection of theocratic government are extended to every individual member of the church.

(1) Five Gifts

The five gifts that are given to the ministry for equipping the saints of God for worlds of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, and for leading the church to the perfection of maturity are apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. Each of these functions in the order of theocratic government to give direction to the lives of members of the church and to help bring them to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

(2) Two Degrees

The two degrees of ministry are bishop and deacon. The degree of bishop is given to the church for oversight both administratively and judicially. The degree of deacon is given as the ordained ministry to serve the church in the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Both of these degrees function in the order of theocratic government to give direction to the lives of members of the church and to bring them to maturity.

5. The Melchisedec Priesthood

"The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool...The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalms 110:1,4). Just before the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament was to reach the zenith of its glory in the service of Solomon's temple; King David predicted that it would be supplanted with a better, eternal priesthood in which the Lord Jesus, Himself, would assume the position of High Priest, seated at the right hand of the heavenly Father.

The Book of Hebrews deals extensively with this transition in priesthood from the Aaronic to the Melchizedek order in chapters 4 through 8. *"We have a great high priest, which is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. Now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much more also he is the mediator of a better covenant"* (Hebrews 4:14;8:6). The entire New Testament (better covenant) is contingent upon the more excellent priesthood (ministry) of Jesus Christ, the eternal High Priest.

There are, however, many reasonable questions concerning the priesthood of the New Testament that demand scriptural answers: Is a continuing priesthood of men necessary under grace? What is the function of a priest? What is the order of the priesthood? How is priesthood conferred? Can Gentiles be involved in the priesthood?

The Catholic, Episcopal, and Orthodox churches declare that a continuing priesthood is necessary for the New Testament era, and each assigns its own definition to the responsibilities incumbent upon such priesthood. Most of Protestant Christianity, however, either totally denies the necessity of a priesthood of men, says that every believer is a priest, or obliquely refers to its ministers as functioning in a capacity vaguely similar to that of the Old Testament priesthood.

The fact that Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven to make intercession for mankind as their High Priest is disputed by none. The question arises as to whether or not it is needful for the priestly office of Jesus to be extended to men on earth and whether or not the work of ministers of the gospel is in anyway related to the function of priests in the Old Testament.

On one extreme it is believed that Jesus is the only priest of the New Testament. It is asserted that the word *priest* means *one who stands as a mediator between God and man to make sacrifices for sins*. If such a narrow meaning could be ascribed to the term priest, then there is no question that Jesus is the only priest, for He is the only Mediator and the only sacrifice for sins. To give such a restricted interpretation of the office of a priest, however, is arbitrary and does not take into account the various other functions of the priesthood in the Old Testament.

On the other extreme it is believed that there is indeed a human priesthood, but that every believer is a member of that priesthood. It is asserted that since all who believe in Christ have equal access into the holy of holies through the blood shed at Calvary, all believers are priests, and there is no need for men to be set apart as priests or ministers. Most people who espouse this teaching call I Peter 2:5,9 to witness to their assertion: *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood...but ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation."*

While it is demonstrably true that every believer has access to the throne of grace through the shed blood of Jesus and as such shares in the priesthood of Christ, it is erroneous to assume that there is no need for priests in the New Testament era to carry out the other scriptural functions of priesthood.

The functions of the priesthood in the Old Testament were threefold: it offered sacrifices to God to atone for the sins of the people; it instructed the people in the law and its observance; and it maintained the worship of God according to His system. Each of these three functions was carried forward into the New Testament dispensation, with only the method of observance modified to correlate with the new covenant.

At their appointed times all of the priests of the Old Testament taught the law, officiated in worship, and offered sacrifices and offerings. Any consecrated priest could offer a burnt offering, a peace offering (thanksgiving, payment of vows, freewill offering); an incense offering

(accompanied by a meal offering or a drink offering); a sin offering (for wrongs where the effect was on the sinner); or a trespass offering (for wrongs done to others). Each of these offerings was made in the holy place and in the case of the sin offering and trespass offerings blood was sprinkled before the veil of the most high place.

One task of the priesthood was reserved for the high priest and for him alone: the offering of the blood of the bullock, the ram, and the goat on the Day of Atonement. Only the high priest could make the offering which atoned for the sins of all the people of Israel and made all the other offerings complete. This is the thrust of Hebrews 9:6: *"Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people..."*

This sacrifice was unique in that it was offered on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The daily offerings and sacrifices were offered before the veil that enshrouded the ark in the most holy place. It is apparent, then, that the yearly sacrifice of the Day of Atonement brought completion to those daily sacrifices. The imperfection of this sacrifice was the fact that it had to be offered yearly and as such could not complete the atonement even for the high priest who offered it.

The perfected order of sacrifice for sin in the New Testament was made when *"Christ being come an high priest of good things to come...By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us...Not yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others...but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself...but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God"* (Hebrews 9:11,12,26; 10:12).

The work that was unique to the high priest of making the atonement for the sins of all Israel that completed the daily sacrifices was fulfilled once for all in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus as the High Priest of the Melchisedec priesthood. When He offered His own blood on the altar in heaven, Jesus made atonement for the sins of all mankind, past, present, and future. All the past sacrifices for sin were complete in His sacrifice. And, there need not be any future sacrifice, for the blood has been shed and atonement made for eternity.

The daily offerings for sins which the priests of the Old Testament made became superfluous in the New Testament, for there will be no future sacrifice to make them complete. Since they would already have been made complete through the eternal sacrifice of Jesus, they would be meaningless; therefore, as Daniel 9:26,27 predicted, the daily sacrifice ceased when the Messiah was cut off. The New Testament priesthood, consequently, is nowhere found concerning itself with sacrificing for sins.

The continuation of the second function of the priesthood in the New Testament is readily seen. Just as the Old Testament priests and Levites instructed the people in the keeping of the law, so Jesus commissioned His ministers to go and teach all nations *"to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28: 19,20).

The work of preaching the gospel serves both as a fulfillment of the Old Testament priest's work of teaching the law and offering peace, incense, and burnt offerings. *"That I should be a minister of Christ Jesus to the nations, sacrificing the gospel of God, in order that the offering of the nations may be acceptable, having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 15:16; literal Greek). The Greek word *leitourgon*, translated "minister" in the Authorized Version, is used again in Hebrews 10:11, *"And every priest standeth daily ministering [leitourgeon] and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices."* The work of continually preaching the Gospel, then, is closely parallel with the work of the daily sacrifices of the Old Testament. The priest of the New Testament carries out the sacrificial ritual by offering God's sacrifice for sin (the person of Jesus Christ) to mankind, saying in Christ's stead, *"Be ye reconciled to God"* (II Corinthians 5:20).

The third function of the priesthood of the Old Testament was also continued in the New Testament, again with a new order. The ministry in the New Testament continued to lead the

people in worship. In the Old Testament the priests offered peace, incense, and burnt offerings. In the New Testament the priests led the worship in spirit and truth through singing, praise, dancing, and other worship forms.

One interesting example of this truth is found in Acts 13:1,2: *"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers...As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Paul for the work whereunto have called them."* We must be careful to notice that these men were not ministering to the people, nor were they ministering to one another. They were "ministering to the Lord." The Greek word for ministering here is *leitourgounton*, from which we derive our English word liturgy. These men were carrying out a liturgical worship service to God. They were leading in the worship as a priest of the Old Testament would have done. *Wuest's Expanded Greek Translation* renders this passage thus: *"Now as they were ministering to the Lord in sacred things and were fasting, the Holy Spirit..."* The third function of the priest—that of officiating in public worship—was continued in the New Testament.

The New Testament Melchisedec priesthood perpetuated the functions of the Old Testament Levitical priesthood. The High Priest has offered once and for all the complete sacrifice for sin. The ministers whom He has ordained on earth continue to preach the gospel, offer God's sacrifice to men, and lead the worship of God in spirit and truth.

Since the law was a shadow of good things to come in the grace dispensation (Hebrews 10:1), we might well expect the order of the priesthood in the New Testament to be reflected in the priesthood and its related offices in the Old Testament. That priesthood included three levels of temple service: the Levites, the Aaronic priests, and the chief priests. All of the priests were of the tribe of Levi; hence, the term Levitical priesthood. Only the direct descendants of Aaron could be priests. The chief priests were a higher order that involved administrative positions.

This Old Testament type is clearly revealed in the New Testament anti-type. All of those who have been called of God to minister His Word in one capacity or another correspond to the Levites who served in the temple, prepared sacrifices, and carried out other functions that did not directly relate to liturgical order. Every minister fits in this category of service.

The Aaronic priests of the Old Testament reveal the ordained priesthood ministry in the New Testament. This office of ordained priest is revealed in the deacons of I Timothy 3:8-13. Verse 13 of this passage is literally translated from the Greek as follows: *"For the ones having ministered well, acquire for themselves a good position and much boldness in the faith in Christ Jesus"* (Literal Greek). This scripture implies that one must have ministered well and have proven himself before acquiring the position of Deacon, or an ordained priest. Verse 10 also lends credence to this idea: *"Let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon..."*

The offices of the Chief Priests are mentioned in Ezra 8:24: *"Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests..."* They are also mentioned in Matthew 24:16:21. The offices represented a higher order of the priesthood. Administrative positions are also revealed in the New Testament Judaism priesthood in I Timothy 3:1-7. The office of the bishop is a higher order of the ministry which has to do with administrative responsibility. The Greek word that is translated *bishop* is *episkopos*, which means an overseer. A bishop, then, corresponds to one of the chief priest of the Old Testament.

The order of the priesthood of both Old and New Testaments, then, is parallel. In Old Testament Judaism a chief priest was first a Levite (by virtue of being born of the tribe of Levi), second a priest (by virtue of being born of the lineage of Aaron), third a chief priest (by reason of administrative appointment). In the New Testament a bishop is first a minister (by virtue of his calling from God), second a deacon (by virtue of his ordination), and third a bishop (by reason of his administrative appointment).

According to Hebrews 5:4, no man takes the honor of the priesthood unto himself unless he is first called of God. Even, Jesus, Himself, became a priest upon the authority of Psalms 2:7. Those who would be priests must first be called of God. Then, they must qualify themselves

through training (II Timothy 2:15), and they must bring forth fruit to show that they are qualified (I Timothy 3:8-10).

The New Testament principle of ordination by the laying on of hands then comes into play. We find this first in the ministry of Jesus when He ordained twelve apostles. We find it continuing even among the Gentile churches where at the direction of Paul, bishops were ordained in every city in which an assembly was present (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23). This ordination is described by the Greek words *kathistemi* meaning *to place or set down* (Titus 1:5) and *cheirotoneo* meaning *to elect by stretching forth the hand* (Acts 14:23).

Ordination into the priesthood is a part of the doctrine of laying on of hands mentioned in Hebrews 6. One became an ordained priest by the laying on of hands of the presbytery (the body of elders). The conferring of the office of bishop involved an appointment to an administrative post as well as a liturgical ceremony. In the Old Testament it was conferred by the leader of Israel, Ezra. In the New Testament it is conferred by the leader of the church. Priesthood, then, is conferred upon qualified men in ordination by the laying on of hands of the presbytery.

The Old Testament order excluded the Gentiles from membership in the priesthood. The New Testament, however, extended all of the covenants of God to the Gentiles—the covenant of Abraham, the covenant of salvation, and the covenant of the priesthood. I Peter 2:5-10 declare that whereas the Gentiles were in times past not a people, they are now the people of God and as such inheritors of the priesthood: *"Ye (Gentiles) are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation."* This is a direct quotation of Exodus 19:5,6. Priesthood, then, is also extended to Gentiles.

A classic example from the Old Testament of a Gentile's being involved in priesthood and offering sacrifices to Yahweh God is revealed in Jethro, a priest of Midian (Exodus 2,3). The priesthood of Jethro was probably a remnant of the order of which Melchisedec was a priest, though it was probably altered. It is true; however, that Jethro did make an offering to Yahweh, declaring Him to be the only God.

Isaiah 61 declares that in the time of the arise, shine of the church, priesthood would be present: *"But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord: Men shall call you the Ministers of our God."* While this passage applies historically and futuristically to Israel, it applies spiritually to the church during its restoration among the Gentiles (Isaiah 60:1-8). Isaiah 66:21 also reveals that God would take from among the Gentiles and ordain a priesthood of both priests and Levites: *"And I will also take of them (Gentiles) for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord."*

This is confirmed by Paul in Romans 15:16, where the apostle quotes this passage of Isaiah: *"That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, sacrificing the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost"* (Literal Greek). This parallels Isaiah 66:20: *"And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations...as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord."*

It is scriptural therefore, that priesthood is ordained from among the Gentiles after the order of Melchisedec!

God does have a Melchisedec Priesthood for the New Testament composed of those men and women, both Jew and Gentiles, whom He has ordained with the commission to preach the Gospel, to minister the word of reconciliation, and to officiate in public worship. This priesthood is divided among ministers, deacons, and bishops. It is conferred on committed men and women by the laying on of hands of a presbytery. This is the new order of priesthood in the New Testament.

6. Female Ministers

Because of the prophecy of Joel concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days in which both the sons and daughters of Zion would prophesy (Joel 2:28), The Church of God believes that women are called equally with men to the world of ministering the gospel. In Bible days women who preached the Word or ministered before the Lord were often called *prophetesses*, a term which literally means a "divinely gifted female teacher." In reality the work of

a woman who prophesies (preaches) is parallel with the work of a man who prophesies (preaches) in the New Testament ministry.

Many organizations have ignored the repeated references in the Bible to the fact that women were used to preach and teach the Word of God and have placed their emphasis on a misconception of Paul's reference in I Timothy 2:11,12 and I Corinthians 14:34,35 that women keep silence in the churches to exclude women from public ministry. The truth is that in both of these references Paul is dealing with the need for wives to be in subjection to their husbands and not to usurp authority over them. If the instruction were that all women should be silent in churches, it would not be possible for women to pray, sing, or join in any other part of the worship service. The truth is that as long as a woman is in subjection to the headship of her husband and her leaders in the Lord, she is at liberty to be used of God in any capacity of ministry, including preaching, teaching, and defending the gospel of Jesus Christ and administering the sacraments of the church. A woman may be ordained as a deaconess, the office parallel to a deacon, the title of ordained ministry. The only area of ministry that is reserved by the Scriptures for men is the office of bishop.

Examples of women who were ministers before the Lord and His people in Bible days are many. Miriam was esteemed along with Moses and Aaron as a leader in Israel (Micah 6:4) and led the song of victory after the triumph over Pharaoh (Exodus 15:20,21). Deborah served as judge of all Israel (Judges 4:4). Huldah was a prophetess who gave words of the Lord to the priests for the king of Judah (II Kings 22:14-20). She was used to give instruction to the king (II Chronicles 34:22,28). Anna prophesied to all Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38). Phoebe was a deaconess of the early church and was sent to serve the Roman church with commendations from Paul (Romans 16:1, 2). Philip, one of the Seven Overseers of the early church, had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9).

Since there is neither male nor female in the kingdom of God (Galatians 3:26,29), there are no restrictions on the gender of those whom God may call and ordain to preach the gospel of the kingdom and minister to the needs of humanity. The Church of God believes that women may share equally with men in this calling.

7. New Testament Judaism

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was the promised Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world. His miraculous birth, His sinless life, His atoning death, and His glorious resurrection were all predicted by the Hebrew prophets of old. His divine mission on earth was encapsulated in this statement: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

But, did Jesus start a new religion? Is He responsible for all the differing doctrines and practices which bear the name of Christianity today? Why is there such a startling difference between Christianity and Judaism, the religion of the Old Testament? Can two religions that claim to spring from the same God fail to have many-indeed, most- things in common? These are reasonable questions that deserve sensible, factual answers.

Jesus (Yahshua) was a Jew according to the flesh, an heir of the covenant of God through Abraham. His lineage was of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). He was reared in a Jewish family that was proud of the heritage in Judaism and that did everything according to its precepts (Luke 2:39). While Jesus often attacked the oral traditions that became the basis for Talmudic Judaism, He respected and honored Biblical Judaism, the religion of the Old Testament. The religion which Jesus practiced throughout His life was Judaism, from His first pilgrimage to Jerusalem at age twelve until His last Passover.

Those who think that the ministry of Jesus destroyed the Jewish religion should listen to His own words: *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. 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"* (Matthew 5:17,18). Jesus completed the fulfillment of all

the Messianic aspects of the law and the prophets; however, He did not terminate all the law any more than He fulfilled all prophecy (Acts 24:14). Jesus, then, came to fulfill, not terminate the religion of the Old Testament.

Jesus was a reformer, not an innovator. It might be said that He was a reformed Jew, or should we say, the Reforming Jew. His ministry was Judaism's time of restoration (Hebrews 9:10).

The Messiah simply did not come to destroy the oracles of God that He had given to the Jewish people (Romans 3:1-3). He did not come to replace a bad religion with a good one (Romans 7:12). His coming brought a new covenant which reformed and perfected the ancient religion of Judaism (Jeremiah 18:1-6) by taking away the superfluous, strengthening the meaningful, and adding the dimension of the Spirit. Jesus established an experience which makes it possible for men to live the righteous principles that Biblical Judaism espoused (Romans 8:4; Hebrews 8:10).

The life and death of Jesus Christ satisfied the demands of divine justice for the sins of the human race. He became the perfect sacrifice when He voluntarily offered Himself once for all as a perpetual atonement for the sins of mankind (Hebrews 9:14,24). Because of this eternal work of redemption, Jesus stands as the only embodiment of the righteousness and justification of God for man (I Corinthians 1:30).

In justification by faith we see the perfection which Jesus brought to Judaism. *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"* (Romans 10:4). While we have the Messiah's word that He did not end the law, we see that the use of the law for justification or righteousness is ended. Justification before God is no more a heavy yoke of works to establish self-righteousness; it is now a righteousness of faith. Still, the law remains as a guideline for discipline and worship.

By His atoning work on Calvary, Jesus transformed Judaism, God's religion, from an enforced fleshly ritual that was carried out in fear of death into a voluntary spiritual experience that is carried out in love for the Creator. The righteousness of God is now a faith righteousness imputed to the heart of the believer when *"with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:10).

Because the believer is justified by faith alone, the commandments of Judaism contained in carnal ordinances (rules governing fleshly works, animal sacrifices, and the like) became useless and were nailed to the cross through the body of Jesus (Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14).

The death of Jesus brought about a change in the law (Hebrews 7:12). Though the eternal principles of Judaism remained the same, the manner of and motive for its observance were changed. The new covenant perfected Judaism by elevating its system of worship and service to God into the dimension of worship in Spirit and in truth.

A classic example of the reformation and perfection of Judaism is the Passover. In Old Testament Judaism the Passover commemorated liberation from Egyptian bondage with a supper of roast lamb and bitter herbs. In New Testament Judaism the Passover commemorates liberation from the bondage of sin and death with a supper of the communion of the body and blood of Jesus.

New Testament Judaism, then, is merely a perfected order of worship and service. It is not a method of establishing righteousness but a better way in which we may worship and serve the living God in obedience to His "one faith" (Ephesians 4:5).

There is only one religion (faith) given by God to mankind; He simply does not have one religion for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Every Christian, therefore, is involved in Judaism in one way or another, whether he is aware of it or not. Judaism gave the New Testament believer the two most important things the world has ever known: the Bible, which is Judaism in its purest form, and the Messiah, who is the Jew of Jews, and the Lord from heaven.

Christians who observe communion, or the Lord's Supper, are practicing Judaism by commemorating Passover (I Corinthians 5:7,8). Every believer who practices tithing is claiming his heritage in Old Testament, we could not understand Judaism, for without the tithing (Genesis 28:22). Most Christians observe the injunction of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 by abstaining from blood, a concept which is a direct product of Judaism (Leviticus 17:10). Christians also claim

their heritage in Judaism by other practices: abiding by the Ten Commandments for moral conduct, setting aside a day for rest and worship, using Old Testament prophecy to understand what is happening in the world, appealing to a High Priest (Jesus), and so forth.

When the nation of Israel rejected the Messiah, He did not abolish Judaism, the faith (religion) of God. The Jews' unbelief did not make the faith of God without effect (Romans 3:3). What their unbelief did was to extend God's religion to both Jew and Gentile, so that all believers may become part of Abraham's faith race (Galatians 3:29). Faith in Jesus makes every believer a true Jew (Romans 2:29).

The perpetuation of Judaism in the first century church is well established both by Scripture and by history. The believers were called *Christians* first at Antioch (Acts 11:26), years after the ascension of Jesus. The question arises, what were they called before that time? The answer is clear: they were recognized as a sect of the Jews.

Why then does modern Christianity not have more identity with Judaism? The answer is simple. First century Jews and Christians had one common enemy—the Roman government. Because the Jewish people and the early Hebrew Christians refused to adopt Roman polytheism, they became targets of anti-Semitism, which is the hatred for and aversion to the Jews and things Jewish. As Gentile influence gained control of the church, however, most of its liturgy and concepts based in Judaism were gradually modified to include Roman ideas. Finally, the church and the state were united at the expense of the elimination of everything that had any obvious connection with Judaism. This process was completed when Constantine made Sunday a day of required rest throughout the Roman Empire in A.D. 321 and when he outlawed Christian observance of Passover in A.D. 325.

Since that time, a spirit of anti-Semitism has seemingly characterized Christianity. Even when overt hatred, persecution, and slaughter of the Jews themselves have not been manifest, Christian tradition has consistently brought sweeping indictments against Judaism. Unfortunately the average Christian almost completely misses the advantages of Judaism, the profound legacy of understanding of the Eternal God that knowledge of His ancient religion affords (Romans 3:1). The ingrained fear of anything that even remotely sounds Jewish has kept most Christians from discovering their roots in Judaism. What most people do not realize is that hatred for Judaism is at bottom hatred for Christianity.

Hebrews 13:8 declares, *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."* It is a restatement of Ecclesiastes 3:15: *"That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past."* This is a declaration of the fact that God never changes (Malachi 3:6). Just as surely as the physical laws of nature are unchangeable (Romans 1:20), so are the eternal principles of God's Word. With God there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning (James 1:17).

If Judaism were ever God's appointed religious system—and we have His word that it was—then we must conclude that in some form it remains such. God did not give up on the Judaic law and repeal it; He merely reformed and perfected it by adding the new covenant in the blood of Jesus and making it available to whosoever will. The fundamentals of the Word of God remain the same—not abolished, but given a new manner of observance.

Since God never changes, we might logically expect His use of the system of Judaism to continue. It is altogether fitting and proper, then, that when Messiah Jesus returns to this earth to set up His kingdom, He will use Biblical Judaism as a guideline for governmental order. First He will make Jerusalem, Israel, the capital for world government (Isaiah 2:2-4). Then all nations of the world will be required to observe the Feasts of Yahweh (Zechariah 14:16,17). The pattern for judicial and executive government will also be that of Judaism (Matthew 19:28). In short, perfect Messianic Judaism will be restored in its fullness in the kingdom of God.

This is why the spirit of restoration is at work throughout the Christian world today. Christians everywhere are reawakening to the inherent Jewish-ness of their faith and are thereby making preparation for the return of their Lord and His Judaic Kingdom (Acts 2:30).

The one word which encapsulates the nature and goal of New Testament Judaism is *restoration*. While this concept is a new dimension in the world of religious thought today, in reality New Testament Judaism is only the restoration of the first century dimension of Judaism in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a "Jesus kind of Judaism" as defined by the New Testament.

The Church of God encourages believers everywhere to search for the roots of their faith in the Eternal God and His Son Jesus Christ to discover that the Christian heritage is in New Testament Judaism, the Judaism that lifts up Jesus.

8. The Creation

The Church of God teaches that God created heaven and the earth from nothing in the beginning and subsequently formed everything in heaven, including the angels, and everything in the earth, including man, from what He had created (Genesis 1). With the creative authority of His Word (John 1:1-3) and the motive force of His Spirit (Genesis 1:2), God was the author of all the creation in six days.

The first work of creation was the creating of heaven and earth out of nothing. The first verse of Holy Scripture declares: *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). This truth is confirmed by Hebrews 1:10;11:3. There is no way of confirming when the beginning was, for the earth is as old as heaven itself. The creation of which man is a part was completed some six thousand years ago following a creation that is described as having taken place in six days. Whether these six days were millennia, ages, or actual twenty-four hour days is open to speculation but does not materially affect the truth of the fact that God was the Creator of the earth and all things that are in it (Colossians 1:16).

The angelic host was created by God to inhabit heaven and to praise and worship His name continually (Matthew 18:10; Psalm 148:1-4; Hebrews 1:6). The angels are the messengers of God to the rest of His creation. The archangels are those beings of higher degrees of authority in the angelic host. Of these Michael was the angel of war (Revelation 12:7), Gabriel was the personal emissary of God (Luke 1:26), and Lucifer was the angel in charge of music and praise (Ezekiel 28:13). It was from this position that Lucifer exalted himself to be like the Most High God and was cast out of heaven to become Satan, the devil, or adversary of God (Isaiah 14:12-15; Luke 10:18).

The final work of creation took place when God made man in His own image as the crowning work of creation, after which He rested from His labors. Man was placed in the Garden of Eden and given dominion over all the earth (Genesis 1:26). Adam was formed from the dust of the earth, and Eve was formed from a rib taken from the side of Adam (Genesis 2:7,21-23).

The Church of God does not accept the un-provable allegations of the theory of evolution which suggests that the earth and all that is in it are the product of chance, natural selection, and survival of the fittest, with higher form of animals evolving from lower forms of animals. This theory is based in humanistic philosophy and exalts itself against the knowledge of God and against the burden of scientific facts that support the Biblical account of the creation.

The Church of God believes that *"through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear"* (Hebrews 11:3).

9. The Plan of Salvation

a. The Prophetic Plan

After Adam and Eve were created by God and placed in the Garden of Eden, they were subjected to the temptation of Satan (Genesis 3:1), the angel who had rebelled in heaven and had been cast into the earth with the third part of the angels (Revelation 12:4,7). They both sinned by violating the commandment of God (I John 3:4), thereby bringing themselves and their offspring under the power of Satan and the penalty of death (Genesis 2:17; Hebrews 2:14, 5; Romans 6:23). They were subsequently driven from the Garden of Eden lest they should partake of the tree of life and become eternal sinners (Genesis 3:22-24).

At the time of the fall of man God initiated His plan of salvation to redeem fallen man. It was revealed in the symbolism of the animal which He sacrificed to provide a covering for the nakedness of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21) and in the promise to them that a Son would be born through their lineage who would bruise the head of the serpent that had deceived them (Genesis 3:15).

The sin of Adam was inherited by his descendants (Romans 5:19). It was passed on to children from the time of their conception (Psalm 51:5). This inherited sin left all of mankind in a helpless condition of not being able to redeem themselves from sin (Ephesians 2:12); therefore, they were under bondage to sin and to death even if they had not sinned in the same manner in which Adam sinned (Romans 5:14).

It was for this reason that God introduced the concept of the remission of sins through the shedding of blood. Since the penalty of sin was immediate death, that penalty could only be lifted through the offering of a life; therefore, without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22).

God confirmed the fact that it was His will to preserve man and redeem him from the curse of sin when He established His covenant with mankind in the days of Noah. After He had destroyed the world by water, God made a covenant with all the earth that He would not again destroy the earth and He confirmed that covenant with the sign of the rainbow (Genesis 9:12,13).

In a later dispensation God further confirmed His plan of salvation by making a covenant with Abraham by which He chose him and his children above all others in the earth and promised to him the inheritance of the earth (Genesis 17:4,5,7) Galatians 3:16,17,29). It was the purpose of God that in Abraham all nations of the earth would be blessed (Galatians 3:18). The basis of the covenant of God with Abraham was Abraham's unwavering faith in the promises of God, a forerunner of the faith righteousness which would be imputed to all those will would believe in the Son of God (Genesis 15:6; Romans 5:1) .

In the faith that Abraham manifested in God's provision is a revelation of the coming Savior. When Abraham offered up Isaac, his son of promise, God stayed his hand from killing Isaac and provided a ram for the sacrifice. Abraham called the place *Yahweh-Jireh*, meaning *Yahweh has provided* (Genesis 22:8,9,11-14). This foreshadowed the coming of the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

In order to keep His people from the pollution of total idolatry until the time when He would bring forth His Son in the world, God gave the law as a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ (Galatians 3:19-24). The law was added because of transgression so that sin would be exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13). The law gave man an outline of the system of praise, worship, and service which pleased God and offered man for the first time a choice of life or death (Deuteronomy 30:15-19). It also set forth in types and shadows the revelation of the work of redemption that the Son of God would do (Hebrews 10:1).

The fulfillment of the plan of salvation was manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God (Luke 24:27,44). His mission was revealed in His name, Jesus, for He was sent to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). He was called Christ because He was the Anointed of God as no other man had been or would ever be (Hebrews 1:9; Luke 4:18; John 1:41). He was called the Son of God because He was of the substance of the Father, very God (John 1:1-14; I Timothy 3:16; Colossians 2:9). He was called the Son of Man because He took upon Himself the limitations of humanity and became very man (Hebrews 2:14,16; Philippians 2:5-7).

Jesus was God manifest in the flesh because it was impossible for man to save himself from sin and because the only hope of salvation was for God to become man, overcome sin, atone for sins, and redeem fallen man (I John 4:9,10;5:20; Hebrews 1:3). It was necessary for Jesus to become man because without becoming man He could not overcome sin in the flesh and thereby gain victory over Satan (Hebrews 2:9,10;4:15). Jesus was born of a virgin so that at His conception He was not born in sin. Otherwise He would have been no different from any other man (Isaiah 7:14; Hebrews 10:5; Romans 8:3,4). Jesus was conceived of the Virgin Mary when she was

overshadowed of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:30,31,34,35; Galatians 4:4).

While Jesus was on earth, He was a prophet with the message of the gospel of the kingdom of God (Acts 3:22; Mark 1:14,15). During His incarnation Jesus lived a sinless life so that He might overcome sin and death (I Peter 2:21,22,23; I John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14; 9:26; II Corinthians 5:21). He was qualified to offer a perfect sacrifice because of His deity (Philippians 2:6,8) and because of His sinless humanity (Hebrews 7:26,27). Jesus became the sacrifice for sin by dying on the cross of Calvary (Luke 23:33; Colossians 1:20-22; Acts 4:27,28; 2:23). His sacrifice had a greater effect on sin than those of the law because His perfect blood was able to cleanse the consciences of the believers (Hebrews 9:9,13,14; Romans 8:3,4; Hebrews 7:19,22; Colossians 2:11). The atonement which Jesus made extended once for all mankind, past, present, and future (Hebrews 10:10,12; John 3:17). Because of this efficacious sacrifice there never will be a need for another sacrifice (Hebrews 10:14;10:26).

After His death on the cross, Jesus was resurrected on the third day in proof of His divinity and the success of His mission to redeem mankind from the power of sin and death (I Peter 3:18-20; Ephesians 4:8, 9; Acts 2:30-32). His resurrection was the seal of the justification of those who would believe in Him (I Peter 1:3; Romans 4:24,25; I Corinthians 15:14,17).

After His resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father, to become the High Priest (Hebrews 1:3; Acts 2:33; Hebrews 3:1;7:28;8:1). The priesthood of Christ was of the order of Melchisedec, the eternal priesthood (Hebrews 5:5,6;7:15,16,21). Through the provisions of His priesthood Jesus became the Mediator between God and man (Hebrews 9:15; I Timothy 2:5), and He gave gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8; Romans 6:23).

Until the fullness of times that will bring about His return to the earth to reestablish His kingdom, Jesus makes intercession with God as the advocate of man (I John 2:1). At the end of the age He will return in power and great glory (Matthew 24:30) to resurrect the dead saints and to change the living saints (I Corinthians 15:51,52) and reestablish the thousand-year kingdom (Revelation 20:4). Then will God's eternal plan of salvation be completed when those that endure to the end shall be saved with an everlasting salvation and given eternal life (Matthew 24:13; Revelation 20:6).

b. The Personal Plan

There is a plan of salvation for the lives of all individuals who come to accept the universal plan of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. This plan involves the following steps:

- (1) The spiritual birth, which is accomplished in an individual's life by the process of repentance for sins, justification from God through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and regeneration in the transformation into a new life (Romans 10:9,10).
- (2) Sanctification as a second definite work of grace, which sets the believer apart to a life of holiness and obedience to the commandments and will of God (Colossians 2:11,12).
- (3) Baptism of the Holy Spirit, which provides power for service, direction into truth, and anointing to live a victorious life (Acts 1:8).
- (4) Progressive sanctification, which helps the believer continually rededicate his life to the Word and will of God (Ephesians 5:26,27).
- (5) Maturity, the process of perfection, which is the spiritual adventure of coming to know and putting into operation the Word of God which makes the spiritual and church life of the believer complete by bringing him to the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).
- (6) Endurance to the end, which is the operation of the spirit of preservation that brings one to the completion of his spiritual experience at which time he will be fully saved and the plan of salvation for his individual life will be complete (Matthew 24:13).

Through the application of the personal plan of salvation to his life, an individual may progress in his relationship with God to the point of receiving the crown of life that is prepared for them that are saved.

10. Predestination

While it is true that God did predestinate certain characters from their birth under the dispensation of the law both for good and for evil, the free moral agency of every human being under the dispensation of grace is one of the most fundamental of New Testament teachings.

The true interpretation of the doctrine of predestination rests on God's solution to a dilemma of sovereignty. Since God is sovereign over all, He must control all things, predetermining the outcome of events of history; however, if man is to be a moral agent who loves and serves God by choice, man must be sovereign over the choices that he makes. In order to solve the dilemma, God limits His sovereignty over all things in order to give man the sovereign right to decide for himself whether or not he will believe and obey God.

In the dispensation of grace God makes no determination regarding good and evil characters, though He does use vessels that are qualified either for wrath and destruction (by rejection of His righteousness) or for honor and glory. The only things which are predestined by God in the New Testament era are the prophetic programs of God outlined in the pages of the Word of God and the nations that are foreordained to righteousness and unrighteousness by these programs. Without fail, all of these prophetic events will take place, with both the good and the evil carried out to the extent required of the Scriptures. Through their freedom of choice, made possible by God's limitation of His sovereignty, all men make their own decision as to which category of prophetic fulfillment they will join. Though God foresees through His divine foreknowledge what each individual will choose, He makes no effort to influence that determination, except to encourage him to accept the good by the action of the Holy Spirit and man's conscience upon his will.

Paul outlined the nature of predestination in Romans 8:29,30: *"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."* God has predestined that which He foreknew—that a group of people should be conformed to the image of Christ. This position on predestination is confirmed in Ephesians 1:11: *"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."* Again, the body of people is predestinated to obtain an inheritance since God works all things after the counsel of His own will as He has revealed it to His holy prophets. This verse of scripture does not indicate that specific individuals have been predestinated of God to a predetermined work, whether good or evil.

If God were to predestinate people in the day of grace, there would be no necessity for the preaching of the Word of God to convert the hearers or for any other work of dedication to God for greater power and the manifestation of His Spirit; for all would be predetermined and the efforts of mankind toward pleasing God would be futile. This idea, if it were true, would completely destroy the validity of Scriptures which declare the gospel message to be for whosoever will (Revelation 22:17). It would also make it impossible for one to fear lest he should become a castaway (I Corinthians 9:27).

As long as man continues to live in the dispensation of grace, every individual is a free moral agent with the God-given right to determine for himself where he will spend eternity. He may choose either life or death, but he makes the choice. Though God has preordained programs of both good and evil in this day, those who participate and are prophetically used of God in both of these programs make their own decision at some point in their lives as to whether they will follow good or evil and are used of God accordingly (Romans 9:22).

11. The Spiritual Birth

According to Jesus' own declaration in John 3:1-10, it is an absolute necessity that a man be born again in order to see the kingdom of God. He explained to Nicodemus that with His coming, the kingdom of God was changed, and that every man "presseth" his way into it (Luke 16:16). In the ages past, one became a part of the kingdom of God simply by being born of Hebrew parents. After Jesus, it became necessary for a man to be reborn of the Spirit of God in order to

be an heir in the kingdom of God. As in all other things, Jesus took the natural, visible shadow of the things under the law—in this case, natural birth—and revealed the spiritual things that were to be after His being sacrificed for sin. It was then necessary for a man to experience a new birth during his life in order to be acceptable to God. Jesus went on to reveal that this rebirth occurred as a result of belief or faith in Him, for in verse 16 He declared that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

This brings us to the reason for the teaching on the born-again experience. Since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, there was no promise of life eternal in utter bliss until the day of Jesus. At the time at which God created Adam, He had intended that this man should have eternal life. Satan, however, succeeded in overthrowing God's creation. With Adam's sin came death and hardship. This, however, was not God's desire, so after four thousand years of prophesying, He sent His Word in human form to provide an eternal atonement for the sins of mankind, past, present, and future (Galatians 4:4,5). To those who would believe on Him would He return the promise of eternal life which God took from Adam (Read Romans 8:20; I Peter 1:3). All that is necessary is for a man's sins to be taken away is the blood of the eternal sacrifice and that he live holy in God's eyes until his appointed natural death. Then, he will receive eternal life with God.

The Church of God teaches that the born-again experience takes place in the following three steps:

a. Repentance

Repentance is the act of professing godly sorrow for something done wrong or left undone. This is confirmed by Paul in II Corinthians 7:10: *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation..."* An Old Testament example of this repentance is found in Psalm 51:1 where David was godly sorrowful for his sins and asked God to blot them out. His act of confessing his sorrow at having sinned against God and asking for forgiveness was repentance. We find this same thing in Peter's message to the Jews in Acts 3:12-19. Peter condemned the Jews and showed them their sin in crucifying Jesus. Then he admonished them to repent and be converted (regenerated or born again) so that their sins might be blotted out. (Read Job 42:6; Jeremiah 31:19; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3).

b. Justification

Justification is the peace with God that is brought about by repentance. This justification comes about by faith in the fact that one's sins of which he has repented have been blotted out. Old Testament reference for the shadow of justification is seen in Leviticus 1:1-4 where the preparation of the lamb for sacrifice showed a man's repentance for sin and his seeking forgiveness. Through the sacrifice of the lamb, the man was justified in the eyes of God (Read Titus 3:7 and Romans 8:30). Justification is the state of righteousness that is imputed to the believer for his faith.

c. Regeneration

Regeneration is the process of a remaking or rebirth. This is the completion of the born-again experience. When regeneration takes place, it is a result of repentance and justification. At this point the blood of Christ does what the blood of bulls and goats could not do—it transforms the old creature into a new creature. The person is the same; his mannerisms and personality are not changed. What is made new is his outlook, his motivation, for he no longer does evil but pursues good. At this point, the promise of eternal life provided that man lives righteously is renewed in his heart. The Holy Spirit enters his heart and makes him a child of God. He receives the earnest or down payment of spiritual inheritance throughout his life until the time of the redemption of the purchased possession (Ephesians 1:13,14) in eternal life for the body (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:1-5; Ezekiel 36:26,27; Psalm 51:10; I Peter 1:3).

The combination of repentance, justification, and regeneration brings about the experience of

being born again-born into the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13).

The Church of God teaches that the spiritual rebirth takes place during one's life on earth, not at his death or resurrection. Scriptures supporting this teaching include John 3:12; II Corinthians 5:17; I John 3; John 1:12,13; Colossians 1:12,13; I John 5:1.

The Church also teaches that it is possible for a born-again believer to fall from the graces of God and become a disobedient child. He is then subject to being disinherited from the kingdom of God if he dies in a state of disobedience. This clearly outlined scriptural understanding totally denies the doctrine of "Eternal Security." Scriptures supporting this teaching include James 1:12-15; Galatians 2:16-18; I Peter 2:4,15,18-22; Jude 12:19; Revelation 12:10; I Corinthians 9:27; 3:16, 17; II Peter 1:9, 10; Hebrews 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 6:12; Hebrews 10:38, 39; II Peter 3:13,14; James 4:17; II Timothy 4:10. Those who profess the necessity of daily sin make void these scriptures against such a profession: I John 3; II Timothy 2:19; Hebrews 6:1; Colossians 1:28; Philippians 3:15; II Timothy 3:17; Psalms 37:37.

12. Water Baptism

Water baptism is revealed in type in II Chronicles 4:6, where we see the example that reveals to us the necessity of water baptism. Before a sacrifice was accepted and offered on the altar, it was washed in the laver. This reveals the fact that in order for us to present ourselves to God a living sacrifice which is acceptable to God (Romans 12:1) we must be baptized in water. It is also revealed in the fact that after the leper was ceremonially cleansed of his leprosy (type of sin), he then had to go forth and wash himself (Leviticus 14:1-9).

Water baptism was first used by John the Baptist to show an outward sign of an inward repentance and rededication to God. In Matthew 3:7-8, John refused to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because they had not already brought forth *"fruits meet for repentance."* John's baptism with water availed nothing without the true repentance of those whom he baptized.

While water baptism does not wash away sins, it is, nevertheless, an essential outward sign of the repentance and born again experience that has been attained inwardly. Jesus placed great emphasis upon this baptism in water when He declared to John, *"Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness"* (Matthew 3:15). It is apparent then that water baptism is a part of the all righteousness that we must fulfill.

To declare that water baptism is absolutely essential to salvation would be an error because the Scriptures declare in Romans 10:9,10,13, as well as in other places that *"if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved...for whosoever shall call upon the name of Lord shall be saved."* No reference is made to the fact that water baptism is absolutely necessary to salvation. For instance, if one were born again in his automobile as he drove down the highway and on such an occasion the person were to be killed in an accident, would he be saved? Most certainly, for he had not had opportunity to be baptized in water. Water baptism is included in the category of things the Christian must do when he knows to do them. To refuse to be baptized when one knows to do so or to neglect to do so when opportunity is available would come under the classification of James 4:17. This negligence becomes sin, and the soul is under condemnation. If it were absolutely essential for one to be baptized in water before he is fully justified before God, how then did Cornelius and his family receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit before they were baptized in water? Acts 10:44-47 declares: *"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"* After they had received these experiences from God, however, Peter immediately called for their participation in water baptism to fulfill the commandment of the Lord.

While water baptism is not essential to salvation, believers should be baptized as soon after

conversion as possible. An example of the experience of water baptism after repentance is found in Acts 8:32-40. The reference which Philip explained in Isaiah has no connection whatsoever with water baptism. Philip, however, revealed the necessity of water baptism, for the eunuch said, *"See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?"* Then Philip answered, *"If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest."* Note that belief is first necessary. One must be born again in order for water baptism to be effective.

The Church of God believes this baptism is to be carried out in the same manner described by our Lord in Matthew 28:19: *"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."* In cases where people are convicted they should be baptized in the name of Jesus or Yahweh or Yahshua, the church permits baptism in any of these formulas.

The Church of God also believes that this baptism is by immersion. In Matthew 3:16 after Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water. In Romans 6 the description of baptism is of being buried in baptism. This is a principle of baptism that takes place in every form of baptism, whether water, blood, or Holy Spirit. Every baptism is being totally immersed in something. In cases where it is not possible or practical to baptize by immersion or where the conscience of an individual dictates otherwise, the church permits baptism by sprinkling or infusion.

13. Sanctification

Sanctification is the second definite work of grace wrought by the blood of Christ, which purges us from the nature of sin. Due to the fall of Adam, all mankind is cursed with the nature of sin, with the nature which causes him to commit sin in spite of his desire not to do so. This is revealed in Psalm 51:5: *"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."* This was the nature of every man, for the sin of Adam was passed on to his seed (Romans 5:14, 15).

The ineffectiveness of the sacrifices of the law is revealed in the fact that, though they provided atonement and justification for sins, they did not destroy the nature of man that caused him to sin. So, sin continued. Hebrews 9:13,14;10:1,2 reveal that the sacrifices of the law could not make those who were repenting perfect because they could not purge the conscience. The purging of the conscience from dead works is sanctification.

Paul explains this purging of the conscience further in Colossians 2:11-12. He says that the people were circumcised spiritually in putting off the body of sin of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. This circumcision of the heart removed the nature of sin, the cause of sin. The born-again experience only brings about a forgiving of past sins while this experience removes the body of sins. It is interesting to note the parallel between the natural and the spiritual. After natural birth, a child may be circumcised. This process does not remove any impurity, but it does remove a cause of impurity or uncleanness. In the spiritual realm, when one is born again, he still has the excess of the flesh over his heart, the organ which symbolically reproduces the likeness of Christ in him. Sanctification removes this body of sin, this excess fleshly element that brings about impurity. Then there is nothing to bring about an involuntary recurrence of impurity in one's heart.

In short, the nature of sin has been cut away by the sword of the Spirit to produce the likeness of Christ in the heart of the believer.

In Colossians 2:12, Paul goes on to show that this circumcision is a baptism in which we are buried with Christ. This baptism is clarified in Romans 6:1-8 where Paul tells us that when we are baptized into Jesus we are baptized into His death. *"Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death."* (Note also Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20: *"I am crucified with Christ."*) In Romans 6 Paul goes on to reveal in verses 6-8 the nature of this baptism in the death (blood) of Jesus, saying, *"Knowing this, that our old man [nature of sin] is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him."* We are told that when we have been baptized into His death (blood baptism) we are dead to sin, the body of sin is

destroyed, and there is no more nature of sin in us. This is not to say that temptation is destroyed; however, the inherent desire to sin is removed.

Acts 19 shows clearly the process involved in the experiences of God. The disciples at Ephesus confessed that they had not heard if there was any Holy Spirit; however, they had been baptized in water in the baptism of repentance. Then, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (sanctification-blood baptism). Note that the verb, were baptized, is transitive passive. They were acted upon. There is no reference to Paul's baptizing them. And, there was no need for this, for one baptism unto repentance is sufficient. Then, Paul acted by laying hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke with tongues (Acts 19:6).

Acts 22:16 reveals this process and the manner in which this blood baptism or sanctification takes place. Ananias instructed Paul; *"Why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* Notice that to be baptized so as to wash away sins is accomplished by calling on the name of the Lord. This baptism is sanctification, baptism in the blood or death of Jesus which destroys the body of sin. After we have been sanctified, we are then set apart and are *"meet for the master's use"* (II Timothy 2:21).

The Church of God also teaches progressive individual self-sanctification—the living of a sanctified life. The sanctified heart then corrects the fleshly weaknesses. It is necessary for every man to continue to renew his sanctification progressively, for business affairs and necessary resting and recreation draw men's minds from God and His work. It is necessary to *"keep under"* one's body *"and bring it into subjection"* (I Corinthians 9:27).

Further clarification of progressive self-sanctification is found in II Corinthians 7:1: *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse [sanctify] ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* We may be born again and sanctified; however, we must seek continually to cleanse ourselves from filthiness of flesh and spirit to reach the state of Bible perfection.

Another facet of sanctification is revealed in Jesus' statement: *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth"* (John 17:17). Jesus prayed to His Father that He would sanctify (set apart) His disciples as a collective body. The manner in which this sanctification was to take place was through the Word of God. The truth of this statement is found in Ephesians 5:23-27, where Paul explained the relationship of Christ and the Church. He said in verse 25: *"Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it...that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."* This shows that there is sanctification or cleansing of the church by the washing (purifying) of the Word of God. The church must be purified as a body in the Word of God, so that He *"might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."*

14. Baptism of the Holy Spirit

a. The Infilling of the Holy Spirit

When Christians are born again, the Spirit of God indwells their lives (Psalm 51:10). They do not, however, receive the full infilling or baptism of the Holy Spirit. We find the prime example of this in the fact that in John 20:22, Jesus appeared to His disciples and breathed on them, telling them to receive the Holy Ghost. At this time, they were born again and received the Spirit of God. Note the parallel in the natural. God breathed upon Adam, and he became a living soul. These twelve disciples who were dead in sins became alive in Christ by His breathing on them. Jesus then led them to Bethany and blessed them, and they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, for they had been sanctified and the nature of sin removed from their lives. Then they tarried in the upper room ten days until the Holy Spirit came upon them as Jesus had promised in Acts 1:5: *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."* Peter confirmed the process detailed above in Acts 2:38: *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."*

An Old Testament shadow and prophecy of this event is found in II Chronicles 5:11-12. Here one hundred and twenty priests (cf. Acts 1:15) had assembled in the temple and were sanctified, awaiting His presence. They were all of one mind and accord, and they were praising God (cf. Acts 2:1). Then, the cloud of God filled the house with such a manifestation (cf. Acts 2:2) that the priests were not able to minister (cf. the accused drunkenness of Acts 2:15).

In John 7:38,39, we read: *"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost [baptism] was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"* Here we see that the gift or baptism of the Holy Spirit could not be given until Jesus was glorified or ascended to the Father. This is clear from the fact that Jesus could not give this or any other gift until He had become the High Priest at the right hand of God. It was necessary for Him to sit down at God's right hand to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit before He could give it to His disciples (Hebrews 8:3,4). This is proven by Acts 2:33: *"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."*

There is much controversy in the kingdom of God as to whether this experience was reserved for the early church and is not for our day or is still available for men to receive today. This is proven to be an experience available today by the fact that it was a continuing thing- those who believed in Samaria received the Holy Spirit; Cornelius and his household were baptized with the Holy Spirit; Paul laid hands on those believers in Ephesus, and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. This experience is available even in this day, for Peter said that we today can receive the same baptism of the Holy Spirit that was received on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:39. He said that the promise (the Baptism of the Holy Spirit-Acts 1:4) *"is unto you [the Jews], and to your children, and to all that are afar off [including us today], even as many as the Lord our God shall call."* Everyone whom God calls—that is, everyone who is born again by the Spirit of God—has the opportunity to receive this promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not as some suppose—the climax of Christian experience and the "full gospel." This is evidenced by Jesus' statement in John 16:13: *"Howbeit when he the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all truth."* The explicit duty of the Holy Spirit is to guide Christians into deeper truths and experiences with God that they might become perfect

b. The Speaking With Tongues

In Acts 2:1-4 we find the record of the first outpouring of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We see in verse 4 that when this experience was received, the believers began immediately to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. In his sermon in defense of their actions, Peter quoted Joel 2:28,29 and declared its fulfillment in their having the Spirit of God poured out on them. Immediately after they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak with other tongues inasmuch that those who had gathered from the far reaches of the world were amazed that these uneducated Jews were speaking their native tongues.

In Acts 19:6, we see that this experience was a continuing thing, for it was still being received some 26 years later in Paul's ministry. Even then, as it was on the Day of Pentecost, the initial evidence or outward sign that these people had received the Holy Spirit baptism was the fact that they spoke with tongues.

In Peter's visit to Cornelius' house, it was declared that the sign that told them that Cornelius and his entire household had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit was the fact that they *"heard them speak with tongues"* (Acts 10:46).

There is much question in the kingdom of God as to whether this speaking with tongues is speaking in other languages (*xenoglossy*) or in unknown tongues (*glossalalia*). The truth is that it can be both. On the Day of Pentecost they spoke with languages that men understood and with unknown tongues.

The speaking with unknown tongues is well established in Scripture. In Romans 8:26 Paul says, *"likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."* In I Corinthians 13:1 Paul declares: *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity..."* This was not, as some have attempted to promote, the speaking in his ordinary vernacular of the common people and then speaking eloquently. It was speaking with mortal tongues and then with unknown tongues used when a man speaks angel's languages.

In I Corinthians 14 Paul gives one of the most conclusive proofs that the evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is unknown tongues. In verse two he says that *"he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him."* In verses 14 and 15, he says that *"if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also."* Notice here that Paul said that he would pray with the Spirit in a tongue which he did not understand. This praying in the Spirit is praying in the unknown tongue, the tongues of angels. This is further proved by verse 23: *"If therefore the whole church be come together into one place and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?"* Even the first known reference to this experience in Mark 16:17 make reference to these tongues as "new tongues." The unknown spoken by the utterance of the Spirit were the only "new" tongues.

Paul also said that he thanked God that he spoke with tongues more than they all (I Corinthians 14:18) and applied the clincher in I Corinthians 14:39 by saying, *"Forbid not to speak with tongues."* Speaking with tongues is even today not forbidden, for it is the initial normative sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

But, why speak with tongues? Let us see what God said through the mouth of his prophets in Isaiah 28:11,12: *"For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said this is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear."* In this prophecy it is also self-evident that this rest or Comforter which Jesus said He would send should manifest Himself through the sons of God by stammering lips and other tongues. The Apostle James declared: *"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, whithersoever 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"* (James 3:2-8). In verse 8 James said, *"The tongue can no man tame."* This is why God requires speaking in tongues before one is completely saturated or baptized with His Spirit. There is only one power that can conquer and tame the tongue, and that is the Holy Spirit of God. When one becomes so full of the Spirit of God that he loses his vocabulary and begins to stammer and speak with a tongue of which he is not familiar, then, and only then, has he been completely conquered and become entirely subject to the will of God. So by these truths we can see why God requires speaking in tongues. *"Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not"* (I Corinthians 14:22).

The speaking with tongues as the sign of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not complicated. Believers today can learn the lesson of how to receive the Holy Spirit and what to expect when they receive it by studying the way in which it was received on the Day of Pentecost. When one is seeking the Holy Spirit (*"tarrying until..."*), he need only use his tongue to enunciate whatever thoughts or inspirations the Spirit enters into his mind. This was true on the Day of Pentecost when

they spake with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (inspiration).

15. The Seven Spiritual Baptisms

Just as the one Spirit of God is operated through seven channels, dividing that one Spirit into Seven Spirits (Ephesians 4:4; Revelation 4:5), so the principle of baptism is operated in seven different spiritual circumstances, making seven baptisms. These seven baptisms are (1) The Baptism of Repentance (Mark 1:4); (2) The Baptism of the Blood (Colossians 2:11,12; Romans 6:3); (3) the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5); (4) The Baptism of Fire (Matthew 3:11; (5) The Baptism into the Church (I Corinthians 12:13); (6) The Baptism of Suffering (Matthew 20:22; I Peter 4:1); and (7) The Baptism of Death (Luke 12:50).

(1) The **Baptism of Repentance** is the initial experience in the spiritual side of the Christian life. It is the manifestation of godly sorrow that brings justification from God and regeneration by the Word (II Corinthians 7:10). Water Baptism is not a spiritual experience but an outward sign of the spiritual Baptism of Repentance.

(2) The **Baptism of the Blood** is the second experience of the Christian life. It is the removal of the body of sin or the nature of sin. This baptism is the baptism into the blood of Christ for the remission of sin, called sanctification.

(3) The **Baptism of the Holy Spirit** is the indwelling of the promised Comforter, the blessed Holy Spirit of God. Its initial evidence is the speaking with tongues.

(4) The **Baptism of Fire** is the experience of being filled with zeal for the work of the Lord. This is the baptism spoken of in Matthew 3:11 that was received on the Day of Pentecost as cloven tongues sat on each of them like as of fire as a manifestation of the inward work of the Spirit (Acts 2:3). This baptism of fire is much the same as Jeremiah's experience in Jeremiah 20:9: *"His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."* David had this same fire: *"My zeal hath consumed me"* (Psalms 119:139). We are told that the great work of God will be accomplished because the *"zeal [fire] of the Lord of hosts will perform this"* (Isaiah 9:7).

(5) The **Baptism into the Church** is revealed in I Corinthians 12:13: *"For by one Spirit are ye all baptized into one body."* This baptism is the process of joining the church, which the scriptures reveal as the covenant. Just as the covenant baptizes man and woman into one body, so an individual becomes a member of the church by this covenant baptism. Scriptures confirming this baptism to be by covenant include Isaiah 62:5; Ephesians 5:26-32; and Jeremiah 50:5.

(6) The **Baptism of Suffering** is the experience of suffering for the sake of the gospel. This suffering may be in the form of physical or mental distress or the condition of hunger and other want in which the Christian is placed because of his service of God. Scriptures which reveal this baptism include Philippians 3:7, 8; Matthew 20:20-23; I Peter 4:12-14; Proverbs 23:23; I Peter 4:1, 2; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:10; I Corinthians 4:11-13; and II Timothy 2:12.

(7) The **Baptism of Death** is the climax of the Christian experience in this life. It is through death that the Christian enters into the portals of life by the resurrection. So, the death of the Christian is the most glorious event of his mortal experience. The most outstanding manner of physical death which will bring a greater reward is martyrdom for the cause of Christ or suffering as it were unto death, or, as Paul said, *"In deaths off"* (II Corinthians 11:23). Scriptures which reveal the baptism of death include Romans 8:23; 5:12,18,19; Hebrews 9:27; I Corinthians 15:51,52; Ephesians 1:13, 14; II Corinthians 5:1-3; Luke 12:50; Matthew 26:39-42; Acts 2:31.

16. God's Chosen People

The first time that Yahweh chose a people with them is found in Genesis 15. Abraham had left his father's house in Haran of Syria to look for the land to which God had sent him, and when he finally came into the land, he implored the Lord in this manner: *"Lord God, whereby shall I know that I inherit [this land]?"* (Genesis 15:8). God replied, *"Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates..."* (Genesis 15:18). The record declares that *"in the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram."*

Abraham, therefore, was the man with whom God entered into a covenant, making Abraham and his family after him His chosen people. *"The Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him...I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God"* (Genesis 17:1,7,8).

This agreement between God and Abraham brought about a startling transformation. Abraham, who was a Syrian by nationality and a Babylonian by birth (Genesis 11:31), became the father of another nation, the nation of faith in the Eternal Yahweh. As far as God was concerned, Abraham was transformed from a Gentile into a chosen vessel to father a holy nation that would bear His name among the Gentiles.

From the time that Abraham had crossed over the river Euphrates, He had been called a Hebrew, from the word *eber*, meaning *to cross over*. This leaving the land of Ur of the Chaldees and later departing from his father's house in Haran of Syria was the act of faith upon which God predicated His promise and covenant with Abraham. So, after the making of the covenant, Abraham became more than a Hebrew—he became the father of the faithful.

Just as God had promised Abraham, it was some four hundred years before the time came for the benefits of his covenant to become a reality (Genesis 15:13). Through those ensuing years, the children of Abraham through Isaac were the chosen people of God because of the continuing covenant of Abraham. The children of Abraham continued to be known as Syrians until after the time of Jacob as Deuteronomy 26:5 declares: *"A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down to Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous."* Still, the children of Israel were a chosen people within the nation of Syria. While seventy souls entered into the land of Egypt during the time of the famine, at the end of four hundred years, six hundred thousand men, together with women and children, were ready to be delivered from slavery into which they had been forced.

A profound deliverance was effected by the intervention of God through the hand of His servant Moses, and the children of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob gathered before the great mountain of the Lord called Sinai to make a covenant with God to become His holy nation, chosen above all the people of the earth (Deuteronomy 10:15). When this covenant was made, however, it merely amended the covenant that Abraham and Yahweh had made four hundred years before, for it could never replace or abrogate that covenant: *"The [Abrahamic] covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect"* (Galatians 3:17).

When God chose all of Israel as His nation and established His covenant with them, He made further selection and separated a part of Israel to be a special people unto Him. *"When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary and Israel his dominion"* (Psalms 114:1, 2); *"Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: but chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved"* (Psalm 78:67,68). The tribe of Judah became a peculiarly chosen people unto God as it were a nation within a nation. It was Judah to whom He entrusted His sayings (Romans 3:1-3). And, it was Judah, above all of the other tribes of Israel, who was zealous for the Word and law of God.

As time progressed, particularly following the reigns of David and Solomon, the tribe of Judah,

with Benjamin and much of Levi, became even more separated in the divided kingdom. The wisdom of God's choosing Judah above the others is reflected in the fact that they continued to maintain His religious system while the ten tribes entered into idolatry and dispersion. It was during this time that the members of the tribe of Judah came to be known as *Jews*—a contraction of the word *Judah*. The first scriptural record of this term is found in II Kings 16:6. Initially it was applied by others and not by the bearers of the name (as in the case with the term *Christian*). Through succeeding generations, this term came to be synonymous with God's chosen people, so much so that members of other tribes came to be called Jews also (Acts 19:14,34;21:39).

In the Old Testament era, there were two ways in which one could become a Jew. First, being born of Hebrew parents automatically made him a Jew through the covenant to Abraham and his lineage. Second, provision was made for those who wished to accept the law of God through faith to become fellow citizens with those Jews of fleshly lineage. From the very outset of the exodus, the Lord said, *"And when a stranger shall...keep the passover of the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land..."* (Exodus 12:48). Leviticus 19:34 reconfirmed this position: *"But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself..."*

Is it possible that those Gentiles in the flesh actually became Jews? As far as God was concerned their acceptance of the terms of the covenant between Himself and the children of Israel transformed them into Jews just as it had transformed Abraham. Though at first they were called *proselytes* and were considered second-class citizens by the carnal Jews, those who accepted the covenant of God eventually became recognized as Jews. The exclusivity of the Jews did not obviate the impartiality of God. According to Isaiah 56:3-7 the Gentiles who accept God's covenant are to have a place in His house better than that of sons and daughters.

Since God has no respect of persons, the thing which made Abraham the chosen of God (or in a sense, the first Jew) can make any man a Jew. As Abraham's selection was totally predicated upon his faith in God, so in both Old and New Testament dispensations', becoming chosen of God was by faith in God to accept His will and system for the particular dispensation. This faith transformed a Syrian into a Jew, and it transformed many strangers of various nationalities into Jews.

Such was the case in the day of Esther. We are told that when the Jews were given permission to defend themselves on the day on which they were to have been slaughtered, *"many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them"* (Esther 8:17). Apparently, many of the people of the Persian Empire so believed in the protection of the Jews by their God that they were willing to become Jews. Whether their instinct was faith or self-preservation, the simple fact is that the scripture tells us that they became Jews.

Throughout the dispensations of the Old Testament, the Eternal God continued to recognize those who accepted His covenants as being His chosen people or Jews, as they later became known. It was in His divine plan, however, to make the way easier so that all men might become His chosen. In the fullness of time it was the covenant that He had made with Abraham that prompted the Father to send forth His Son, made of woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law (Galatians 4:4,5). Zacharias, the father of John, prophesied: *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David....to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham...."* (Luke 1:68,69,72,73).

From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus maintained the covenant and the religious system under which He had been born of the flesh. He staunchly maintained that the Jews alone, or those who accepted the covenant of Judaism, were God's chosen people. He declared that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and admonished His apostles not to go in the way of the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5,6). Jesus well knew that the law of God went forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3). He knew that to the Israelites alone pertained *"the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God,*

and the promises" (Romans 9:4). It was of the Jews *"as concerning the flesh (that) Christ came"* (Romans 9:5). Even when addressing one of these lost sheep of Israel (a Samaritan or Ephraimite), the Savior declared: *"We know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews"* (John 4:22).

In His conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, however, Jesus predicted that a time was shortly to come (and even was then) when a change would take place in the manner of carrying out God's chosen religion, which also implied a change in the manner of God's choosing His people. He declared that the true worshippers of the Eternal Father must begin to worship Him in Spirit as well as in truth. Until that time, the people had worshipped Yahweh in a system that had been given by God and was a revelation of divine truth; however, the worshippers had carried out their ritual by obedience to the commandment in a lifeless manner. The time was coming and then was that those who would offer acceptable worship to God would have to do so willingly and with the Spirit of God motivating them. The Messiah declared that since God is Spirit, they who worship Him must do so in Spirit as well as in the truth which He has given. Mere ritualistic obedience would no longer suffice.

Since the covenants of God until that time had been pertinent to the children of the flesh only, it was not possible for the Messiah to direct His ministry outside of that sphere; however, when it came time for a new covenant to be established to replace the Sinai covenant and to amend the Abrahamic covenant, Jesus predicted that others besides the Jews would have access to that covenant. Isaiah had foretold this great event: *"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles"* (Isaiah 42:6). Simeon, the priest who dedicated the Son of God, reiterated it in Luke 2:32. Jesus claimed it in Luke 4: 18.

In John 10:11-16, Jesus set the stage for the opening up of His covenant to the Gentiles. He declared, *"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring...and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."* The Son of God predicted that there would be a time when there would be one religion for all men, one fold in which all the sheep of God would be gathered together.

Prior to the time when the new covenant in the blood of Jesus was sealed through the death of the testator (Hebrews 9:15-17), the message of the Messiah was directed only to the children of the fleshly covenant. After the death and resurrection of the Son of God, however, His commission to His disciples was this: *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15); *"Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1:8).

As the door was opened for the Gentiles to become heirs of the promises of God, the immutable principle of the accepting of the covenant of God remained constant. Psalm 50:5 tells us that only those who have made a covenant with God are qualified to inherit with Christ. The new covenant that Yahweh made with the house of Israel and the world through the death of His Son was this: *"I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people"* (Hebrews 8:10).

God's covenant was made available to the entire world including the Gentiles and was to be predicated upon only one thing—faith. This was the covenant which God would make with the world: *"That whosoever believeth in Him...should have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). Becoming chosen of God was contingent upon accepting the Messiah through faith as the everlasting atonement for sin.

While previously God's covenants had applied to the flesh and were sealed with the fleshly sign of circumcision, the Messiah established a spiritual covenant which by a spiritual birth translated the believer into spiritual Israel, the spiritual kingdom of God. The principle of becoming chosen of God by making a covenant with Him remained constant.

The great similarity between the covenant of Abraham and that of Christ is immediately noticed. Both were given because of faith and both promised an inheritance. Paul notes this similarity in

Galatians 3:6-29: *"Even as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed...Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law...that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith...For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ...And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

The Abrahamic covenant, then, was not done away in Christ, but rather was extended by Him to all men, both Jew and Gentile. Believers by virtue of their faith become the true children of Abraham. This is further explained in Romans 9:6-8, 23-26: *"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed... that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. 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."*

Ephesians 2:11-13 expands upon this thought of Gentiles' becoming spiritual Jews: *"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh...were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."*

Paul declared that to the apostles alone was revealed this mystery that the Gentiles should be accepted before God on equal terms with the Jews: *"The mystery...in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel"* (Ephesians 3:3,5,6).

The Abrahamic covenant and its more far-reaching implications then were not for the children of the flesh but rather for the children of faith. Circumcision, the fleshly sign in which the Jews according to the flesh had come to trust, was totally secondary to the spiritual faith which Abraham had had when he was chosen of God. *"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which be of the law be heirs, faith is made void...therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all"* (Romans 4:13-16).

In Romans 2:25-29 the apostle Paul further explained the principle of faith and obedience to God through which the Gentiles could be accepted before God on equal terms with the Jews. *"For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?...for he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, and in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."*

Here Paul stated that a Gentile's having the righteousness of God is *counted for* circumcision so that he becomes a Jew. Since the righteousness of God is Jesus Christ and Him alone (Romans 10:4; I Corinthians 1:30), the Gentile as well as the Jew receives righteousness through faith in Jesus. This faith righteousness is then counted for circumcision of the flesh so that circumcision becomes a spiritual experience rather than a fleshly rite. The word *counted for* in the Greek is the same word used in Romans 4:3: *"Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for*

righteousness." It is also seen in Romans 9:8; *"The children of the promise are counted for the seed."* Just as Abraham's faith was counted for righteousness, so the substitutionary righteousness of Christ in the heart of the uncircumcised believer is counted for circumcision and the reborn child of the promise of God is counted for the fleshly seed.

This is the principle upon which a Gentile by circumcision of the heart (rebirth) can become a spiritual Jew. The true Jew is the spiritual seed of Abraham through faith. What the apostle was saying here is that both fleshly Jews and fleshly Gentiles can become spiritual Jews through the circumcision of the heart. And, indeed, this was the case, for we find Peter, the apostle to the Jews in the early church, making this statement: *"To the strangers...Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house...ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people...which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God..."* (I Peter 1:1;2:5, 9,10). By accepting the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness, the Gentiles became a part of God's holy nation, His chosen people. They became spiritual Jews, the true seed of Abraham. As such, they also became heirs of the world, as God had promised to Abraham.

This is the reason that the kingdom of God will be established in the nation of Israel rather than in some other nation of the world. The camp of the saints of the Most High God will be in the Holy City for the thousand years of the kingdom of God upon the earth (Revelation 20:9). The inheritance of the land from the river Euphrates unto the Egyptian Sea is promised to the true seed of Abraham, the spiritual Jews, who will reign with the true Isaac, Jesus Christ, for one thousand years over the entire earth from His headquarters in Jerusalem, Israel.

The identification of God's chosen people, the spiritual Jews, of today is simple. Those who believe upon Messiah Yashua are the children of the promise, the seed of Abraham through faith. There is but one chosen people, spiritual Israel, the kingdom of God.

The question arises, how does natural Israel, the Jews according to the flesh, fit into this analysis? Romans 11:29 tells us that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. For this reason and for this reason alone, the natural, physical benefits of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his lineage according to the flesh still pertain to the fleshly Jews. Romans 9:29 declares that except the Lord of Sabaoth had left Israel a seed, they would have been as Sodom and Gomorrah; however, Yahweh's promise was that a remnant would be saved.

The Zionist movement that has brought millions of Jewish people back to the land of Israel from the dispersion among the nations and has brought about the reestablishing of the nation of Israel in a part of the land which God promised to Abraham is a direct result of the faith of those Jews in the promise of God to Abraham. Their faith in God's covenant has brought the fleshly benefits to them even though they are not children of faith in the Messiah, the Son of God.

The great purpose of God in returning the land of Israel to the fleshly children of Abraham is to bring about the fulfillment of numerous prophecies of the Scriptures which predict the bringing of the people again to their land from the dispersion so that the stage may be set for them to partake of the cleansing of the fountain that is to be opened unto the inhabitants of the land for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13:1). God is hastening the day when the remnant of the Jews left in the land of Israel who believe upon the Messiah will mourn for Him as for an only Son (Romans 9:27; Zechariah 12:10). Then will come to pass the word of God: *"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob"* (Romans 11:26). The Jews according to the flesh—who accept Jesus Christ the Messiah—will then become a part of God's chosen people, spiritual Israel, the kingdom of God.

17. The Family

The Church of God believes that family is the most basic unit of the society of man and is vital to the order of society and the preservation of the knowledge of God in the earth. A complete family consists of a husband and wife and children, with the husband as the spiritual head or leader of the family, the wife as a qualified helper, and the children in obedience to their parents (Genesis 1:27, 28; 4:1; I Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:33; Exodus 20:12).

The purpose for the existence of the family as a divine institution is to provide a proper order for procreation (Genesis 1:28), a stable and secure environment for rearing children (Proverbs 20:7), and the perpetuation of the knowledge of God and righteous living in society (Proverbs 4:1; Deuteronomy 6:6,7).

God was the author of the concept of family. He established the first family in the beginning of man's history with Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:18,23,24). A family is based on marriage, and marriage is constituted by the making of a covenant between a man and a woman that is consummated in sexual intercourse (Genesis 17:7; Jeremiah 3:14; Malachi 2:14; Matthew 19:4, 5). Marriage provides a proper means of expression of human sexuality which was created by God for the purpose of the oneness of fulfillment of married partners (Proverbs 5:18,19; I Corinthians 7:2, 5) and for the purpose of procreation and the perpetuation of the human race (Genesis 1:28). God placed restrictions on sexual relations limiting their expression to those who are rightfully and lawfully married to each other (Hebrews 13:4; I Corinthians 7:2,5). All premarital, extramarital, or homosexual sexual relations are, therefore, sin (Exodus 20:14; I Corinthians 6:9,10).

God's perfect will for marriage is for married partners to live together until the death of one or both (Malachi 2:15). This is for the purpose of providing a stable environment for the nurturing of posterity. Though He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), God does make allowances for divorce and remarriage in the case of unfaithfulness of a married partner (Matthew 19:9) and desertion (I Corinthians 7:15).

The blessing of God upon families is manifested in the giving of children to the union of husband and wife. Though some through choice or physical impairment do not have children, children are a blessing from the Lord to those who have them (Psalm 127:3-5; 128:3,4). The responsibilities of parents toward their children are to provide for their children love and security (Titus 2:4,5), food and shelter (I Timothy 5:8), moral guidance and correction (Proverbs 29:15), spiritual guidance and instruction in the Word of God (Deuteronomy 6:3,6,7), and instruction in responsibility and the work ethic (I Thessalonians 4:11; II Thessalonians 3: 10-12). Children's responsibilities to their parents include obedience to their parents in their youth (Ephesians 6:1), honor of their parents throughout all their lives (Exodus 20:12), and care for their parents in their aged years (I Timothy 5:4).

The activities which support strong families include the family altar and regular worship together as well as work and play together (Deuteronomy 6:7). The family's responsibilities to God and the church help to fulfill these characteristics. These responsibilities include obedience to the commandments of God (Deuteronomy 6:5-7), faithfulness in church attendance (Leviticus 23:3), support for the church and its program (Hebrews 10:25), and helping to win others for Christ and the church (John 15:1,2).

18. Marriage

When God created man in the beginning, He created male and female, intending for them to marry. This act of marriage is the making of an agreement or covenant with one of the opposite sex that they will live together for the rest of their lives and be faithful to each other in their sexual relationship. This agreement is the covenant which binds those who are married together in the eyes of God and makes them one, whether they are saint or sinner. The marriage contract was devised by God so that man might have companionship and so that he might procreate and bring forth legitimate seed to be reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

When marriage vows have been taken and the marriage has been consummated in sexual intercourse, the two people who have been married become one flesh. Paul's statement in I Corinthians 6:16 declare that though a man is joined to a harlot, they are one body. This being joined to a harlot is proven to be a physical union and not a marriage by the fact that in verse 15 Paul asks if he should take his members (his physical body) and make them the members of a harlot. Marriage to a harlot (though not advisable) would be acceptable in God's sight; adultery with her would be abominable. The act of sexual intercourse, then, makes two people one flesh. This

is the thrust of Jesus' statement in Matthew 19:5: *"For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh . . ."* This condition of being one flesh, of being united physically; continues in the eyes of God even though the couple be separated for years by thousands of miles. Nothing can interrupt this status of oneness except by one partner's becoming one flesh with another by committing the act of adultery or by death.

a. Sexual Expression

With regard to personal behavior between married partners, there are no scriptural guidelines and restrictions except the rendering of "due benevolence" (I Corinthians 7:3). The Bible specifically condemns the following practices: adultery (extramarital sexual relations), homosexuality (sexual relations between members of the same sex, including both men with men and women with women), and bestiality (sexual intercourse between humans and animals). Any practice which is not included under these categories is not scripturally prohibited; however, the wise Christian will be cautioned against abusive behavior or violating the conscience of a married partner. Masturbation is not prohibited scripturally; however, people should not abuse their consciences if they are under condemnation. The church neither promotes nor condemns actions on which the Bible is silent.

In I Corinthians 7:2-5 Paul revealed the proper actions of married partners one toward the other in order to avoid fornication. He declared that a man should have his wife and the wife should have her husband. This is to say that married couples should possess each other physically in order to satisfy their natural sexual impulses so that there will be no temptation to commit adultery. In verse 5 Paul said "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time." The Greek word for defraud is deprive. Married partners, then, are responsible to render to each other due benevolence in sexual relations, not depriving one another of such contact unless it be by mutual consent so that they may seek the Lord and suppress their physical desires as a part of fasting and prayer to draw closer to God. This is to take place only for a season, after which they are to come together again. Since according to Paul, the husband has power over his wife's body and the wife has power over her husband's body, both partners in marriage should give due consideration to each other's sexual needs so as not to give an occasion to the flesh to be tempted by adultery in extramarital relations. This truth is confirmed by Proverbs 5:15-21, which shows that a man should be satisfied with the physical attributes of the wife of his youth and not seek entanglement with lusts of strange women.

b. Birth Control

The timing for having children in marriage is a matter that is left to the discretion of married partners. Since sexual relationships are given for companionship and oneness as well as for procreation within the confines of marriage, there is no requirement that a married couple have children.

The question of the morality of using mechanical means of preventing pregnancy confronts believers in the twentieth century because of various contraceptives that are available. The question centers around the issue of the beginning of life and what is meant by the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."

From the evidence of Holy Scripture a human life is not in existence until after the fertilization of the ovum of the female by the sperm of the male. In the case of Adam, he became a living soul when the breath of life entered into his body (Genesis 2:7). The truth of this statement is confirmed by Job 33:4: *"The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life."* The breath of life is in the blood in the form of oxygen which is the meaning of the statement in Leviticus 17:11 that life is in the blood. The life of an unborn child is in its blood.

Since there is no independent life in the womb until the time of fertilization, the use of mechanical or chemical means to prevent conception could not be considered a violation of the

commandment of God against murder. The Church of God, therefore, recognizes the right of married couples to use contraceptives according to the dictates of their consciences.

c. Abortion

The Church of God believes that abortion is the taking of a human life. From the time that fertilization of the ovum and implantation of the zygote in the lining of the uterus takes place, there is no justification for inducing miscarriage by surgical or chemical means. A strong basis for this position is found in Exodus 21:22-25 in the case of labor that is induced by accident. *"If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."* When fighting men accidentally cause labor in a pregnant woman and the child is born without defect, the punishment for their action is determined by the woman's husband or by the judges. If, however, the child dies or is defective because of the accident, the penalty is life for life, eye for eye, and so forth.

If this is the case in the accidental inducement of labor, abortions are certainly a violation of the will of God. Since the will of God is for the protection of life, especially of that life that cannot protect itself, abortion is morally wrong in nearly all circumstances. The only exceptions to this rule are cases where a woman's carrying a fetus to term would endanger her own life. In the case of danger to the life of the mother, abortion of a fetus would be classified as an act of self preservation and would not be considered murder.

The Church of God believes that human life begins with the fertilization of the ovum. Since Adam became a living soul when God breathed into him the breath of life, the breath of life is the evidence of the existence of a soul, the killing of which, except for self-preservation, is a violation of the law of God. Since the breath of life is the oxygen that is circulated by the blood stream and not just the process of breathing, when blood is present to provide the breath of life, a living soul exists. This is the reason for the scriptural principle that the life of a being is in the blood (Deuteronomy 12:23).

The Church of God believes that abortions should be resorted to only in extreme cases and only with the mutual agreement of husband and wife in conformity with their consciences.

d. Alternate Means of Childbearing

Medicine and science have made alternative means of childbearing possible. These methods include invitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, and artificial insemination. Invitro fertilization involves the removal of the ovum from the woman and its fertilization by the sperm of the man in a laboratory dish (invitro), followed by the surgical implantation of the fertilized ovum in the lining of the uterus. This process may involve the ovum and sperm of husband and wife or of a donor(s). Surrogate motherhood is the implantation of a fertilized ovum in the uterus of a woman who is not the biological mother of the zygote and her bringing the child to term as a surrogate for a woman who is not able to maintain pregnancy. Artificial insemination involves the implantation of the sperm of a man in the womb of a woman. This may be from a woman's husband or from a donor.

The Church of God does not object to married couples' use of invitro fertilization or artificial insemination when there is no involvement of a third party—that is, the sperm is that of the husband and the ovum is that of the wife. The church cautions its members to exercise wisdom in the use of such procedures and then only through mutual consent and with a clear conscience of both husband and wife. The church denounces the use of any of these techniques to induce pregnancy in unmarried women.

e. Divorce

God hates divorce (Malachi 2: 14-16); therefore, it grieves Him for couples to separate after they have been joined by a holy covenant. This is the reason for Jesus' making the statement in Matthew 19:6: *"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."* This scripture does not say that man *cannot* put asunder what God has joined together. It is a commandment of God in the form of a future imperative, the strongest form of command in the Greek language. Man is commanded not to separate what God has joined together in marriage; however, it is not impossible for him to do so, just as it is not impossible for him to commit murder, despite the fact that God's law commands him not to do so.

Though God hates divorce, He has made provision for divorce and remarriage in cases of marital infidelity through the act of adultery. In Matthew 19:3-9 Jesus addressed the problem of divorce and remarriage in response to the question of the Pharisees, *"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"* Jesus answered them and said, *"Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso married her which is put away doth commit adultery."* Jesus declared that a man could put away his (not someone else's) wife for the cause of fornication. Though being married to someone else's companion is a state of adultery, it is not the limitation of the fornication about which Jesus spoke here. The literal translation of Matthew 19:19 declares, *"Whosoever shall dismiss his wife, if not upon the ground of fornication, and shall marry another, commits adultery."* This clearly says that a person has the right to divorce his companion on the grounds of fornication. Anyone who divorces his companion for any other reasons causes her to commit adultery and commits adultery himself.

The real question of this passage is what fornication is. According to the meaning of the word in the Greek text, fornication is any act of sexual intercourse that takes place outside of marriage. It includes premarital, extramarital, homosexual, and zoophilial relations. When a married person is involved in one of these relations, his companion can divorce him and remarry with scriptural sanction. If Jesus had limited divorce and remarriage only to the grounds of adultery, it could have been done only for heterosexual extramarital relations.

If either party of the marriage covenant allows a stranger to come between them through the act of adultery, he breaks the covenant of marriage. The marriage is not, however, dissolved, nor does it have to be dissolved. Though the innocent party can put away the offender and remarry, the ideal thing in the eyes of God is to forgive and continue the marriage. On the other hand those who simply cannot forgive adultery or other extramarital relations are given liberty by Jesus, Himself, to divorce and remarry.

The only other situation in which God permits believers to divorce and remarry is in the case of desertion when a married partner leaves his companion and determines not to continue the union. This is the exception which Paul gave in I Corinthians 7:15.

These restrictions on divorce and remarriage apply to believers. In the case where people have divorced and remarried for whatever reason while in sin, they are to remain in the marital stale in which they are at the time of their conversion. This is the instruction of Paul in I Corinthians 7:17, 27,28.

f. Annulments

The Church of God believes that a person may be entitled to the annulment of a marriage contract when that contract was obtained through deception. This was the case in the Word of God when a man could rightfully put away a woman if she were found not to be a virgin or to have had some uncleanness following the marriage (Deuteronomy 24:1). When there is a willful attempt on the part of a married partner to deceive the other partner in order to complete the marriage contract, that contract may be annulled with the approval of the church.

19. The Kingdom, the Church, and the Bride

The Church of God believes in the essential oneness of the universal body of Christ. While God has called individuals and organizations and has given them various inspirations and portions of His Word in which to specialize, there is oneness in the body of Christ, and no part of the body is exalted above another.

This principle, which is true of the universal body of Christ as well as of the church, is revealed in I Corinthians 12 in Paul's analogy comparing the human body and its diversity of organs and functions with the body of Christ and its diversity of callings and operations. The conclusion is that there is no part of the body which is self-sufficient or can function to its fullest capacity without interaction with the other parts of the body. This principle is true of the universal body of Christ of which the kingdom of God, the church, and the bride are functioning parts. None of these can fulfill its role in God without interaction with the others. As with the human body, the one thing which unites all the parts of the body of Christ is the blood of Jesus, that purifying, life-giving, and interrelating element without which the body would have no life.

The Church of God believes that it is a part of its responsibility and ministry to help bring about greater unity of purpose and fellowship within the kingdom of God and the other elections that are a part of that kingdom. This is an effort to bring about a fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus in John 17:18-23 that His disciples be one. An understanding of God's plan for oneness in the diversity of the callings and elections that He has outlined in His Word will help the church and those with whom it is associated in the kingdom of God to be able to bring this work of unity to pass in this generation.

The Church of God believes that there are three degrees of election in the calling of God. The first degree is the kingdom of God, the second is the church, and the third is the bride of Christ. The kingdom of God is all inclusive of those who have been elected from the world and redeemed by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The act of their faith translated them into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). The church is made up of those elected in the kingdom for the higher calling of being formed into a house or temple for God (I Peter 2:5). The bride of Christ is the election in the church that is formed according to the pattern of God and brought to maturity to be married to the Lord at His second coming and share with Him in the ruling of the earth for a thousand years (Matthew 25:1-10; Revelation 19:7;20:4).

The three elections are revealed in the makeup of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Israel as a whole was God's dominion of kingdom (Psalm 114:1-2) that He elected from among the nations of the world to be His chosen people. The kingdom of God is spiritual Israel (Romans 2:28, 29). Within Israel, God made a further election and chose the tribe of Judah as His sanctuary (church) according to Psalm 78:68,69. The church is the sanctuary of God (I Peter 2:1-8).

Within the tribe of Judah, God made still another election of the city of Jerusalem as His dwelling place. The bride of Christ is the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9,10. The truth of the nature of these elections is revealed in the days of Solomon when both Israel and Judah were unnumbered and Jerusalem was numbered. Both the kingdom (Israel) and the church (Judah) are unnumbered, with millions of members. The bride (Jerusalem) is a numbered body of two sets of 144,000, one Jewish, the other Gentile (Revelation 7:1,8;14:1- 4). This truth is further confirmed by Zechariah 1:19-21 which declares that in the restoration of the universal body of Christ, a three-dimensional restoration would be formed with Israel (kingdom of God), Judah (church) and Jerusalem (bride).

The degrees of election are no indication of degrees of righteousness. When one is born again into the kingdom of God, he is as righteous or justified as he will ever become, for he has had imputed to him the righteousness of Christ because of his faith. The degrees of election, therefore, are results of the grace and choosing of God to provide vessels to carry out various functions in His kingdom. Every member of the kingdom has his place in God, and everyone will be rewarded according to his works.

When all the works of God that He has designed to be fulfilled in the grace dispensation are completed by those different elections that He has established, all things will be brought together in one, and there will be one people of God, the eternal kingdom.

20. Covenant Relationships

God is a God of covenants because He is a God of agreement, unity, and oneness. It is a divine law principle that God never does anything without the use of a covenant. The only scriptural process by which two or more people may be united together into one unit for a particular purpose is through a covenant. There are many purposes for which people may seek to be joined together, including marriage, defense treaties, business contracts, and church covenant. While the purpose (and, therefore, the rights and privileges) may not be the same, the underlying principle which makes them one is the same. That principle is the making of a covenant.

The process of making and fulfilling the promises and commitments of covenants is the cornerstone of a safe society. The degree of security in any society can be directly measured by the level of moral commitment of that people to the honoring of promises, commitments, and covenants. While the term *covenant* means a *formal or solemn agreement between two or more parties*, the principle upon which covenant operates extends to all areas of life. Covenantal relationships are those that are based on agreements, commitments, and promises. The quality of life, spiritually, economically, and socially is directly dependent upon the level of commitment to the simple action of keeping one's word.

The Word of God contains many references to covenants. The first covenant which God made was with nature in the very beginning of creation. Jeremiah 33:20,25 declares, *"Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season...If my covenant be not with the day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth..."* God has a covenant with the entire universe that provides for the orderly interrelationship of the various elements of that universe and insures their survival.

The first covenant that God made with mankind and the creation is revealed in Genesis 9:9-16 where after the flood in the days of Noah, God declared, *"And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."* The covenant was that God would never again destroy the earth with water.

The first covenant that God made as a means of choosing a man and a people to be His elected people is found in Genesis 17:5-8 where God promised Abraham, *"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."* This covenant was based on Abraham's faith and was an everlasting covenant which subsequent covenants could not abrogate or disannul (Galatians 3:15-18).

The covenant by which God chose Israel to be His nation above all the nations of the earth is stated in Exodus 19:5,6: *"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenants then ye shall be a peculiar treasure above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."* This covenant of Yahweh took twelve tribes and made one nation. Though the tribes remained denominated, kept their separate identities, and camped under their own standards, they were, nevertheless, one nation by reason of the covenant into which they had entered.

In the New Testament dispensation, the principle of covenant continued to operate. Through His death on the cross, Jesus instituted the new covenant of grace which is discussed in Hebrews 8:7,8: *"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."* In Hebrews 12:24

Jesus was declared to be the "*mediator of the new covenant.*"

The effect of this new covenant was far reaching, for it united into one nation all those who believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. The entire kingdom of God that is made up of all believers is one kingdom. Those who are members of that kingdom are joined one to another, whether they recognize it or not and regardless as to how much they are divided. Like Israel of old, they are denominated, but because of the covenant of grace they are one kingdom. Since adoption into that kingdom is a sovereign act of God, the believer who is a part of the kingdom of God has no choice but to accept every other believer in that kingdom as his brother in the covenant of grace.

Another covenant that is manifested in the dispensation of grace is the covenant of membership in the church. The prophetic Scriptures speak of this covenant: "*For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee*" (Isaiah 62:5), and "*They shall ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join our- selves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten*" (Jeremiah 50:5). These prophecies declare that the children of Zion (the church) would be joined to the Lord and to one another in a covenant.

Paul revealed the covenantal relationship of members of the church in II Corinthians 11:2: "*For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*" He continued to explain the parallel between membership in the church and marriage in Ephesians 5:31,32: "*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*"

The covenant of the church is made for the purpose of joining into one body those who desire to submit themselves to the government of God and to the operation of His Word so that they may come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. This covenant is an agreement to be joined together with all others who have received it in commitment to the Word of God and its teachings. It is also an agreement with God and with the rest of the church to walk in the prophetic path that God has outlined for the church.

Another prominent covenant is the covenant of marriage, that agreement which unites a man and a woman into one in spirit and in flesh. This covenant is for the purpose of providing companionship, proper expression of sexuality, and procreation. The commitment of society to the honor of the marriage covenant is the element which binds the fabric of society together. When that commitment is strong, society is robed in strength and security. When it begins to weaken, society begins to unravel.

There are certain dynamics that are principles that make a covenant work. These include (1) faithfulness; (2) commitment to the covenant itself; (3) commitment to the parties of the covenant; (4) support of the covenant, both financial and moral; (5) self sacrifice of ego, money, and labor; (6) defense against outside attack; and (7) an atmosphere of trust contained with the absence of the competitive spirit. These dynamics of covenant apply to marriage covenants, church covenants, business covenants, international treaties, and so forth.

There are benefits of covenant that include (1) a formal commitment of others to oneself; (2) shared strengths; (3) a cooperative effort in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; (4) defense; (5) mutual support; (6) security; and (7) tranquility with no need for aggressive behavior.

It is important that believers be committed to the covenants of which they are a party. Commitment to the covenant of grace will cause believers to seek unity with other participants in that covenant. Abraham sought unity with Lot in Genesis 13:5-12 because they were brothers and his commitment to their covenantal relationship caused him to give the best of the land to Lot for an inheritance. It was by this same principle that Jesus was able to lay aside His deity, not grasping at equality with God, and become man so that He might fulfill His covenant with man.

Commitment to the church covenant will bring unity within the church, for members will seek to find solutions to problems rather than forsaking their covenant or becoming isolationists. Because of their covenant, members of the church have an obligation to be a unified body, to love

one another, to support one another, and to defend one another. This kind of commitment creates room for diversities of gifts and callings and for different convictions of conscience within the church. This is the way in which the church gains strength and grows in number and maturity.

The only natural covenant breaker is Satan. He has come only to kill, to steal, and to destroy, and he is an enemy of all covenantal relationships. Those who would arm themselves against his devices must be like God and be covenant makers, not covenant breakers. The strength that helps believers to overcome the devil is the covenantal relationships that they have with God and with other believers.

The Church of God believes that covenants are the basis of all actions of God and that God's people should make and keep covenants contracted between themselves and God and between themselves and their fellow man. When they keep covenant, they prove that they are committed to the God of covenants.

21. Holiness

The Church of God believes in and practices Bible holiness. This is in keeping with one of the primary requirements for being the house of God. *"This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of house"* (Ezekiel 43:12).

In Leviticus 11:44,45 God made a call to His people to separate themselves from all things of this life which would detract them from their service of Him: *"For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy."* Holiness is a recurrent theme throughout the entire Word of God. God demands no less than holiness from His people if they are to attain unto His perfect will. To live a holy life is to live a godly life of conformity to the will and Word of God, for holiness is the condition of being set apart to the service of God. That this condition is required in The New Testament is clearly set forth in I Thessalonians 4:7: *"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."* The calling of salvation requires that believers live holy lives. Hebrews 12:14 makes this condition a requisite of acceptance before God: *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."*

Paul declared that it was the responsibility of Christians to be holy in this present life. He declares that the grace of God that brings salvation teaches us that *"denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* (Titus 2:12). The Church of God believes that it is necessary for believers to obey the commandments of God and to maintain temperance and sobriety in those things that are not specifically covered by the laws of God. As they practice these beliefs, they can fulfill II Corinthians 7:1: *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* When we have fulfilled all the Word of God and have put it into operation in our individual lives, we will have perfected holiness. Then the church will be holy and without blemish, ready for the return of the Lord (Ephesians 5:27).

There are a number of things which affect the holiness of the believer either positively or negatively. The positions of the church on these are set forth in the following:

a. Fruit of the Spirit

Jesus declared in Matthew 7:15-20: *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit...Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."*

It is necessary for a good tree (one who is born again) to bring forth good fruit. If this is not the case, then he will be cut down and will die spiritually. If one bears corrupt fruit (or the deeds of the flesh), then it is evident that he is corrupt and not a true believer (Galatians 5:10-21).

According to Paul in II Corinthians 5:17, if any man is in Christ or born again, *"he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."*

A true believer will manifest the fruit of the Spirit. They are *"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance."* If we do not manifest these fruit of the Spirit, then we do not have the evidence that we have the Spirit.

b. Dress and Grooming

The Church of God makes the following recommendations as guidelines for dress and grooming of its members: Members and ministers should dress in modest, decent apparel and maintain standards of grooming in conformity to the environment in which they live and minister. The church recommends that the use of ornamentation and jewelry not be excessive. The church makes no recommendation regarding styles of clothing except to note that clothing should be of modest cost and of such decency that becomes holiness. The church recommends that members guard against exposure of nakedness in circumstances that could incite lust. Any display of the body in a way that is designed to be provocative to the opposite sex is lasciviousness and one of the works of the flesh.

While it does not believe that dress codes in themselves are evidence of holiness, the church encourages its members to be dressed and groomed honorably in every circumstance as becomes those who profess holiness.

c. Substance Abuse-Alcohol, Narcotics, Tobacco, Gambling (updated March,2024)

The Church of God stands against the habitual or excessive use of any substance which tends to bring the believer under bondage. Anything that forms addiction or is harmful to one's body is displeasing to God. These include alcohol, narcotics (both prescription and illegal drugs), tobacco and gambling. The guidelines of scripture for the use of each of these substances are the same as those that are established for the use of alcohol.

Since no one material thing is sin in and of itself, we must conclude that intoxicating drinks and drugs have some redeeming value and that as such their use cannot be totally prohibited scripturally. There are numerous examples of the use of wine in the New Testament. Jesus was called a winebibber. In this instance Jesus noted the paradox of the attack on John the Baptist because he did not partake of drink and their vilification of Him because He did. Either John the Baptist did not drink anything (which is impossible), or Jesus partook of wine (Matthew 11:19).

Wine was used in the Passover celebration when Jesus instituted it (Matthew 26:29). Jesus turned water into wine at the marriage in His first miracle (John 2). Paul proved that wine was used in the communion in his day, for some in I Corinthians 11:21 had become drunk while partaking of the Lord's Supper. We see, therefore, that the partaking of alcoholic beverages is not totally prohibited scripturally. Wine and other beverages can be used scripturally for medicinal purposes. Paul gave this instruction in I Timothy 5:23: *"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities."* The thing which becomes sin in the drinking of alcoholic beverages is the danger of drunkenness, which the Word of God throughout its record condemns as sin. The danger in taking the liberty to drink intoxicating beverages is the weakness of the flesh that brings about sin in drunkenness. This is the way in which wine is a mocker (Proverbs 20:1).

In the case of alcohol, narcotics, tobacco and gambling, God is not pleased when one becomes a slave to a substance or habit. Whenever one is in bondage to anything, he cannot be fully committed to God. It is for this reason that the church recommends that its members not habitually or excessively use alcohol or narcotics or participate in gambling. The smoking or chewing of tobacco is a habit that involves impurity of the flesh and should not be used. Participating in excessive/habitual gambling activities can rob individuals/families of finances and time in the pursuit of monetary riches (I Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5). This is a part of the condition of holiness that separates the believer from those things which would detract from his relationship with God and his testimony in the world.

d. Recreation and Entertainment

The Lord recommended rest and relaxation for His disciples. After a busy day of observation and instruction Jesus said to them, *"Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and*

rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat" (Mark 6:31). Christ recognized the effects of stress and fatigue on His followers. The state of "no leisure" was both exhausting and depleting. In view of this scripture and Christ's prescription to the apostles, it is appropriate for the church to outline ways in which its members may take their leisure.

Woven through the cloth of the Holy Scriptures is the thread of the law of temperance. Temperance is marked by moderation, keeping within the limits or not extreme or excessive. It is recognized by an absence or avoidance of extravagance. The law of temperance is applicable to the recreation and entertainment in which Christians may involve themselves. The church must remember the advice of Paul: *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not"* (I Corinthians 10:23).

In striving for the mastery, a man should be *"temperate in all things"* (I Corinthians 9:25). The Scriptures repeatedly bear out that Christians should keep themselves from evil. I Thessalonians 5:21,22 admonish us to *"hold fast that which is good,"* and to *"abstain from every form of evil."* David instructs us to *"depart from evil, and do good"* (Psalm 31:14).

The prophetic promise for those who do these things is that when they have their minds stayed on the Lord, they are kept in perfect peace or rest (Isaiah 26:3). The key to understanding the restraints one should place on himself in the matter of entertainment lies in the abstinence from evil.

The Church of God makes no restrictions on its members regarding recreation and entertainment except those requirements that such activity be wholesome and that which promotes holiness. Activities that promote the lusts of the flesh and encourage other violations of the commandments of God should be avoided.

e. Swearing

Swearing as it is commonly interpreted in the Christian community is to some degree confusing and misleading. To swear or to affirm does not force anyone to tell the truth if he intends to lie. Likewise, if one intends to tell the truth, he needs no oath to bind or confirm his words.

Prior to the coming of Jesus, the Jewish people practiced swearing by something greater than themselves to witness to their words or to attest to their truth. *"If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth"* (Numbers 30:2).

Even God, himself, swore. Because He could not swear by any greater, He swore by Himself: *"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee"* (Hebrews 6:13,14).

When Jesus came, however, He revealed to man the perfect will of God regarding swearing. He said in Matthew 5:34,35: *"Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King."* In the dispensation of grace, therefore, we are not to swear at all. In verse 37, Jesus revealed the reason for His giving this command: *"But let your communication be, yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."* Jesus meant by telling us not to swear that our word with a simple yes or no is sufficient for us to tell the truth, without our building ourselves with an oath.

James confirms the truth of this in James 5:12: *"But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation."*

This teaching against members' swearing includes joining lodges or such organizations as well as swearing to tell the truth in court proceedings. Our word should be sufficient according to the Word of God so that we should not bind ourselves by an oath.

f. Restitution

Restitution has always been a part of the character and conduct of God's people. It was instituted by God through the law He gave to Moses, inasmuch as the law required various things of one who had wronged his brother in order for him to be justified of God. He was required to restore unto anyone the equal or greater amount of what he had taken or destroyed. *"If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep"* (Exodus 22:1).

In I Samuel 12:3, we see an example of restitution where it was possible: *"Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? And I will restore it you."* In Ezekiel 33:12-15 we read of the necessity of restitution in order to obtain life if we sin or err: *"If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die."*

In the New Testament in Luke 19:5 we find an example of restitution in Jesus' day. When Jesus called unto Zacchaeus, guilt filled his heart, for he had defrauded his fellowman. He said, *"If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I will restore him fourfold."* Zacchaeus apparently knew that it was God's will for him to make restitution to his fellowman in order to be justified of God.

The Church of God believes that when one wrongs his brother, he must make due restitution in order to be justified of God (Matthew 5:23,24).

g. Meats and Drinks (Revised November, 2008)

The question of whether or not the Old Testament laws of clean and unclean meats apply to New Testament believers has been before God's people since the days of the Early Church when God began to call out of the Gentiles a people for Himself. The question that was posed to the Council of Apostles and Elders in Acts 15 was: *What does God require of the Gentiles?*

(1) Emphasizing the New Testament.

When it comes to the law of clean and unclean meats, we need to examine in greater detail the application of New Testament Judaism in order to better understand our stance as a church. The word *Judaism* carries a lot of weight. When we use this term it invokes many different ideas. Most people's minds go back to God's system of worship for the Jews under the Old Covenant. This, however, is not the case. Judaism is simply God's system of praise and worship. For the purpose of this thesis, the emphasis in the term *New Testament Judaism* is on the words *New Testament*. Another way of saying this is *New Covenant*. Therefore the question is: *"What is God's system of praise, worship, and service for the New Covenant believer?"*

One of the building blocks in understanding the concept of New Testament Judaism is Divine Law. God cannot lie, and He does not change. It is because of Divine Law that Ecclesiastes 3:14, 15 says, *"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past."* This tells us that the dietary laws that God gave to Israel in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 must in some way be significant to us today.

(2) Rightly dividing the Word of God.

In order to have a balanced approach in our Christian faith, we must accept the whole Bible as the Word of God. We must believe and practice its teachings rightly divided, the New Testament being witnessed by the Law and Prophets, as our rule of faith, government and discipline, and walk in the light of it to the best of our knowledge and ability. In order to rightly divide

the Word of God, you must consider what both the Old and the New Testament have to say on any subject. The Old Testament in no way contradicts the New Testament when we understand the concept of New Testament Judaism. As those who are in Christ, we must live in every way in accordance with what God requires of us in the New Covenant.

Everything that God did among His people through the Law and Prophets stands as a witness to the authenticity of the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me"* (John 5:39). Through the study of God's Law, we are able to come to a better understanding of the great spiritual truths which Jesus fulfilled in the New Covenant. Consider what Paul said in Galatians 3:23-26, *"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."*

There was a dispensation of time in which God did indeed require the Jews to abstain from eating certain meats as a part of their faith. They were *"kept under the law."* However, through a study of the Word of God as a whole, we come to understand how that dispensation of time came to an end when Jesus gave His life's blood bringing in the New Covenant in which we are justified by faith. Our study of the Law of God ought to be for the purpose of coming to a greater revelation of Jesus Christ.

(3) A new covenant.

Should believers today abstain from eating of the unclean animals spoken of in the Old Covenant? The answer to this question is found in understanding the New Covenant that Jesus brought through His blood. Jeremiah prophesied of the day when this New Covenant would be implemented: *"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people"* (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The Lord very adamantly says that this New Covenant will not be according to the Old Covenant. The covenant that God had given through Moses had been written on tables of stone. This New Covenant would be spiritual, for it would be written into the hearts of men. Jesus came to perfect the system of Judaism by bringing it into the realm of the Spirit. This is what Jesus meant when He said, *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill"* (Matthew 5:17). Jesus Christ, by His sinless life, accomplished and carried out to the fullest the requirements of the Law. This is something that no man before Him had ever done.

Jesus brought about a new and living way to serve the Father through His death and resurrection, Paul wrote in Romans 8:2-4, *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

Jesus did not come to do away with the Law of God or to start a new religion. He did, however, bring about a change in the way the Law was kept. The Law that God had given to Moses at Sinai was only *"a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image"* (Hebrews 10:1). Everything that God had revealed to Moses as a pattern for the governing of God's people on earth was a revelation of the pattern of heaven itself. The Old Covenant had been given by God to the children

of Israel as a means of purifying the flesh, but it in no way dealt with the real problem that man faced: the need to be purified spiritually because of our sinful nature.

(4) A change of the Law.

Although Jesus did not destroy the Law of God, He did bring about a reformation. His death brought a change in the Law. Hebrews 7:12 states, *"For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."* According to the Law of Moses, only those who were of the tribe of Levi could serve as priests. Notice how this requirement was based strictly on a candidate's fleshly lineage. When Jesus came, He became our forever High Priest, not while living on earth, but after His death. How could this be since He was not of the tribe of Levi?

The answer is proof positive that the death and resurrection of Jesus brought about a change in the Law. His priesthood was not according to the Old Covenant requirements that pertained to the flesh; it was according to the Spirit which is contained in the New Covenant He brought about. The writer of Hebrews gives us insight into this aspect of the ministry of Jesus: *"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second"* (Hebrews 8:1-7).

(5) The way to righteousness.

The works of the Law, including the laws concerning what a person could and could not eat, had been a means of attaining unto righteousness. These laws dealt with the purifying of the flesh. Under the New Covenant, it is the blood of Jesus that purifies the believer thereby making them righteous. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone"* (Romans 9:30-32). Jesus became that stone of stumbling and rock of offence to many of those in Israel because they did not receive the One that God had sent in fulfillment of their own scriptures.

Paul goes on to describe the spiritual condition of his brethren in the flesh in Romans 10:3-13, *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? (That is, to bring Christ down from above :) Or, who shall descend into the deep? (That is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Paul wanted to make it abundantly clear the complete work that Christ had accomplished through His atoning death. It is by our faith in His death and resurrection that we can attain unto righteousness—not our works or deeds. Jesus ushered in what we define as the *Dispensation of Grace*. John declared, *“And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ”* (John 1:16,17).

Under the Law, it was required that a man seek to obtain a right standing with God by living according to the righteous standards of the Law. In the Grace Dispensation, Jesus Christ has fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law and His righteousness is then imputed to us through faith in Him. This is why Paul said in Ephesians 2:8,9, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* The “works” that Paul is dealing with in this passage are the works of the Law. This includes the laws that are in question today in this article concerning the law of clean and unclean animals.

(6) A covenant with the flesh.

The ordinances that God had given to the children of Israel under the Old Covenant distinguished them as God’s chosen people according to the flesh. Still today, one of the things that are an identifying quality of the Jews is their desire to be “kosher”. The eating of pork is taboo. Remember, though, that this is all based on a covenant with the flesh. In other words, it was a covenant with the natural seed of Abraham. The thing that we need to understand about the work of Christ is that He brought the faith of God out of the realm of the flesh and into the realm of the Spirit. He brought a New Covenant, a covenant to be written on the tables of the heart.

Jesus transformed the Law of God from something that only applied to a select group of people into something which applies to all people. Paul goes on to explain, *“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby”* (Ephesians 2:11-16).

(7) The time of reformation.

Jesus brought an end to, or as Paul said “abolished,” the ordinances that separated the natural Jew from the rest of humanity. Salvation was no longer attained through adherence to the Law which governed the purifying of the flesh. We know that Jesus did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. He fulfilled it by satisfying those requirements in His flesh, and then transferring that righteousness to us by our faith in Him. The writer of Hebrews deals with this transference of the Law from the flesh to the Spirit. Hebrews 9:1 starts by saying, *“...the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.”*

After describing this service in the temple, which was made by the hands of man, the writer goes on to describe the fulfillment which Christ brought to these practices. Hebrews 9:8-14 states, *“The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of*

bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

What was the reformation that Jesus brought? It was the New Covenant in which it was no longer the flesh that was purified, but the conscience. Jesus brought about a new and living way. For example, the Feast of Passover was reformed from a feast in remembrance of God's deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt, into a remembrance of the deliverance from sin that we experience in Christ. Once again, Jesus took an Old Covenant practice, which we know was only a shadow, and revealed to us its fulfillment in Him.

Luke 22:19, 20 show us how Jesus reformed the method and reason for which the Passover was to be remembered. When Jesus broke the bread, He said, *"This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me."* Then when He took the cup He declared, *"This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."* Once again we find Jesus bringing the Law into the dimension of the Spirit, making it applicable not just to the natural Jew, but to every man.

Another example is the issue of circumcision. Under the Old Covenant, every male child was required to be circumcised as a sign that he was a part of God's covenant people. Circumcision is still a requirement under the New Covenant; however, it is no longer a physical circumcision, but rather the circumcision of the heart. Paul, as the Apostle to the Gentiles wrote, *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God"* (Romans 2:28, 29).

The Law of God is established here. It is in no way destroyed, yet it is brought into a spiritual application. The New Covenant is not based on the flesh, but on the Spirit. *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature"* (Galatians 6:15). This is the same truth that Jesus alluded to in John the 3rd chapter when He spoke to Nicodemus the Pharisee. Jesus told him, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (vs.3). Nicodemus had a hard time understanding this because in his mind, he was applying the words of Jesus to the flesh, while Jesus was pointing to something altogether new. Jesus was demonstrating that being the chosen of God, would no longer be by natural birth or lineage.

Jesus goes on to say, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again"* (vs. 5-7). There was a change that was coming about. It was a reformation in which Jesus Christ would make both Jew and Gentile acceptable before God, for the covenant would not be based on the flesh, but on the Spirit. This is why Paul said, *"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (II Corinthians 5:16, 17).

(8) Peter's vision of the unclean.

This transference of the Law from the natural (flesh) to the spiritual is what God began to reveal to Peter in Acts the 10th chapter. This passage demonstrates that the laws pertaining to the natural children of Abraham under the Old Covenant were a shadow that pointed to the work that Jesus Christ would accomplish in the New Covenant. Peter was given a vision from God, which was for the purpose of preparing him for a door of ministry that the Lord was opening to the Gentiles through a centurion man named Cornelius. The vision is found in Acts 10:10-16, *"And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him,*

Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven."

The meaning of this vision is made clear later in verse 28 when Peter, a Jew, goes to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. *"And he said unto them, ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."* The Old Covenant law of the clean and unclean was used by God to show Peter how the Gentiles had been made acceptable to God through the cleansing blood of Christ. God's acceptance of the Gentiles through their faith in Jesus, and not by works of the Law, was a new revelation to the growing church. Jesus had opened the way for not only the Gentiles, but for every man to find salvation through the New Covenant which He bought with His blood.

Before His death, Jesus gave the following instructions to His twelve apostles, *"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 10:5b, 6). That all changed once Jesus had given His life on the cross. The vision that God gave to Peter was in conjunction with the Great Commission which Jesus had given to His disciples after His resurrection. Notice the terminology that Jesus uses in Mark 16:15, *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."*

Jesus had not done away with the Law of God, He had fulfilled it. The laws God had given to Israel, distinguishing between clean and unclean animals, were also a part of the reformation that Christ brought. The New Covenant is not concerned with whether an animal is clean or not, but rather whether men are clean or not. The distinctions between the clean and unclean are those who have accepted Christ, and those who have not.

A prominent argument about this subject is this: *"If eating unclean meats was something that was no longer forbidden under the New Covenant, wouldn't Peter have known this from what he had learned from Jesus?"* After all, he had been with Jesus learning from Him for over three years. *By the time Peter has this vision, which is around a decade after Jesus' ascension, Peter, a devout Jew, still refuses to eat of the unclean animals."* The answer to this statement is simple. Jesus, while on the earth, did not reveal to His disciples everything that He was going to do. Notice what Jesus tells His disciples in John 16:12, 13, *"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come."* Jesus did not stop speaking to the church. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit was sent to relay the ongoing instructions of Jesus to His church. This is the reason why God gave this vision to Peter. It was time, in God's plan, for His church to come to a new understanding.

(9) Does food defile a man?

Jesus did say some things that—had His disciples understood at the time—would have helped them to see the change that He brought about. In Matthew 15:1-20, Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees because His disciples are eating bread without washing their hands. They had not broken the Law of Moses here, only the *"tradition of the elders,"* however; the answer that Jesus gives them demonstrates the emphasis that He placed on the condition of men's hearts, and not on what they eat. *"Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man...Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man"* (vs. 11,17-20). Though

Jesus is not dealing specifically with the law of meats here, the principle that He uses still applies. It is not what you put in your mouth that matters to God; it is what you allow in your heart.

There are some New Testament principles that we must apply when it comes to food. In I Corinthians 8, Paul is dealing with the subject of meat that has been offered to idols. Paul reminds us that the idol is nothing to us who know that God is our source. Then he says something relevant to us in our discussion about eating meat: *“But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse”* (vs. 8).

Meat is just meat. In the New Covenant, we are not defiled by what we eat, whether it is meat that was offered to an idol, or meat that is on the list of unclean animals included in the Law of Moses. Our walk with God is not based on food. Our stance as a church on the issue of meats and drinks can be summed up by what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 14:17, *“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”*

(10) The Council of Acts 15.

God’s acceptance of the Gentiles together with the Jews—as joint-heirs with Christ, raised some challenging questions in the Early Church as to what the requirements were for the Gentiles to be a part of the church. It was for this reason that a Council of the Apostles and Elders was called together in Acts 15 to discuss the matter. It starts in verse 1 when certain men from Judea were teaching, *“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”* The issue at stake here was more than just whether or not the Gentiles should be circumcised. The matter that they were considering was whether *“it was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Law of Moses”* (vs. 5). Remember, the dietary laws were a part of the Law of Moses. Peter, the apostle who God had used to open the door to the Gentiles, then gives a compelling statement in verses 7-11, *“Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”*

What was Peter saying? The Gentiles, without keeping the Law of Moses, received the baptism of the Holy Ghost the same way as those Jews had who were in the upper room at Pentecost. This was not to say that there was no longer a Law, but rather that the law of the Spirit had been written into their hearts. It was the Law that Christ had come to reform in which we are now made clean by the blood of Christ. There was no denying what God was doing among the Gentiles. After much discussion, James, who was anointed of God to lead the church at that time, brings prophecy to light concerning how God would take out of the Gentiles a people for His name. He subsequently states the final decision: *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood”* (vs. 18,20). The Gentiles were not, nor have they ever been, bound by the laws of meats. I want to reiterate that the Old Covenant had been a covenant that applied only to the natural seed of Abraham. It only dealt with the flesh, and it was only a shadow. The only requirement placed on the Gentiles in Acts 15, concerning what they could and could not eat, was to abstain *“from things strangled, and from blood.”* James did not just pull these requirements out of the air. He looked to the Scriptures to understand the will of God. In this case, he had to go all the way back to the instructions that God had given to Noah after the flood. Genesis 9:2-4, *“And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even*

as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat."

James did not make up the requirements for the Gentiles—God did. Noah was told, *"Every beast, every fowl, and all the fish of the sea are food for you."* The only stipulation was, *"Don't eat the blood."* Some would argue that Noah already knew what he should and should not eat because there were clean and unclean animals on the ark. However, the purpose of this distinction was made not as to what could be eaten, but as to what could be offered as a sacrifice. Genesis 8:20 tells us, *"And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar."* It is in the very next chapter that God tells Noah that *"every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you."*

(11) A matter of obedience?

There is another question that arises with regard to whether or not we should keep certain laws that God gave to His people under the Old Covenant. We know that we are justified by our faith in Jesus, however, some may argue: *Shouldn't we do these things as a matter of obedience? After all, we are aspiring to be the Bride of Christ...right? Jesus kept the Law of Moses, shouldn't we walk even as He walked? Aren't the dietary laws a test from God of whether we will be obedient or not?*

We are called to be Christ-like; however, this is not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Jesus was a Jew according to the flesh. He was of the tribe of Judah. He kept the whole Law of God in order to become the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins. Either He did a complete work, or He did not. To say that keeping certain laws in the Law of Moses is not a matter of righteousness but of obedience is a contradiction and does not work in the plan of God.

The problem is that when we choose to keep certain Old Covenant laws with the intent of being obedient, we then have to say that not doing those things is disobedience. What is disobedience? It is sin. If we have sinned, then we are no longer righteous. So then, no matter how we look at it, it is a matter of righteousness. This is where we have to say once again, *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"* (Romans 10:4).

It is apparent that the Apostle Peter struggled at least once with this when he faced peer-pressure from some fellow Jews. In Galatians the 2nd chapter, the Apostle Paul is moved to confront Peter who had been eating with the Gentiles until James sent some delegates to visit with them. When they came, Peter *"withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision"* (vs. 12). Let's look at what Paul had to say in Galatians 2:14-21, *"But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."*

(12) Beware of the curse.

In Galatians 3, Paul makes some statements that are very important in our understanding of what God requires of us as New Covenant believers. He starts by asking some questions: *"Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so*

many things in vain? If it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith" (vs. 2-5)? We did not receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit under the Law.

It was not until Jesus had purchased our salvation through His blood, resurrected, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was given to men. Paul is making the point that there is a difference between the Old and New Covenants. Why would we want to go back and attempt to purify the flesh with works of righteousness when Jesus Christ has become our righteousness by faith?

There is a great danger for those whom once being saved, begin to think that they in some way need to go back and keep certain things from the Law of Moses as a means of coming to perfection. Paul calls this a "curse": *"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"* (Galatians 3:10-14).

The curse here is not the Law, for we know that *"...the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good"* (Romans 7:12). The curse is the fact that in order to be justified by the Law, you are required to keep the whole Law, and no one, except Jesus, has ever done that. If we decide to live by the Law of Moses that forbade the children of Israel to eat pork as a means of righteousness, then we are obligated to keep not only that one law, but all of the laws that go with it. If we don't, then we have failed: *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"* (James 2:10).

If we go the way of the Old Covenant, we place ourselves in great danger. Paul puts this in perspective in Galatians 5:1-4, *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."* It does not get much clearer than this: *If you use any part of the Law as a means of justification, then you are obligated to keep the rest of the Law.* Furthermore, you are no longer trusting in the complete work that Jesus Christ has accomplished for those who put their faith in Him.

(13) The spirit of judgment.

Another problem that generally comes along with those who propose that we keep the dietary laws is a spirit of judgment. If one has a conviction that they should not eat certain things, that is well and good. However, there is no biblical foundation for imposing that requirement upon other believers. We need to be very careful not to judge someone's spiritual condition by what they choose to eat or not eat. We must let God, who sees the condition of the heart, be the judge of all men.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *"For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand"* (Romans 14:2-4). The key in this issue is to treat one another with respect and love. Paul also deals with the other side of this issue: *"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to*

him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:12-15). This has to do with putting others before ourselves.

Paul knew his liberty in Christ, and yet he considered the concerns of others and sought not to be offensive to those who believed certain things should not be eaten. In any case, we must avoid being judgmental of others. Let's consider Paul's final words in the book of Galatians concerning those who try to make others keep certain parts of the Law of Moses (such as the fleshly ritual of circumcision): *"Those who are trying to force you to be circumcised want to look good to others. They don't want to be persecuted for teaching that the cross of Christ alone can save. And even those who advocate circumcision don't keep the whole law themselves. They only want you to be circumcised so they can boast about it and claim you as their disciples. As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, and the world's interest in me has also died. It doesn't matter whether we have been circumcised or not. What counts is whether we have been transformed into a new creation. May God's peace and mercy be upon all who live by this principle; they are the new people of God"* (Galatians 6:12-16 NLT).

(14) The Law of Liberty.

One of the issues that are definitely a part of this subject is that of health. God does want us as believers to take care of our bodies. Our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. The New Testament deals with this issue by teaching us that we should be temperate in all things. The issue that we have been dealing with throughout this thesis is what James called in the New Testament, the Law of Liberty: *"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed"* (James 1:25). This does not mean that we are free to do as we want. It means that we are free to be led by the Spirit who has written the Law of God in our hearts.

This is what Paul is saying in Galatians 5:18, 22, 23, *"But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."* Because we are free from sin, we are free from the Law. Among the fruit of the Spirit is temperance or self-control. We state in our Manual of Apostles' Doctrine: *"If there is any term which can describe the law of liberty, it is temperance in all things. To him who has the Law of God written on his heart, all things will be lawful, but all things will not be expedient. It is much more difficult for one to live a temperate life than to cloister himself behind some code of stringent laws and regulations, some self-imposed or denominationally-imposed legalism. The true Christian's life is one of temperance, for he imitates the life of Christ, who abstained from all evil, yet partook of liberty. Those things denounced by the Scriptures will be avoided by the true Christian. Those things not governed by commandment of the New Testament will be governed by the law of temperance"* (V, H, 21, h).

It is not the responsibility of the church to legislate to the children of God what they can and cannot eat. This is not to say that we cannot or should not promote that believers should live a healthy lifestyle. However, we must make clear that what we eat does not have any bearing on our relationship with God.

(15) Conclusion.

We must let the New Testament be the governing factor in all that we do. I Timothy 4:1-5 gives us the instruction we need to follow when it comes to the food that we eat: *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every*

creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

What is the truth that we are to *believe and know*? It is that those who are in Christ have been given freedom from the dietary laws that were binding on the natural children of Abraham. This is the same instruction given to Noah, *"Every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused."* When we go beyond this, we place upon ourselves requirements that God Himself does not require of us. Whatever you have to eat, receive it with a thankful heart, knowing that the Word of God has given you the freedom to eat it.

h. Temperance, the New Testament Law of Liberty

James wrote of the law of liberty: *"Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed"* (James 1:25). The Chief Bishop of the early church made it clear that it is a blessing to carry out the work of loving the Lord God with all one's heart soul, mind, and strength, and his neighbor as himself, thereby fulfilling the law written on his heart by the Spirit. He continued to reveal this to be the topic of his discourse: *"If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well...So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty"* (James 2:8,12).

The exhortations of the New Testament condemning legalism of depending on works of the law for righteousness are matched by an equal number of scriptures warning against abuse of the law of liberty: *"Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"* (Galatians 5:13,14); *"As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God"* (I Peter 2:16); *"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably"* (Romans 14:15). Then there is Peter's resounding denunciation of men who would use the law of liberty as a means of promoting unrighteousness: *"For when they speak swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh...while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage"* (II Peter 2:18,19).

If there is any term which can describe the law of liberty, it is *temperance in all things*. To him who has the law of God written on his heart, all things will be lawful, but all things will not be expedient. It is much more difficult for one to live a temperate life than to cloister himself behind some code of stringent laws and regulations, some self-imposed or denominationally-imposed legalism. The true Christian's life is one of temperance, for he imitates the life of Christ, who abstained from all evil, yet partook of liberty. Those things denounced by the Scriptures will be avoided by the true Christian. Those things not governed by commandment of The New Testament will be governed by the law of temperance.

The Church of God has sought to free itself from the bondage of traditions and man-made laws that promote appearance and mannerisms as standards of righteousness. Some segments of modern Christianity have been much like the Judaizers of the early church, though they have promoted a different brand of Galatianism. Many have thought that the work of rebirth in the believer's heart was not sufficient to make him righteous. These have sought to define holiness and righteousness in terms of standards of conduct and works of righteousness, usually defined by their own self-righteous standards. This has resulted in a bringing of the children of God under bondage of legalism and made ministers into investigators and prosecutors. Men have violated the Scriptures by judging another man's (God's) servants and their salvation by their own personal code.

The truth is that all matters not specifically governed by the commandments written on the hearts of the believers are governed only by New Testament temperance. If there ever were anything that cannot be legislated, it is salvation. Israel proved this through centuries of failure to

keep the commandments; and even today many who trust in their rigid laws and commandments are filled with bitterness and hatred which are more condemned in Holy Scripture than immodesty.

Finally after years of trying, the motto of the church is a reality: "No Law book but the Bible." Seeing that the church has left the bondage of legalism of man-made traditions inherited from those who sought to appear more holy than someone else rather than seeking to be temperate in all things, the church heeds the admonition of Paul: *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free."*

i. Suicide (November, 2021)

The Church of God acknowledges that suicide exists in our world today. Nearly 800,000 people die by suicide in the world each year, which is roughly one death every 40 seconds. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the world for those aged 15-24 years.

Most people who consider suicide do not really want to die, they just do not know how to cope with or eliminate the pain they are going through. The first signs of a suicidal person is depression, followed by isolationism, and eventually suicidal idealization. It's important to understand that suicide does not end the chances of life getting worse, it eliminates the possibility of it ever getting any better. Suicide is never the answer to the problem. In fact, suicide does not end the pain, it just passes it on to someone else.

The Church does not believe that the act of suicide automatically sends a person to Hell. The Church recognizes that the person who committed suicide may have been influenced by mental illness, severe depression, and/or chemical imbalances that adversely affected their behavior.

The Church of God believes that God alone is the Judge of mankind in these matters. He is the only One who knows the thoughts and intents of a person's heart and mind (Hebrews 4:12). That is why He alone is the righteous Judge of all mankind (Psalm 50:6). God knows what was happening in an individual's mind before they committed suicide (Hebrews 4:13). Again, God makes the judgment concerning the matter.

Suicide may be the result of a number of different afflictions including depression and/or other debilitating forms of mental illness. Many forms of mental illness can be effectively managed by medications prescribed by healthcare professionals just as high/low blood pressure and high blood sugar levels are managed by medications. If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts or urges, please talk with a healthcare professional right away.

God's Word also makes it clear that suicidal thoughts can come from Satan who is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus refused to go against God's Word when His flesh was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (*"Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down...'"* Matthew 4:5-7). Our job as believers is to reach out to those who are contemplating suicide with the message that Jesus Christ is the answer in every area of our lives even when we are brokenhearted, held captive, mourning, or struggling with a spirit of heaviness (Hebrews 7:25; Isaiah 61:1-3).

The Church of God encourages its members to reach out in love to the families of those who have committed suicide with grace and mercy (Galatians 6:2). While the Church does not condone suicide, it acknowledges that its duty is to support/encourage the surviving family members (Psalm 34:18; Psalm 22:24). We should emphasize that Yahweh God is rich in mercy, compassion, and grace (Ephesians 2:4; Psalm 116:5). The Church also acknowledges that surviving family members—who may feel trespassed by the act of suicide—need to forgive their loved one who took their own life (Matthew 6:14,15).

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- » HEBREWS 4:12, *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

- » PSALM 50:6, *"Let the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is Judge. Selah."*
- » HEBREWS 4:13, *"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."*
- » I PETER 5:8, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*
- » MATTHEW 4:5-7, *"Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' 7 Jesus said to him, 'It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"*
- » HEBREWS 7:25, *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."*
- » ISAIAH 61:1-3, *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."*
- » GALATIANS 6:2, *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."*
- » PSALM 34:18, *"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit."*
- » PSALM 22:24, *"For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from Him; But when He cried to Him, He heard."*
- » EPHESIANS 2:4, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us."*
- » PSALM 116:5,NIV, *"The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion."*
- » MATTHEW 6:14,15, *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

22. Full Restoration of the Gifts to the Church

"Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Psalms 68:18). This scripture prophesied of Jesus' ascending on high where He sat down at the right hand of God. In this position, He became the High Priest and as such received gifts from the Father to give to men. The first gift which He gave to men was the promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit, which by His own declaration was to lead and guide those who received Him into all truth.

a. Five Gifts of the Ministry

In Ephesians 4:8 Paul revealed the continuation of this gift program for the purpose of leading the church into all truth and perfecting it. He said that when Jesus ascended on high, he gave gifts to men. These gifts include that of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher and are given according to the degree of one's ability of utterance. Proverbs 18:16 shows this: *"A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men."* It is possible to have a great ministry without any one of these gifts; however, a gift makes one's ministry much more effective. We are shown this in Proverbs 17:8: *"A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it: whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth."*

The Church of God stands for the complete restoration of all of the five ministerial gifts of the

church in this day. These gifts must be operating in their perfect order so that The Church of God might be perfected in the Word of God and come into the unity of faith necessary to be prepared for the return of the Lord. Without these gifts given to men by our High Priest, a perfect church cannot possibly be formed, and Jesus cannot return to this earth; for He will return only for a bride who has made herself ready (Revelation 19:7) through the perfect ministry given *"for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ."*

b. The Nine Gifts of the Spirit

Spiritual gifts are included under the category of the gifts mentioned in Psalms 68:18. These gifts are operations and ministries of the Spirit of God which are available to individuals for the edification of the body of Christ. These gifts are special abilities and talents which God gives to those who are qualified spiritually and who seek after them (1 Corinthians 12:31;14:1). They are given to different people within the church and kingdom of God according to the grace of God. *"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith "* (Romans 12:6).

These gifts are available to individuals, and each operates through the individual who has that particular gift. I Corinthians 12:11 declares that the Spirit divides *"to every man severally as he will."* Every man who is qualified is given a gift individually as God wills it.

The nine gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifested in Him through the believer to meet special needs. They are:

- (1) **The Gift of the Word of Wisdom**, which is given for making decisions in harmony with the will of God through the giving of wisdom for a particular situation at that time.
- (2) **The Gift of the Word of Knowledge**, which is given for a clearer perception of knowledge of the will and Word of God and for a deeper insight into truth that goes beyond the perception of the senses.
- (3) **The Gift of Faith**, which is given to bring absolute certainty that God will intervene and act even in the direst of circumstances.
- (4) **The Gifts of Healing**, which are given to bring compassion and to provide the healing of all manner of diseases through the Word and power of God.
- (5) **The Gift of Working of Miracles**, which is given for the releasing of extraordinary divine power that immediately breaks through the realm of human possibility and performs the impossible.
- (6) **The Gift of Prophecy**, which is given to provide insight into future events and to bring forth, inspired utterances that interpret the meanings of hidden truth.
- (7) **The Gift of Discerning of Spirits**, which provides identification and the understanding of how to deal with various spirits which manifest themselves through man and provides understanding of what spirit or purpose of God is being manifested or needs manifestation for a particular time.
- (8) **The Gift of Tongues**, which is given for personal and corporate edification of the intellect through the spiritual inspiration of other languages and of unknown tongues.

- (9) **The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues**, which provides for the interpretation of those utterances which are made in tongues by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for the interpretation of languages with which the believer is not familiar, and for the edification of the church through the revelation of hidden meanings of spiritual utterances that bring understanding to the mind and the spirit.

These are the gifts of the Spirit which are available to anyone who desires and qualifies for them.

23. Understanding Divine Healing (Revised November, 2007)

The subject of divine healing is one that is largely misunderstood in the Christian community. Some say that every believer is guaranteed a healing according to Isaiah 53:5 just like everyone that confesses Jesus as their Savior is guaranteed salvation. The truth is that divine healing is a mystery to most of us prompting such questions as "Why does God heal some and not others?" This article is intended to bring to light what Holy Scripture says about healing so that we as believers can have a better understanding of this subject.

What do we know about healing? First, we know that it is one of the nine spiritual gifts found in I Corinthians 12. In verse 9 it says, *"...to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit."* Notice that the word *gifts* is plural in this scripture. In this article we will expand upon the premise that healing comes in many forms including spiritual and physical applications.

Next we are instructed to desire the spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 14:1,2) and we learn that they can be imparted to us by the laying on of hands by the ministry (Romans 1:11; I Timothy 4:14). Once we have received the gift, we are instructed to share it (I Peter 4:10) and not to neglect it (I Timothy 4:14). Paul says in I Corinthians 12:7 that these nine spiritual gifts-including healing-are given to profit the body of Christ.

In Psalm 103:2,3 we read, *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases."* Here David declares the healing of diseases to be one of the benefits given by God to mankind. The only requirement for divine healing is faith in the power of God to heal. Healing is a provision and promise of God as a sign that should follow believers. It is not, however, a requirement. It is only a benefit.

In order to understand healing we must first answer the question *why are we sick?* To answer this question we must go back to the beginning of mankind. Man is unique among God's creation because he has the Spirit of God breathed in him. Mankind's sickness can be traced back to the separation of his spirit from God's Spirit in the Garden of Eden. Thus, the original cause of all sickness is a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion (sin) against God. Physical illness—along with all of mankind's problems—came as a direct result of spiritual sickness in man. In Romans 6:6, Paul calls this condition "the body of sin."

Today, men and women are born with an Adamic nature which means that our flesh is inherently corruptible physically and spiritually; hence the onset of physical sickness as well as spiritual immorality. Also, we must acknowledge that Satan can bring about sickness. Consider the story of Job when Satan asked for permission to attack his physical body. It is important to understand that while Satan can attack us with sickness, he can do nothing without God's permission. With that said, we must acknowledge that there are times when God allows sickness in our lives.

The fact that one is sick or afflicted is no sign that he has sinned or is sinning, for God at times has allowed sickness to overtake perfect men (for instance, Job) to test their love for Him. He has also permitted Satan to send affliction as a thorn in the flesh to buffet one endowed with great revelation from God and to keep him from becoming exalted in his knowledge. II Corinthians 12:7 shows this: *"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh."* Some suffer for the sake of the body of Christ, as

Colossians 1:24 reveals: *"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh and for his body's sake, which is the church."*

It's hard for those of us who have lived in the Grace Dispensation to understand that God permits sickness and has even used sickness to punish His creation. The Greek word for sickness is *asthenes* which means *strengthless or weakness*. While many of us automatically associate sickness with a physical infirmity that is not always the case. In Romans 5:6 Paul says, *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."* The words *without strength* are interpreted from the Greek word *asthenes*. It's important to understand that when we see the word *sickness* it can mean both spiritual and/or physical weakness. Obviously Paul was referring to spiritual weakness in this scripture so we see the word *asthenes* interpreted to mean spiritual weakness.

The fact is that when Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, He did not annihilate corruption within our mortal bodies. In other words, our bodies are still subject to weakness-both spiritually and physically. If Christ had done away with corruption in our bodies at the cross, man would not be subject to death as a result of sickness or disease.

God can use sickness in mankind for His glory. Consider the story found in John 9:1-3, *"And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."* Some have concluded from these scriptures that God made the man blind so that Jesus could heal him. This is not what the scripture says. God took a person who was blind-because of mankind's original sin-and demonstrated His healing power through Him for His glory.

The Apostle Paul was a vessel that was used mightily of God to heal many, but he remained afflicted with sickness in his physical body. Paul besought the Lord three times to heal him, and yet it was denied (II Corinthians 12:8). Why? *"...My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"* (verse 9). So, the most important thing is not always that God heals us, but that He helps us develop an attitude of faith and grace in sickness.

Most Christians have no doubt heard the phrase *"And by His stripes you are healed"* pronounced over themselves or another believer who was sick in their body. This statement is taken from Isaiah 53:5 and has been interpreted to mean that we as believers are guaranteed a physical healing as a result of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross of Calvary. The church recognizes that Isaiah 53 is primarily a reference to the remission of sins and not a guarantee for physical healing. While physical healing is included in Isaiah 53:5, it is but one facet of the total restoration of the body mind and soul now available to believers as a result of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Divine healing is a benefit of serving God and is one of the 9 spiritual gifts given to the church; however, we as believers are not guaranteed physical healing based on Isaiah 53:5.

Isaiah 53:1-3, *"Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of the dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."* From the beginning of this chapter the prophet Isaiah identifies that he is referring to Jesus Christ-our Lord and Savior. Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah and the role that He would play in redeeming us from our sins.

Isaiah 53:4, *"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."* Since Jesus took our grief and carried our sorrows, does that mean that we would not grieve any more or experience sorrow? The answer is no. Jesus identified with—but did not remove—our grief when He suffered on the cross. This is an important point to remember.

Isaiah 53:5,6, *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he has bruised for our iniquities:*

the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." We find this same scripture quoted in I Peter 2:24,25. These verses are often misunderstood because people see the word healed and they immediately think of physical healing. The Hebrew word *rapha*, which was interpreted in this passage as *healed*, means *to mend, cure, heal, thoroughly make whole, a total restoration*. A restoration to what? Because of Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, mankind now has the ability to be restored to his Creator, Yahweh God.

How is the Hebrew word *rapha* (translated as heal or healed) used in other scriptural settings? In Psalm 41:4 David says, "...LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." The word *heal* in this scripture is the Hebrew word *rapha*—the same word used in Isaiah 53:5. It is obvious that David is talking about a spiritual healing/restoration here and not a cure from a physical ailment. In Hosea 14:4 God says, "*I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from them.*" The word *heal* in this scripture is again the Hebrew word *rapha*. In this context God is talking about healing or restoring a nation who has backslidden. There is no mention of or referral to a physical healing of any kind.

The Bible says in Psalm 89:31,32 that iniquities (sins) are punishable by stripes. "*If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.*"

The emphasis in these scriptures is on our spiritual sickness or weakness. The phrase "with his stripes we are healed" is a reference primarily to our spiritual redemption or restoration from sin. This is confirmed in verse 8, "*...for the transgression of my people was he stricken.*" Jesus was not stricken for our health; He was stricken for our sins. Verse 10, "*Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin...*" The scripture does not say that His soul was an offering for our health; it was an offering for our sin. The entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah talks about the price that Jesus would pay to atone for the sins of the people. It is not a chapter discussing physical healing. In fact, verse 12 summarizes with this statement "*...he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*"

The Church of God recognizes that Isaiah 53:5 is primarily a reference to the remission of sins and not a guarantee of physical healing. Jesus came to save us from our sins—not to guarantee us good health. While atonement from sin is 100% guaranteed (if a man accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior), being a Christian does not guarantee you physical good health. If Isaiah 53:5 was a statement about physical healing, we would have a 100% guarantee that God would heal every believer. We know that this is not the case. We have witnessed many spirit-filled men and women of God go unhealed and subsequently die from their ailments.

The fact that Isaiah 53:5 says "*we ARE healed*" (emphasis added) further verifies that this scripture is talking about total restoration and/or salvation as opposed to physical healing. Jesus did not die so that we could be healthy; He died to save our souls from hell.

Paul tells us in Romans 8:19-23, "*For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God... [21] For the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. [23]...even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*" If we are still waiting for our complete bodily redemption, it is obvious that we do not possess it as of yet.

In Luke 21:28, Jesus clearly tells us that our complete redemption (spirit, soul, and body) will happen at His second coming: "*And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*" It is at this time that we will finally be liberated from the consequences of Adam's sin in our bodies.

When Jesus Christ appeared on the scene some 2,000 years ago, He arrived at a time when there was little supernatural healing and limited medical remedies. When the children of Israel became physically sick, they had very few options available to them for treatment. This is

confirmed by the woman who was sick with an issue of blood for 12 years. Mark 5:26 says she *"...had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse."*

Prophecy dictated that the coming Messiah would heal the people of God both spiritually and physically. Malachi 4:2 prophesied that He would have *"healing in his wings."* The fact that Jesus Christ healed the people of their infirmities was a fulfillment of Bible prophecies and was part of the proof that He was indeed the promised Messiah. This truth is confirmed in Matthew 8:16, 17, *"When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."*

Matthew 4:23,24a, *"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria..."* The miracles that Jesus performed among the people spread quickly throughout the region. In that era of limited communication and no means of mass communication, the spoken word of the works that Jesus was doing helped spread the message of the Gospel and brought people to Him. In fact, He told the disciples of John the Baptist, *"...Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached"* (Luke 7:22). Jesus used healing to help spread the good news of the Gospel and to minister to the needs of hurting people both spiritually and physically.

While Jesus healed many people throughout His earthly ministry, the Scriptures reveal that He did not heal everyone everywhere or every time. Consider the account of Matthew 13:54-58. Jesus had returned to His own country and began to preach in the synagogue; however, His works there were limited because of the unbelief of the people.

According to the four Gospels, Jesus did not heal the same way every time. The woman with the issue of blood was healed simply by touching the hem of His garment (Matthew 9:20-22). Another time He spat on the ground forming clay and anointed a man's eyes (John 9:6,7). He healed the centurion's servant by proxy (Matthew 8:5-13). Sometimes He laid His hands on them (Mark 5:41), and other times He simply spoke and they were healed (Matthew 8:16). Jesus used a number of methods to minister to the needs of people and often equated physical healing with the need for spiritual healing-the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 9:2).

It should be noted that divine healing did not begin with the earthly ministry of Jesus. The Old Testament records divine healing dating back hundreds of years before the time of Abraham. In Genesis 20:17, 18 God healed Abimelech. Naaman was healed of leprosy in II King 5:14. The Gospels record that Jesus healed thousands of people during His ministry before He ever hung on the cross of Calvary.

Matthew 8:16-17 confirms that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:5 during His 3 ½ years of ministry on this earth. *"When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which had spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."* The word bare used in this scripture is from the Greek word *bastazo* which means *to lift, bear, carry, take up*.

In Mark 16:15-18 we find the instructions given by Jesus that we refer to today as The Great Commission. *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."*

When we read the phrase *"lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover"*, most of us immediately think of someone recovering from a physical condition. The truth is that this phrase encompasses much more than just physical sickness. The Greek word *arrhostos* is translated as

sick and it means *infirm, sick (folk)*. The word *infirm* means literally *physically weak*. The word *physically* is an adverb of *physical* which means *relating to the body as opposed to the mind*. The Greek word *kalos* is translated as *recover* and it means: *well (usually morally) (in a) good (place), honestly, + recover, (full) well*. So the command to *"lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover"* is not limited to seeing sick people healed, it is a command to lay hands on those who are weak in their body, and they shall be made morally well. Jesus is more concerned about the condition of a person's soul than their physical well-being.

The principle theme of The Great Commission is about spreading the Gospel—the good news of salvation. The focus is not about physical healing. Consider Luke 24:46-49 when Jesus said, *"... Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."* In Matthew 10:1 we read, *"And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease."* Again, when we read *"heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease"* our minds have been taught to think that this only addresses physical ailments in our bodies. Let's examine this commission further by defining the original Greek words that were recorded.

The Greek word *therapeuo* that was translated here as *heal means to wait upon, cure, heal, worship*. It is where we get the English word for therapy. The Greek word *nosos* which is translated as *sickness* means *malady, disease, infirmity, sickness*. *"Malady"* means *in bad condition, sick, disease or disorder of the animal body, an unwholesome condition*. And finally the Greek word *malakia* which was translated *disease* means *softness that is enervation (debility), disease*. *"Enervate"* means *lacking physical, mental or moral vigor (strength)*. The point is that the phrase *"to heal all manner of sickness/disease"* is not a strict referral to physical ailments—it also *means to wait upon [through ministry and therapy] those who are in a bad or unwholesome condition*. In other words, Jesus gives us power to minister to and deliver those who have any lack in their life including spiritual, physical, social and/or mental disorders. It is not a command to pray a prayer over a sick person and pronounce them healed and then walk away.

God is sovereign and has absolute power to do anything-except violate His Own nature. God uses this power selectively. He does not always do what He is able to do. Consider Deuteronomy 32:39, *"See now that I even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."*

Sometimes God chooses to heal and/or deliver His servants, and sometimes He chooses not to. He allowed Stephen to be martyred (Acts 7:59,60), yet He worked a miracle to get Peter out of prison (Acts 12:6-10). We can never say that since God liberated one person in the past that He will do the same thing today by liberating us from our problem; we are servants of the Most High God. Whether we live or die, whether we are sick or well, whether we are free or imprisoned, it all lies in His arranging of our lives. It is Yahweh God that makes the ultimate decision regarding us as His servants. Psalm 37:23 says, *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way."*

The truth is that God selectively heals His servants based on His will for their lives. Consider the words of Jesus in Luke 4:25-27, *"But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elijah sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian."* The Bible says that God's ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9). We must trust in God whether He heals and/or delivers us or whether He walks with us through our trial.

So, how does a person get healed today? Let's look at what the Scriptures tell us to do.

a. We acknowledge that divine healing is a benefit of serving God.

- Psalm 103:2, 3, *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits...who healeth all thy diseases."*
- Jeremiah 17:14, *"Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed..."*
- Luke 4:18, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted..."*

b. We are instructed to ask.

- John 5:6, *"...Wilt thou be made whole?"*
- James 5:16, *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed..."*
- John 14:13, *"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do..."*

c. We are instructed to believe by faith.

- Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him...for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*
- Luke 17:19, *"And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."*
- Matthew 8:13, *"And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee..."*

d. We are instructed to lay hands on the sick anointing them with oil.

- James 5:14, 15, *"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord..."*
- Acts 28:8, *"...Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on them, and healed him."*
- Mark 6:13, *"And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them."*

e. We are instructed to pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

- Colossians 3:17, *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..."*
- Acts 4:30, *"By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."*
- Acts 3:6, *"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk."*

f. We are instructed to pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

- Mark 6:5,6, *"And he could there do no mighty work save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief..."*
- Luke 8:50, *"But when Jesus heard it, he answered them, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole."*
- Matthew 17:14-16,19,20, *"...Then came the disciples to Jesus apart and said, why could we not cast him out? [20] And Jesus said unto them, 'Because of your unbelief..."*

If we as Christians are not guaranteed a physical healing, are we any different from unbelievers? The answer is a resounding yes! We have a blessed hope that can sustain us even when deface very difficult situations in our earthly lives. As believers, we have what the Apostle Paul calls the firstfruits. Romans 8:23a, *"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the*

firstfruits of the Spirit..." As believers, we have only begun our journey of complete restoration (body, soul, and spirit) that will climax when Jesus Christ returns to this world.

While we have received the firstfruits of the Spirit, we still have corruptible bodies that we have to live with. I Corinthians 15:42b says this about our bodies, *"...It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption."* Paul was talking about believers here, and he states that we will receive our incorruptible bodies in the resurrection at the return of Christ. As believers, our bodies are still subject to corruption. We still get wrinkles, gray hair, sickness and so forth.

When we as Christians become sick, we should pray a prayer of faith to be healed according to the will of God for our lives. While we are all ready to rejoice anticipating a complete healing from God, what should our response be if He chooses not to heal us? Paul answers that question in Philippians 1:21, *"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

Sometimes the ultimate healing for a believer is for God to take them home with Him to suffer no more. Because God chooses not to heal us as believers is not a sign of rejection or a judgment that we are somehow unworthy of being healed. We must simply acknowledge that God is in control of our lives and that we are His creation and subject to His ultimate will and provision for our lives. While we may not understand everything that God does, we know that His thoughts toward us are *"...thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end"* (Jeremiah 29:11b). When we feel like our troubles-including sickness-are too much for us to bear, we must remember the Word of the Lord to the Apostle Paul, *"...My grace is sufficient for thee..."* (II Corinthians 12:9).

In The Church of God, the prayer of the people is as it was in the Early Church in Acts 4:29, 30: *"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak the word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."* Divine healing is a provision from God and is a source of great glory to Him when His people manifest their faith for healing.

24. Signs Following Believers

In Exodus 4 we find a prime example of the use of signs to confirm a man of God and His program. Before God sent Moses into Egypt to deliver His people, He first equipped him with certain signs which he would manifest through the power of God to lead them from their bondage. Notice verse 17: *"And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs."* In II Kings 2:13-15 the outward manifestation that caused the sons of the prophets to recognize the fact that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha was the sign manifested when he smote the waters of the Jordan with Elijah's mantle and they parted.

In Isaiah 8:14-18 we see a prophecy of Jesus and His disciples, of His binding up the testimony (spirit of prophecy-Revelation 19:10) and sealing the law among them. Then in verse 18 the prophet tells us that Jesus and His disciples were for signs and wonders in Israel.

Jesus surely fulfilled this prophecy, as He repeatedly did signs, wonders, and miracles in the eyes of the people insomuch that they said, *"No man can do these miracles...except God be with him"* (John 3:2). Notice Jesus' signs of confirmation to John that He was the Christ in Matthew 11:4, 5: *"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."*

Peter's statement regarding proof of Jesus' ministry is recorded in Acts 2:22: *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know."* Jesus was approved of God by the manifestation of miracles, wonders, and signs.

In I Corinthians 14:22, we find that the Early Church still was followed by signs, for Paul said, *"Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."*

Jesus declared that the Christian believer should be followed by signs to confirm to the unbeliever that he is of God. He said in Mark 16:17,18: *"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take*

up serpents; and if they drink an deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” As long as there are unbelievers, there will be signs to follow the believers so that the unbelievers will either be convinced or will be without excuse before God (John 9:30-41; Acts 28:3-6; II Corinthians 12:12).

25. Surnaming

The Church of God practices the scriptural procedure of surnaming those men whom God had chosen and ordained to a specific work. This was the case repeatedly with God and Jesus as well as with the early church. God surnamed Abram, calling him Abraham (Genesis 17:5); and Jacob, calling him Israel (Genesis 35:10). Moses surnamed Oshea, calling him Jehoshua (Joshua) (Numbers 13:16). Jesus surnamed Simon Barjona, calling him Peter (Mark 3:16); the sons of Zebedee, calling them Boanerges (Mark 3:17); and Judas, calling him Thaddaeus (Matthew 10:3). The early church surnamed Joses, calling him Barnabas (Acts 4:36); Saul, calling him Paul (Acts 13:9); Barsabas, calling him Justus (Acts 1:23); and Judas, calling him Barsabas (Acts 15:22).

Surnaming was greatly practiced in Biblical culture. However, The Church of God sees that surnaming in the New Testament can be recognized in a limited manner. In the Twentieth Century, this practice can be easily misunderstood by the uninitiated in the Christian community and should be practiced in wisdom.

26. Satan, His Origin, Manifestation, and Destiny

Satan was originally called Lucifer, the son of the morning (Isaiah 14:12). He was one of the two anointed cherubs which covered the mercy seat of God in heaven in the beginning (Ezekiel 28:14). He was the highest of the created beings in heaven and was perfect in wisdom and beauty as the reflector of the light of God until the time came that iniquity was found in his heart (Ezekiel 28:15). This was when he came to consider himself equal with God and prepared to ascend to the throne of the Most High (Isaiah 14:13). At that time, he was cast out of heaven by the warring angel, Michael (Revelation 12:7-9; Luke 10:18), and became a wandering star. When man fell through transgression, however, Satan became the god of the earth (II Corinthians 4:4) and still reigns as such in the world today. He seeks to devour the people of God (I Peter 5:8) through all his programs of subtlety (II Corinthians 11:3) and in this day will institute a program of religious perversion (Revelation 13:11-17) which will cause multitudes to follow his cunningly devised fables. The elect of God, however, will recognize his devices and overcome him (Revelation 17:14). His manifestation in this day will be in the form of the Son of Perdition (II Thessalonians 2:3-9). After the great battle of the ages, he will be defeated and cast into prison for one thousand years of the righteous reign of Lord Jesus (Revelation 20:2). Then he will be released for a small season and go forth to deceive those who did not wholeheartedly accept the administration of Jesus (Revelation 20:7). Finally, along with all those who follow him he will be cast into the lake of fire for the eternal torment of punishment with no hope of escape or annihilation (Revelation 20:10).

Demons are fallen angels that together with Satan were cast out of heaven to the earth before Creation (Revelation 12:7-9). According to Jude verse 6, the fate of the fallen angels is to be bound in everlasting chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day (II Peter 2:4). Until that time, they are the servants of Satan who roam the earth tormenting and oppressing mankind. Ephesians 6:12 refers to them as *“the rulers of the darkness of this world.”* Since Satan is not omnipresent (*def. present everywhere at the same time*), he uses demons to accomplish his master plan of deceiving and destroying the people and work of God. Demons will accompany their master, Satan, *“into the lake of fire and brimstone...and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever”* (Revelation 20:10).

27. The Resurrection

The doctrine of the resurrection is one of the most basic and important teachings of The Church of God as it represents God's greatest promise to mankind. Whether we are saint or sinner,

we are promised a resurrection from the dead and a life after this life.

Jesus said in John 5:28,29: *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."* According to this promise, every man will be brought back to life and judged for his deeds done in the body. One's status in the hereafter is determined by his life on earth.

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Corinthians 15:19). Paul as well as all other believers placed great emphasis on the resurrection. This resurrection about which Paul spoke was the first resurrection. Revelation 20:6 declares, *"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection."* It is necessary that one be holy to have a part in the resurrection of life or the first resurrection. Those who are dead in Christ arise first (I Thessalonians 4:14-19) and with those who are alive and remain in Christ at His coming before the Millennial Reign are in the first resurrection. Then the rest of the dead are resurrected after the Sabbatical Millennium for judgment according to their works at the great white throne. *"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the book were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works"* (Revelation 20:12.). The first resurrection is the resurrection only of those who are righteous (Revelation 20:5, 6).

The Church of God firmly believes in the first resurrection of the dead saints and in the change of the living saints. It also believes in the second resurrection to judgment of all men.

28. The Everlasting Gospel of the Kingdom

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus foretold one of the major events upon which His return to the earth is predicated: *"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."* This statement is reiterated in Mark 13:10: *"And the gospel must first be published among all nations."* Throughout His Judean ministry, the teaching of Jesus maintained the theme of the kingdom of God. Indeed, in that all-important time of His communion with His apostles for the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension from the Mount of Olives, the prime topic of instruction was *"the things pertaining to the kingdom of God"* (Acts 1:3).

In His last moments with His disciples, Jesus was prevailed upon to answer the question: *"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"* His reply was: *"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1: 6-8). Immediately thereafter, Jesus was received up out of their sight.

The last words of our Lord to His disciples were that they would receive power from the Father when the Holy Spirit would come upon them so that they could be witnesses of Him and of the coming kingdom the uttermost part of the earth. Throughout the Book of Acts and the writings of the apostles, the theme of the return of Christ receives preeminence in the hope of the calling of the believer.

In the record of the Revelation of Jesus Christ we find this prediction of an end-time messenger with the proclamation to be made to the inhabitants of the earth: *"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saving with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of his judgment is come"* (Revelation 14:6,7).

The term *everlasting* denotes the perpetual continuation from the time of beginning of the subject to which it applies. Since there was no beginning of God nor was there a time when He was not, it was said of Him in Psalms 90:2: *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."* The promise of everlasting life is given to the believer at the moment of his rebirth and continues forever.

Everlasting punishment for the unrighteous begins with their death and continues forever.

Since the word gospel simply means good news, the everlasting gospel is nothing more than the good news that God has given to man from the time of his creation that will continue to exist forever. In the statement of God's intended purpose for mankind, we find the true nature of the everlasting gospel of the kingdom: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over...all the earth"* (Genesis 1:26). This was God's everlasting good news for mankind, His eternal promise to Adam's progeny: *"Let them have dominion over...all the earth."* From the time of his creation, Adam was intended to be the ruler over all the earth.

Adam disobeyed God and sold himself and all mankind into slavery to Satan when he listened to the voice of the serpent (Romans 7:14). At that time, Satan became the god of the earth (II Corinthians 4:4), the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). Immediately after the fall of Adam, however, God reiterated the beautiful message of the gospel of the kingdom: *"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* (Genesis 3:15). God promised that a seed of the woman would one day bruise the serpent and regain the inheritance of mankind which he had so foolishly lost.

In the dispensations that followed, great men arose and attained the favor of God; however, because of the inherent nature of sin, they all failed God. In spite of all the failures, still the everlasting good news of the kingdom of God continued to be proclaimed. It was related to Abraham and his seed: *"The promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith"* (Romans 4:13). Abraham heard the good news and in faith set out in search of that *"city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:10).

The gospel of the kingdom was proclaimed to the children of Israel: *"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them"* (Hebrews 4:1,2). Those to whom the gospel was preached were they *"whose carcasses fell in the wilderness."* The everlasting proclamation that man should have dominion over the earth was preached to the children of Israel in the wilderness; however, that *"word which was preached to them did not profit them; not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"* (Hebrews 4:2).

"For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ " (Romans 5:17). *"God so loved the world"* that *"when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of woman, made under the law, to redeem them...that we might receive the adoption of sons"* (Galatians 4:4,5). Since man's inherent nature made it impossible for him to attain righteousness before God (Romans 7:15-21), the Maker's love for the creation which He had subjected to the vanity of temptation extended man the chance for redemption through faith in the vicarious atonement of the Lord from heaven.

When the Word of God came into the world (John 1:14), *"He came in the likeness of sinful flesh—that is to say, He voluntarily limited himself to the frailties of human flesh"* (Philippians 2:7), though because of His virgin birth He had no inherent sin. With His victorious life over every temptation that is common to mankind (Hebrews 4:15), Jesus *"overcame sin in the flesh"* (Romans 8:3). When the time came for Him to give His life a ransom for many to redeem the earth and those who believe upon Him from the authority of Satan, He could boldly proclaim: *"The prince of this world cometh, but hath nothing in me"* (John 14:30). Through His obedience unto the death of the cross, Jesus recovered the authority and dominion over death, hell, and the grave from the power of Satan (I Corinthians 15:57; Revelation 1:18). He received from His Father the "rod of iron" symbolic of the authority over the nations of the earth (Revelation 2:27).

While the mission of Jesus was to overcome Satan to regain the authority over the earth, His primary objective in accomplishing this work was to share this authority with mankind. Though the very purpose of His birth was that He would be King (John 18:37), He promised joint regency to those who would believe on Him and accept His righteousness as their righteousness (Romans

10:5). These believers are begotten again unto the lively hope which Adam lost (1 Peter 1:3). This is the reason for the gospel of the kingdom's taking on such momentous dimensions after the coming of Jesus. That which man was incapable of achieving was promised to those who believe in Him: *"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matthew 25:34).

The eternal promise of God to man is that he will rule over the earth. Nowhere is man promised an inheritance in heaven. Jesus said, *"The meek shall inherit the earth"* (Matthew 5:5). He was quoting Psalm 37:11. The prediction of the prophet is: *"And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Hitherto is the end of the matter"* (Daniel 7:27, 28); *"We shall reign in the earth"* (Revelation 5:10); *"And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"* (Revelation 20:1); *"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain"* (Isaiah 66:22). Man is not destined to inherit heaven, but is ordered of the Word of God to have dominion over all the earth as co-rulers with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who believe on Jesus to the saving of their souls have received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is the *"earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession"* (Ephesians 1:4). They are sons of God through the spirit of adoption (Galatians 4:5); and if they are children of God, then they are heirs, *"heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ"* (Romans 8:17). They are certainly not merely heirs of salvation or of eternal life, for Jesus had that with the Father before the world was. The only thing which Jesus gained by inheritance for His victorious mission was authority over the earth. The glorious good news is that those who overcome will be joint-heirs with Him of this promise and will rule with Him, not instead of Him, on the earth, not in heaven. As noted in Matthew 25:34, the inheritance of the saints is the kingdom of God.

This is the good news of the coming kingdom which will be published throughout the earth as a witness to all nations. We are now living in the time of the developing world conditions which will give birth to the great blasphemer, who will exalt himself through the powers of Satan to rule over the unrighteous and seek to destroy the righteous of the earth. This is the little horn of Daniel 7:8, 20, and 21, who is to make war with the saints and prevail over them until the Ancient of Days comes and judgment is given to the saints of the Most High. He will come forth from a ten-kingdom alliance and will set up the great image of the beast, commanding all people to bow down before it (Daniel 3:1-5). Those who endure his onslaught during the time of the tribulation of God's people will be preserved supernaturally by the hand of God in a gathering together during the time of the three-and one-half year outpouring of the wrath of the Almighty in the vials of the seven angels (Revelation 16).

When the potential threat to the survival of the world's political powers becomes apparent through the proclamation of the everlasting good news of the kingdom of God, they will be aroused to violent opposition against this message and will support the persecution of the little horn against the people of God. It is then that they will band themselves together to come up to do battle against the Lord and against His Christ (Zechariah 14:2). The nations will be gathered together thinking to destroy God's elect; however, God will be moving on them to bring them into the great winepress of the wrath of the Almighty (Isaiah 63:1-6). Then the Lord, Himself, will descend from heaven with ten thousands of His saints (Jude 14,15) in power and great glory (Matthew 24:30) to smite the forces of the rebellious nations with the sword of His mouth (Revelation 19:11-16). Then the meek will inherit the earth to herald the proclamation of the Good News: *"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever...and we shall reign on the earth"* (Revelation 11:15; 5:10).

29. The Restoration of the Nation of Israel

On May 14, 1948, one of the greatest prophetic miracles ever accomplished took place in Tel Aviv, Israel, when the leaders of Zionism inked their signatures beneath the historic words of

the Proclamation of Israeli Independence. It was the climax of nearly two millennia of dispersion of the Jewish people from their native land to the four corners of the earth. It was also the culmination of a century of effort by Jewish philosophers and political activists to cause Jewish people to desire to establish a nation and to cause the nations of the world to permit such a nation.

But what was at work in this convulsive political interaction involving the lives of millions of Jews and Gentiles throughout the world? Was it mere human philosophy and the struggle of a beleaguered people for self determination and guaranteed self preservation? Or was it some greater and more far-reaching design of divine intervention? The fact that the writings of the Hebrew prophets predict in great detail the events of the twentieth century in the land of Palestine is beyond question. Consider these prophetic declarations:

"Thus saith the Lord God; although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; I will even gather you from the people and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 11:16,17).

"I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, onto the country for which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers" (Ezekiel 20:41,42).

"Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him... Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord; refrain they voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border." (Jeremiah 31:10,15-17).

The prophet Isaiah likened the return of Israel to their land to a resurrection: *"Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem... Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isaiah 51:1,2; 60:1).*

Amos declared that the restoration of the nation of Israel would be a permanent arrangement by divine proclamation: *"I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them... and I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (Amos 9:14,15).*

But, why should the Eternal God of heaven and earth be concerned so intrinsically with the affairs of such an insignificant people? The answer is also in His Word: *"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Numbers 23:19; Romans 11:29); "... as touching the election, they [Israel] are beloved for the fathers' sakes" (Romans 11:28); "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6).*

The greatest testimony to the immutability of God that exists in the world today is the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. Since the promises and Word of God are incontrovertible, His commitment to the Jewish people remains constant. Their existence as a people and today as a nation remains one of the mysteries of history. It defies all of the rules of history. While countless nations have arisen to power only to fall into oblivion or at best brief mention in world history books, the Jewish people have continued to maintain their separate identity and are clearly distinguishable today, nearly four thousand years since their agreement at Sinai to be Yahweh's peculiar treasure and holy nation (Exodus 19:5,6).

The Church of God rejoices in the providence of divine prophecy and recognizes as one of the greatest prophetic miracles of the twentieth century the restoration of the nation of Israel. It stands unequivocally for the preservation of that which God has wrought through His people in this day. The church believes in the complete restoration of Israel. The land will be restored to the people of Israel, the people will be restored to the land of Israel, and the people will be restored to God in

their national day of salvation.

30. Eternal Judgment

One of the four principal doctrines of Christ mentioned in Hebrews 6 is the doctrine of eternal judgment. Apparently, God did not want eternal judgment taken lightly by the New Testament church. God the Father is going to bring about the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust; but He also has a judgment plan of reward for the deeds performed in this body. Jesus said in St. John 5:28,29: *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."*

The controversy over the years has not been whether the wicked will be resurrected to be judged, but rather whether the judgment of God is eternal death or eternal punishment of the soul. Some contend that the body and soul are synonymous and that as soon as the body is burned in *Gehenna*, or the lake of fire, the punishment of God is established in eternal death. Others teach that the body and soul are two different and distinct things (the soul being the seat of consciousness), and though the body may perish, the soul of man will be in torment day and night for ever and ever. When the Scriptures are considered in both the Old and New Testaments, they agree that God inevitably has a plan of eternal judgment for the wicked.

Matthew 25:31,32,41; *"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd dividend his sheep from the goats...Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."* This everlasting torment Jesus mentions was first and foremost prepared for the devil and his angels because of their fall from heaven. The fact that man became heir to the same judgment through the disobedience of Adam and Eve is revealed by the apostle Paul in Romans 5:12.

The apostle Peter reveals in II Peter 2:4 that these fallen angels are bound in chains of darkness waiting for the Day of Judgment. Revelation 9:1 reveals this place of captivity as the bottomless pit, *tartaras* or the abyss, as it is rendered in the Greek. This place is not to be confused with the place of the dead or the grave called *Sheol* in the Hebrew and *Hades* in the Greek, and meaning the grave. The Bible reveals plainly that there are different degrees of hell or the grave as is stated in Deuteronomy 32:22: *"For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell..."*, and Psalms 86:13: *"For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell."*

Until Jesus came, man was bound in the grave in the earth when he gave up the breath of life. Prophecy dictated that one of the great witnesses of the Son of Man was His power to deliver the souls of men who were bound in the grave once they received His testimony. *"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house"* (Isaiah 42:6,7); *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound"* (Isaiah 61:1); *"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption"* (Psalms 16:10).

The apostle Peter stated clearly in I Peter 3: 18-20 that Jesus, during His three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, went and preached to these spirits or souls who were bound in prison (Hades), who were disobedient during the days of Noah. These included people who lived from Adam to Moses, because Paul explained that death reigned from Adam to Moses over them who had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression in Romans 5:14. Jesus did not preach to them who lived under the dispensation of the law because Paul maintained in Romans 2:11,12 that as many of God's people who lived under the dispensation of the law would be judged

be it, or by their report through faith in keeping it. I Peter 4:6 declares: *"For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."* The souls of the dead from Adam to Moses were preached to by Christ during the days of His death, and as many of them as believed were resurrected together with the rest of the righteous dead who had obtained a good report through faith while waiting for the Messiah promised by God in the law and the prophets. Thus, Jesus delivered the righteous dead at His resurrection from the prison as the prophet Isaiah called it and he moved paradise to the third heaven, as is witnessed by Paul in II Corinthians 12:2,4. Further proof is given by John the Revelator in Revelation 6:9. When he was caught up in the Spirit to the third heaven, or paradise, he said, *"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held."* When John saw these souls of the righteous, he heard them cry, *"Lord, How long must we wait?"* How else could Jesus have proclaimed in Revelation 1:18 that He had the keys of hell and of death if He had not gone there and delivered Himself and the righteous dead. Other scriptures that support these statements are found in Ephesians 4:8-10; Acts 2:24-27; Revelation 19:1,2. The wicked are still bound in Hades, or the grave, waiting to be judged and cast into the lake of fire, called *Gehenna*.

Some say that Jesus could not have done these things spoken of in the previous scriptures because of passages found in Ecclesiastes 9:5,10, and Psalm 6:5: *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."* If we place this verse in the context of what Solomon was saying in this chapter, we will merely see that he was admonishing man to enjoy the things of life that God had made because there was coming an eternal end to the physical aspect of our lives and that man must make the best of this mortal life and what it has to offer. Solomon said, *"All things come alike to all, to the righteous and to the wicked."*

The Word of God reveals in I Thessalonians 5:23 that man is a trinity made up of spirit, soul, and body. There is a carnal mind in man totally consistent of the works and devices of the flesh itself, called the spirit of man. This mind of mortal works and devices perishes through the death of the brain and life-giving organs when the spirit of life departs the body and returns to God who gave it. *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12).

Notice the Word of God is able to divide the difference between the spirit of life, which is in the flesh that returns to God, and the soul—the seat of man's real personality and consciousness.

When a man lies down at night and sleeps, for all practical purposes he does not even know he is in the world. The Word of God shows that there is a part of man with which God deals or speaks during this time of unconsciousness through dreams or night visions. *"In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction"* (Job 33:15-16). Notice God did not speak to mortal ears here, but to the inner, spiritual man, the soul, though his flesh was not aware. So it was when Jesus preached to those in Hades, or the prison. I Peter 1:6 did not say that he went and preached to flesh and blood people, but rather to the spirits in prison. Let us refer once again to I Peter 3: 18,19: *"...being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison."* Though dead physically, Christ was not bound spiritually by His entombment. He was quickened by the Spirit, by which He went in His spirit, not bodily, and preached to these departed souls.

A parable of Jesus in Luke 16:20-26 reveals that it was possible for Him to communicate with the dead. The rich man in the parable was in spiritual torment or anguish, seeing there is no literal flame in Sheol or Hades, meaning the grave. (Gehenna is the place of fire). There was a great gulf between the unrighteous spirits and the spirits of the righteous in Abraham's bosom. Other scriptures that prove the soul and body are not synonymous and that both do not perish

simultaneously are Job 14:22: *"But his flesh upon him shall have pain and his soul within him shall mourn."* Job declared a difference between the flesh and the soul. Psalms 42:4 declares, *"When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me..."* Isaiah 10:18 says, *"And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body..."* The clearest statement in the Scriptures concerning the difference between soul and body is given by Christ, Himself, in Matthew 10:28: *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* The killing of the physical body cannot destroy the soul of man, according to Jesus. An important point to be mindful of here also is that going into Hades, or the grave, does not destroy the soul. *Hell* in this reference used by Jesus was *Gehenna*, the lake of fire, which shows that the word *destroy* means *everlasting shame and contempt* as rendered by Daniel in Daniel 12:2.

We have shown that hell is the prison or place of the unrighteous dead awaiting judgment. The bottomless pit or *tartaros* in the Greek is another degree of hell which holds in chains of darkness the fallen angels who are awaiting the day of God's final judgment.

The third term used in the Scriptures is *Gehenna*, a word derived from *Ge-hinnom*, or the valley of *Hinnom*, referred to in the New Testament as the lake of fire, the place of the wicked's eternal punishment. The first mention of *Hinnom* in the Bible is found in Joshua 15:8;18:16, as a boundary between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Later, it became known as the place of the abominable rites and ceremonies of the Ammonites. Here the children of Ammon worshipped the fire god *Molech*. This valley is situated just outside Jerusalem. According to I Kings 11:7, when King Solomon once entered into idolatry, he erected high places to *Molech* here upon which many of the firstborn sons of Israel were offered in fiery sacrifice. The valley of *Hinnom* was noted for the many human sacrifices offered by fire of both children and adults. According to II Kings 16, *Ahaz* and *Manasseh* caused their children to pass through the fire in this valley. The abomination ceased only when King *Josiah* declared the valley ceremonially unclean to Israel by scattering over it human bones and other corrupt ions. From that time on, it became a place for the burning of the refuse of the city of Jerusalem, including the dead bodies of men and animals. Later the Jews called this valley, *Gehenna*, to denote the place of eternal torment for the wicked. It is no coincidence that this valley is associated with fire and destruction.

Let us consider these prophecies concerning *Hinnom* in the latter end of the indignation period. *"For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever"* (Isaiah 34:8-10); *"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power"* (II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Isaiah 34 deals distinctly with the latter end of the indignation when God will gather all nations to Armageddon for the great slaughter of the nations at the time of the appearing of Christ from heaven. Isaiah's prophecies reveal at this time that *Gehenna* becomes a burning pit of pitch and brimstone bringing into existence the true lake of fire. In his letter to the Thessalonians Paul confirmed Isaiah's prophecy by saying that the Lord will be revealed in flaming fire to punish the wicked with an everlasting punishment from the presence of God and His power.

Revelation 19:11-21 shows forth the righteous judgment of God from heaven, in the person of Christ: *"In righteousness he doth judge and make war."* At this time He descends from heaven with His righteous army, and the winepress of God is trodden upon the nations. At the end of this battle, according to verse 20, the lake of fire receives its first official inhabitants in the form of the beast and false prophet: *"And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that*

worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." It should be noted that the beast and false prophet are still being tormented a thousand years later. *"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever"* (Revelation 20:10). At the end of the millennial reign of Christ, just prior to the great white throne judgment, Satan is finally brought into recompense before God and is cast in the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet are. Even though the word *are* is not used in the original Greek, another term is used that supports this thesis even better.

Let us consider the English rendering of the Greek text in this passage: *"And they will be tormented day and night unto the ages of ages."* Notice the word *they*, which implies that more than the devil alone is going to be tormented for ever and ever, that the beast and the false prophet were still present to suffer with him. Another point of interest is that this word *night* in the Greek means also *spiritual night*, denoting that after the flesh has been consumed away, there is a spiritual fire and darkness for ever and ever. Paul stated in II Thessalonians 1:9 that their torment is to experience everlasting destruction from the presence of God without a chance of reconciliation or annihilation. This judgment is best stated by Jude: *"To whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."*

After God has made Satan, the beast, and the false prophet first partakers of His eternal judgment, then the great white throne judgment will be set. The books are opened, and the dead are judged according to their works found in the books. The sea, death, and hell deliver up the dead found in them. All of the dead that will be raised at this time are not evil; some are to be found written in the book of life that apparently were not found worthy to reign during the thousand years. Those not found in the book of life were cast into the lake of fire as stated in Revelation 20:14-15: *"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."* To prove beyond a doubt that the Word of God teaches that this eternal punishment is for the wicked in addition to the devil and his angels is found in Revelation 14:9-11. Here an angel is warning against men receiving the mark of the beast and proclaims the judgment of God upon those who receive it. *"And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."* Again, this night and day denotes the spiritual darkness of shame and contempt that is everlasting.

The reference used by Jesus in Mark 9:43-48 is a direct quotation of Isaiah 66:24 which talks about a place where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not. To make the point about the dread of this punishment to come, Jesus states that it is better for one to cut off his hands, to cut off his feet, or to pluck out one of his eyes if they offend him, rather than to go into Gehenna where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not. This worm that dies not is a type not only of the soul but also of the constant torment that is inescapable.

Isaiah 66:23, 24 reveals that from one new moon and from one Sabbath to another during the millennial reign, the nations will go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who were slain at Megiddo at the coming of Christ and who were cast into Gehenna. *"For their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."* John the Revelator declares, *"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power"* (Revelation 20:1-5). This second death is the lake of fire, the place of eternal judgment. Eternal judgment is the punishment pronounced upon the wicked of being cast into the lake of fire and thereafter being totally separated from the presence of God with no possible reprieve, reconciliation, or annihilation.

31. The Coming of Christ to Establish His Kingdom

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior

Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

The blessed hope of the gospel is the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the resurrection and change of the righteous of the earth. Though there are some who do not believe in the personal coming of the Lord Jesus in the Judaean body in which He ascended into the heaven of heavens, the vast majority of evangelical Christians recognize with the writers of the New Testament that the coming of the Lord Jesus is to be the most momentous event in all of human history.

When one begins to examine the doctrines concerning the second coming of Jesus, a wide and varied spectrum of teaching is encountered. The doctrines concerning the return of Christ can be divided into three classifications: the pre-millennial coming, which declares that Jesus will return to the earth before the Sabbatical Millennium; the postmillennial coming, which teaches that He will return after the millennium is past; and the a-millennial teaching, which suggests that there will be no Sabbatical Millennium and that Christ will not return to earth.

Within the pre-millennial doctrine, there are three major divisions that are separated by their approach to the coming of Christ in relationship to the seven years of tribulation that are to precede the Sabbatical Millennium. These divisions are the following: the pretribulation teaching, which suggests that Jesus will return before the seven years of tribulation; the midtribulation teaching, which states that He will return after three and one-half years of tribulation but before the last three and one-half years of tribulation (also known as the indignation); and the post tribulation teaching which declares that Jesus will return at the end of seven years of tribulation.

Taking their cue from a misinterpretation of I Thessalonians 4:13-18, theologians of the late nineteenth centuries established the doctrine trine of secret rapture, stating that the Lord would return in the clouds to steal away His bride to return to heaven for a period of seven years, whereupon He would return in power and great glory to establish the kingdom on earth. When examined in the light of the whole Scripture, however, this doctrine is clearly revealed as based not on scriptural fact but on wishful thinking.

The secret rapture teaching had its origin in the revelation of Margaret McDonald, an English woman, who said that she received the understanding from a vision. Her vision was accepted and expanded upon by J. N. Darby and passed on to Scofield and thence to thousands of people through his famous and popular reference Bible. This teaching was developed with benign neglect for a vast number of scriptures which deal with the second coming of the Lord Jesus. Its ready acceptance in the Christian community results from mankind's escapist mentality, the desire to escape trouble particularly physical suffering. With this teaching, believers in Christ would escape all of the time of trouble that the apocalyptic writers predict will come upon the earth in the time of the end of the age, all the while dwelling in heaven in utter bliss awaiting the completion of the indignation of God upon the earth to return to rule upon this planet.

Hebrews 10:12, 13 states a profound, yet simple fact regarding the coming of the Lord: *"But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool."* Literally translated from the original Greek text, this scripture says that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God, *"henceforth expecting till his enemies are placed as a footstool of his feet."* In the Greek text of Hebrews 1:13, God the Father tells Jesus: *"Sit at my right till I place thine enemies a footstool of thy feet."*

The apostle Paul addressed himself to the erroneous teachings concerning the coming of the Lord in II Thessalonians 2 and to their apparent misinterpretation of his teaching in his first epistle, 4:13-18. *"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as god sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God...and then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of*

his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

Paul was speaking on the authority of the word of prophecy, particularly the predictions of Daniel 7. In this passage of prophecy, Daniel was shown a vision of coming kingdoms, climaxed with a fourth kingdom which had the similarities of other kingdoms. Out of its ten horns or ten divisions of its power would come forth a little horn that would rise in power and take over the kingdoms of three of the ten horns, thereby becoming the eighth among seven horns remaining. The power, which Paul identified as the man of sin, is to exalt himself and in the process of his conquering is to begin to make war with the saints of God. The duration of the time that the little horn wars with the saints is three and one-half years (the time, times, and dividing of time of verse 25).

Though the little horn of Daniel 8 dealt historically with the seven year reign of Antiochus Epiphanes over the children of Israel, its futuristic fulfillment will be the same as the little horn of Daniel 7. The extent of his evil works and blasphemies together with his persecution of the saints of God are detailed in this chapter. His policy of personal exaltation and destruction of the righteous of the earth will prosper for a period of twenty-three hundred days or seven years (verse 14). Antiochus came into power over Israel with a policy of peace and then after three and one-half years began to carry out his atrocities against the people and against the Lord. These conditions continued for an additional three and one-half year period until he was smitten by God with consumption and died (without hands, verse 25). Likewise, the little horn of the end will maintain power for seven years, the first of which will feature flatteries and a policy of peace (verse 25). After three and one-half years, he will mount an offensive to seek the destruction of the righteous of the earth. These last three and one-half years will be filled with great conflict, for as God's wrath will be poured out upon the earth in the time of His indignation, the unrighteous political powers of the earth will be raised up in fury to blaspheme the name of God even more than before and make war with the saints of God. At the end of the seven-year tribulation period, the little horn will be destroyed without hands even as Paul predicted in II Thessalonians 2:8 when *"the Lord shall consume [him] with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy [him] with the brightness of his coming."*

Through Daniel's prophecy, we are able to identify the time of the coming of the Lord with the climax of the power of the little horn, the man of sin *"...even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war against the saints and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom... And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him"* (Daniel 7:20-22,25-27).

The kingdoms of the earth and the saints of the Most High will be delivered, then, into the hands of the man of sin for a time, times, and the dividing of time, or three and one-half years, at the conclusion of which the Ancient of Days, God in the person of Jesus Christ, will come to put an end to this self-exalting blasphemer. This agrees with Daniel 8, where the little horn finally stands up against the Prince of princes at the end of the seven-year period, whereupon he is broken without hands, just as Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:8.

If anyone should know the truth about the return of Christ, it certainly should be Jesus Himself, for He is the one who will return. In Matthew 24 our Lord set about to answer the three questions that His disciples posed, *"When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"* (Verse 3). The first question concerned what He had just said about

the destruction of the temple. The second and third questions concern His second coming and the end of the age.

In His chronology of the events surrounding His return, Jesus made these statements: *"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those day shall be shortened"* (Matthew 24:21,22). Then He declares, *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other"* (Matthew 24:29-31).

In Jesus' description of the events which bring forth His return to earth, He first predicted a great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world, nor shall ever be. This could only be the indignation period during which both the wrath of God and the counter wrath of the little horn is poured forth in great conflict upon the inhabitants of the earth. When God's wrath is revealed in the form of the seven vials, the evil powers of the earth blaspheme the more and seek to destroy all the righteous of the earth.

Then Jesus declared that immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven and we will see Him coming in the clouds as Daniel predicted, with power and great glory. Finally Jesus declared that He will send forth His angels to gather the elect (or redeemed) from the four winds. There is not the slightest hint of a secret coming in this passage.

I Thessalonians 4, the erroneous interpretation of which has been the cornerstone of the secret rapture doctrine, confirm that chronology which Jesus set forth in Matthew 24. In verse 13 Paul comforts the minds of the saints: *"But I would have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."* This correlates with Jude 15, *"Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."* Paul continues with his chronology: *"For this we say unto to you by the word of God, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep."* The Greek word rendered "prevent" in the Authorized Version is literally translated *precede*, the truth of which is shown in the subsequent verse: *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first."*

The Lord Jesus Himself descends from heaven at the sounding of the last of the seven trumpets as Paul notes in I Corinthians 15:52. This is in keeping with the proclamation of the seventh trumpet, *"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15). The saints that sleep in Jesus, or the dead in Christ, shall rise first. This resurrection may not be a bursting forth of the graves of the earth, but a resurrection of the souls of the righteous dead in paradise to be clothed upon with their bodies which are in heaven. Since the souls of the righteous are carried to paradise (Luke 23:43), which Paul identifies in II Corinthians 12:2, 4 as the third heaven, those souls are not in the dust of the earth. This resurrection takes place in heaven as Paul declared in II Corinthians 5:1, 2: *"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven."* This resurrection apparently takes place when the saints in heaven are clothed upon with the white robes and the part of the bride which remains upon the earth is granted to be arrayed in fine linen.

Paul concludes his description of the coming of Jesus in I Thessalonians 4 by saying, *"Then*

we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The Greek word which is rendered "caught up" in the Authorized Version literally means *seized*. The Latin equivalent of this word is *rapio* from which we get the word *rapture*, the term which is generally applied to the catching up of the living saints.

The living saints remaining upon the earth then will be seized in the clouds in a supernatural experience that is anything but casual or self-induced. The purpose of the rapture, though, is not as an escape mechanism. It is as Jesus said a *gathering* mechanism in which He will send forth His angels to gather His people together (Matthew 24:31) to meet Him and the resurrected saints that He "brings with him" (1 Thessalonians 4:14). This supernatural gathering of the rapture will not be to whisk everyone off to heaven to escape the tribulation. It will be for the purpose of immediately fulfilling the scene of Revelation 19. *"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse: and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS...And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse."*

The Faithful and True Witness, called the Word of God in John 1:1 by the writer of the Book of Revelation, descends from heaven with the righteous saints to execute judgment upon the armies of the beast and the false prophet that are gathered at Armageddon. Those armies are destroyed, however, with the brightness of the coming of the Lord and His host.

The prophet Zechariah confirms this in Zechariah 14:4,12: *"Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee... Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south... And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongues shall consume away in their mouth."*

The coming of the Lord Jesus is to be a profound, earth-shaking event that the whole world will know about. John said, *"Behold, he cometh in the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him"* (Revelation 1:7). Zechariah said, *"And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son"* (Zechariah 12:10).

Some have misinterpreted the great emphasis that the Scriptures give to the coming of the Lord as a thief in the night to lend credence to the concept of the secret rapture. With this mistaken idea they contend that Jesus will come as a thief in the night to steal His bride away and carry her to heaven. In reality the warnings of the scriptures about the coming of the Lord as a thief in the night have nothing to do with the stealing away of the bride. They have the avowed purpose of urging the saints of God to maintain their righteousness before God so as to be prepared for His coming in power and great glory. Since no man knows the day or the hour of the coming of the Lord, it behooves all to be prepared for His return.

Paul expanded upon this theme in I Thessalonians 5 immediately after he had addressed himself to the events of the coming of the Lord in chapter 4. He was writing to the Christian church of that day, to people who were prepared for Christ's return. *"But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night"* (I Thessalonians 5:1-7).

Here the children of light are compared with the children of darkness. Those who are children of light should be awake and prepared spiritually for the return of the Lord. Those who are children of darkness are asleep and drunken and are not prepared for His return. The ones to whom the Lord comes as a thief in the night are those who are children of night, who are asleep and not prepared for the return of the Lord. This is the reason for the apostle's warning that believers be prepared for the return of the Lord, lest He come and find them without the wedding garments and they be cast out of the festivities.

Paul was writing to the church at Thessalonica, people who knew little if anything about the time of the return of the Lord. Some even misinterpreted Paul's words in his first epistle to mean that the coming of the Lord was imminent. This is the reason for his writing in his second epistle to this church, chapter 2, that they should not be troubled, even by a letter from Paul himself, to think that the day of the Lord was at hand. He then proceeded to relate some of the prophetic events which would have to occur before the return of the Lord.

It was not Paul's intention, then, in this letter to commend the saints at Thessalonica on their overwhelmingly accurate knowledge of the prophetic times and seasons. His message to them was simple, as the New International Version states it, *"Now brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly..."* (I Thessalonians 5:1,2). The important thing in Paul's emphasis, then, is that saints at Thessalonica be prepared for the return of the Lord, at whatever time that coming should be.

This is not to imply that there will be no people who will be aware of the season of the Lord's return as other scriptures indicate. It is, however, the correct interpretation of what Paul was saying to the church at Thessalonica. The Lord, then, will come as a thief, not to steal His bride away, but as destruction on those who are not ready for His return. Jesus Himself confirmed this contention in Revelation 16:15: *"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."* The coming as a thief does not indicate that He is to steal away His bride or anything else. It indicates that those who are not prepared for His coming will find that they have missed God's blessing. Notice the encouragement to keep the garments (of righteousness).

This is the thrust of the prediction of Jesus in Matthew 24:36-39 that His second coming would be as the days of Noah. Though there is a clear message of typology in this prediction that there will be a Noah ministry in the last days to prepare a spiritual ark for the saving of God's people, the major thrust of Jesus' prediction is well stated: *"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."* The majority of the people of the world will be going about the routine of life, with no regard for the righteousness of God. They will be asleep and drunken in the night, unaware of the impending wrath of God at the coming of Christ. And, like the victims of the flood, the day of the Lord will come upon them like a thief and they will be taken away in destruction before they know what has

happened to them. Once again, Noah's family (the saints of God who are prepared for the time of judgment) will be saved, while the evil and unconcerned will be unprepared and will be taken away.

a. The Day of the Lord (Revised March 2010)

There has been much controversy about just what is meant in the Scriptures by the term "the day of the Lord." It's important to understand that every time you read in the Scriptures about the day of the Lord it is not necessarily referring to the same period of time. Jesus establishes this principle for us in Luke 17:22, *"Then He said to the disciples, 'The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.'"* The fact that there are multiple days of the Lord is confirmed by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 2:2a when he said, *"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days..."*

There are a number of days to which God refers to in His Holy Word. Consider these examples:

(1) Ezekiel 30:2,3

[2] *"Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Wail, 'Woe to the day!'*

[3] *For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, the time of the Gentiles."*

- In this passage, the day of the Lord is referred to as a particular time for the Gentiles.
- This is confirmed in the New Testament in Romans 11:25 when Paul makes the statement *"that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in."*
- In other words, there is a specific time [day] that is allocated to the Gentiles.

(2) Ezekiel 39:8,9

[8] *"Surely it is coming, and it shall be done," says the Lord GOD. "This is the day of which I have spoken.*

[9] *"Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years."*

- God prophesies of a particular day—defined here as a period of 7 years—in which the nation of Israel shall clean up after the battle of Gog and Magog.
- This particular day corresponds to Daniel's vision of the 70th week which is the last 7 years prior to the 7th trump return of Jesus Christ (see V,H,33, c. "The 70th Week").

(3) Zechariah 4:10

[10] *"For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."*

- God tells us that there will be a day of "small things." In other words, there will be particular period of time when God's work will be diminished.
- This relates to God's church when they entered in the Dark Ages in 325 AD and also the Arise, Shine of the God's church in 1903.
- As compared to the world's population and even with the rest of the Christian Kingdom, the work of the church has been small in comparison. This day will end with the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon the earth.

There are two “days of the Lord” which we will address. First, the Day of the Lord’s Anger, and second, the 1,000-year Day of the Lord—or the Millennial Reign—as referred to in II Peter 3.

b. The Days of the Lord’s Anger

The day of the Lord’s anger is a period of 3 ½ years just prior to the 7th trump return of Jesus Christ when God pours out His wrath on the earth in the form of seven vials of the seven angels. It will be a time of great destruction upon the earth as God’s judgment of sinful mankind will be displayed for all of the nations of the earth to witness. Consider these scriptures regarding God’s wrath:

(1) The wicked will be destroyed on a massive scale.

- Malachi 4:1, *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch.”*
- Jeremiah 25:33, *“And at that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground.”*

(2) The land will be desolate.

- Isaiah 13:9, *“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it.”*

(3) Satan will be punished.

- Isaiah 27:1, *“In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea.”*

(4) The heavens will shake and the earth will be moved.

- Isaiah 13:13, *“Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger.”*

(5) It is a day of destruction upon the whole earth.

- Zephaniah 1:18, *“Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.”*

The day of the Lord’s anger is prophesied to last for 3 ½ years. This is best described in Revelation 11:3-6: *“And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”* [4] *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.* [5] *And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner.* [6] *These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.”* 1,260 days equals 3 years at 360 days per year (1,080 days total) plus one-half year (180 days).

The day of the Lord’s anger/wrath begins after the Man of Sin blasphemes God while standing on the temple mount in Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15) in the middle of the last 7 years (Daniel 11:36). This corresponds with I Thessalonians 5:2,3, *“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. [3] For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden*

destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.” The Man of Sin’s peace and prosperity message (Daniel 8:25) will cause sinners to become even more complacent and unsuspecting of God’s impending wrath. This is confirmed by Jesus, Himself, in Luke 17:26,27, *“And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: [27] “They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.”*

c. The 1,000-Year Day of the Lord (Millennial Reign)

It’s important to understand that every reference to “the day of the Lord” in the Bible is not referring to a 1,000-year period. We have just cited examples where the day of the Lord was defined as a 3 ½ year period, a 7-year period, and the day of the Gentiles has lasted for thousands of years. There is, however, a day of the Lord which is a direct reference to the 1,000-year period when Jesus Christ establishes His kingdom upon the earth and rules and reigns in righteousness. Peter talks about this day in II Peter 3:8,10-12: *“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day...[10] But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. [11] Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, [12] looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”*

Peter’s major thesis concerning the day of the Lord is that that day is a thousand years in duration, for he makes a point of specifying the kind of day to which he is referring. It is in this day that the elements melt with heat, and the heavens pass away with a great noise. Peter gives us additional insight as to the timing of this destruction in vs. 12,13, *“Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? [13] Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”* The new heaven and new earth take place at the end of the 1,000-year Millennial Reign following the great White Throne judgment. Revelation 20:15; 21:1, *“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. [21:1] Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.”*

The writings of the prophet Joel shed much light on the understanding of the day of the Lord. Historically speaking, his comments and predictions were relative to the overwhelming of the Israelites by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar and of their subsequent deliverance at the hand of Cyrus. Their futuristic and primary fulfillment, however, is in the events and circumstances relative to the coming of the Lord. *“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains; a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them...and the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?”* (Joel 2:1-3,11).

The first chapter of Joel deals with the onslaught of the Babylonian army, which in future prophecy symbolizes the armies of the beast and the false prophet which will seek to destroy the righteous people from the earth. The beginning of chapter two orders a preparation in Zion, the church, for the coming of the day of the Lord, which is at that time still future (*“...the day of the Lord cometh...for it is nigh at hand.”*) Then the description of the great armies of Revelation 19 is made

in detail, with the notation that there has never been the like and never shall be until the years of many generations. The coming of this army into Judaea takes place at the end of the indignation and the beginning of the Sabbatical Millennium, which is the day of the Lord.

The prophet Joel continues in chapter three to expand upon the day of the Lord: *"Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great"* (Joel 3:12,13). This is a reference to the gathering of the nations into the winepress of the wrath of God, when the Lord Himself will be clothed with the garments of vengeance to tread that winepress in fulfillment of Isaiah 63:1-4 and Revelation 19:15; 14:19,20.

Then the prophet continues: *"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."* The valley of decision is the valley of Jehoshaphat mentioned in verse 12. This is the valley of the brook Kidron on the east of Jerusalem at the base of the Mount of Olives, the same mount that Zechariah 14 says will divide in half as the Lord returns to stand on that mountain. This valley intersects the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem. Hinnom is the deep and narrow valley west of Jerusalem which served as a refuse dump for the city and which is called Ge-Hinnom or Gehenna as a typical place of eternal torment. Symbolically then, the slaughter that occurs in the valley of Jehoshaphat on the east of Jerusalem will be judged and cast into torment in Gehenna on the west side of the city.

The armies that are to fight in the *"battle of that great day of God Almighty"* are gathered together into Armageddon (Revelation 16:14,16). Armageddon is literally Har-Megiddo, the hill of Megiddo and refers to the Great Plain of Esdraelon that lies north of Jerusalem. Since the Lord returns to the Mount of Olives, and the winepress of the wrath of God against the armies of the earth takes place in the valley of Jehoshaphat following the cleaving of that mount in half, apparently the winepress of the wrath of God is in this valley, though the battle continues into Armageddon, where the beast and the false prophet are taken to be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:19,20).

Joel, then, declares that in the day when the multitudes are gathered in the valley of decision to await the return of the Lord, the day of the Lord is near. When the battle of Armageddon takes place, the day of the Lord has not yet come. Only the first six of the seven vials of Revelation 16 have been poured out upon the earth.

This chronology of the prophet Joel agrees precisely with that of John the Revelator: *"Behold, I come as a thief...And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done"* (Revelation 16:15-17). The pouring out of the seventh vial coincides with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the message of which is *"the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15). This is the last trumpet to which Paul alluded in I Corinthians 15:52.

From these two scriptures we can conclude that the day of the Lord has not begun until after the nations are gathered for the battle of Armageddon. When the seventh vial is poured out and the seventh trumpet sounds, the Lord, Himself, goes forth in battle. Amos described the start of the day of the Lord: *"Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light"* (Amos 5:18). Obadiah says this concerning the day of the Lord: *"For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head"* (Obadiah 15).

Zechariah is in agreement with Joel and John the Revelator: *"Behold, the day of the Lord cometh... Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives..."* (Zechariah 14:1-4). When the Lord gathers the nations into Armageddon, the day of the Lord is still future; therefore, the day of the Lord is as the apostle Paul said, a thousand year period, which begins with the coming of

Christ at the end of the indignation when the armies of the unrighteous are gathered against Jerusalem.

d. The Hiding Away During the Indignation

This subject is currently being studied by the Council of Apostles and Elders.

e. The Marriage of the Lamb

One of the great events which take place is the marriage of the Lamb to the wife who has made herself ready. The bride is none other than the spiritual city of God. Revelations 21 reveals this when John is told, *"Come hither. I will shew the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God"* (Revelation 21:9,10).

In his previous description of this city he said, *"I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adored for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, behold the tabernacle of God is with men..."* (Revelation 21:2,3).

The holy city, the New Jerusalem, according to the writer of Hebrews is the church. *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn"* (Hebrews 12:22,23). We know that the church is to be the bride of Christ by the words of Paul in II Corinthians 11:2, *"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."*

CHRONOLOGY OF THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

GRACE	TRIBULATION (SEVEN YEARS)		COMING OF JESUS	MILLENNIAL REIGN ONE THOUSAND YEARS	NEW EARTH
	TRIBULATION 3 1/2 YEARS	INDIGNATION (3 1/2 YEARS)			
II Thessalonians 2:3,8: "The day of Christ . . . shall not come, except . . . the man of sin be revealed . . . whom the Lord shall . . . Destroy with the brightness of his coming."	Jesus will not come until after the man of sin is revealed.	Man of sin continues for seven years.	Man of Sin destroyed		
Daniel 7:21,22,25: "The same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom. . . and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."		Little horn makes war with saints for three and one half years. Little horn continues until ancient of days (Jesus) comes and the time comes for the saints to possess the kingdom			
Daniel 8:13,14: "How long shall be the vision concerning . . . the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days."		Little Horn reigns seven years (2300 days)			
Matthew 24: 21,29,31: "Then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be . . . Immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory . . . And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather his elect from the four winds."		Great Tribulation Immediately after the tribulation, the Son of man comes.	Jesus sends His angels at the sound of the trumpet to gather the elect.		
I Thessalonians 4:14-17: "Then also which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him . . . For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with . . . the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall arise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."			Dead saints resurrected in Heaven (I Cor. 5:1). Then we which are alive are caught up.		
I Corinthians 15:52: "Behold I shew you a mystery, We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed"		Last of the Seven Trumpets sounds with his message: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."	Resurrection and change take place instantaneously.		
Job 14:13,14: "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave . . . until thy wrath is past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time . . . If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."		Dead and living saints are hidden until the wrath is past	The change takes place (I Corinthians 15:51)		

GRACE	TRIBULATION (SEVEN YEARS)		COMING OF JESUS	MILLENNIAL REIGN ONE THOUSAND YEARS	NEW EARTH
	3 1/2 YEARS	INDIGNATION (3 1/2 YEARS)			
Zechariah 14:12 "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives."			Jesus (the Lord) comes and stands on the Mount of Olives to start the Battle of Armageddon.		
II Peter 3:10,12 "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. . . . but the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."				Day of the Lord is a thousand year period of time	
Joel 1:3,13 "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion. . . . for the day of the Lord cometh, for a night as hard. . . . And the Lord shall utter his voice before His army, for his camp is very great, for he is strong that executeth his word for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible."		Armies prepare in the time when the day of the Lord is "nigh at hand."			
Joel 3:12,14 "Let the heathen be warned, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."		Multitudes in the valley of decision (valley of Jehoshaphat). The day of the Lord has not yet come, but is "near."			
Revelation 16:14,16 "Gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief, and he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. And the seventh angel poured out his vial. . . . saying, It is done."		Nations are gathered at Armageddon. The seventh trumpet sounds (seventh vial is poured out). The message is "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ," and "It is done."			
Isaiah 26:19,21 "Thy dead men shall live together with my dead body, shall they arise. . . . Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity."		The elect of God are hidden for three and one-half years (until the indignation is over past). They are protected supernaturally from trouble in the midst of trouble.			
Isaiah 45:6 "And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and a shining of a flaming fire by night. . . . and there shall be a tabernacle for a place of refuge."		The Lord will provide protection for His elect by supernaturally watching over every assembly of the church (Mount Zion), regardless as to where they may be.			
Revelation 19:7 "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse."		As Jesus prepares to return for the battle of Armageddon, the proclamation is made that the time has come for the marriage of the Lamb to take place.	The Battle of Armageddon takes place		
Daniel 7:21,26 "And the kingdom and dominion shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."				Marriage takes place as Kingdom of God is established on earth.	Sam Loosed, Deceives Nations Great White Throne Judgment

The Church of God is presently reviewing its doctrine on the timing of Jesus' marriage to His bride, the church. The following are conclusions that have been accepted as church doctrine by the Council of Apostles and Elders:

1. In Matthew 25, The Church of God believes that the Bridegroom returns at midnight. "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6). The Greek Interlinear says. "...Behold the bridegroom, go ye forth to a meeting."
2. In Matthew 25, The Church of God believes that the Bridegroom is Jesus. Throughout the New Testament Jesus makes reference to Himself as being the Bridegroom. This is the case in Luke 5:34, "And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?"
3. In Matthew 25, The Church of God believes that a wedding takes place, and this is when Jesus marries His bride. "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went with him to the marriage; and the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10).
4. In Revelation 12, The Church of God believes that the woman is given two wings of an eagle to fly into the wilderness for the last 3 1/2 years of trouble. "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14).
5. In Revelation 12:14, The Church of God believes that the woman referred to is the Bride of Christ.
6. The Church of God believes that the prophecy of Hosea 2:14-23 will be fulfilled when the woman/bride of Revelation 12:14 is hidden in the wilderness in the last 3 1/2 years of Indignation. The latter part of the prophecy is fulfilled when the Millennial Reign begins after the 7th trump return of Jesus Christ to rule and reign on the Earth (Revelation 19:6, 7).
7. The Church of God believes that while the woman/bride is in the wilderness, she is betrothed to Jesus and calls Him her Husband, and no longer, "My Master." "And it shall be, in that day," says the LORD, "That you will call Me 'My Husband' and no longer call me 'My Master' (Hosea 2:16 NKJV). A betrothal in the Bible is a legally binding commitment that allows the betrothed couple to be referred to as husband and wife. Consider the account of Joseph and Mary in Matthew 1:18, 19a, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. [19] Then Joseph her husband..." Joseph was referred to as Mary's husband even though the scripture says they were betrothed and had not come together to consummate the marriage.
8. The Church of God believes that Jesus will return with the sound of a trump. "For the Lord himself shall ascend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (I Thessalonians 4:16).
9. The Church of God believes that Jesus will return at the Last Trump, and that a resurrection will take place. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (I Corinthians 15:52,53).
10. The Church of God believes that the Last Trump referred to in I Corinthians 15:52, is the 7th trump. "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

These are the statements that have been unanimously agreed upon by the Council of Apostles and Elders. Because the Council of Apostles and Elders is currently in the process of studying this subject, this article is not intended to be an exhaustive essay; however, it is a compilation of the

doctrinal points now believed by The Church of God.

32. New Heaven and New Earth

According to thy words of Jesus in Matthew 5:5, "The meek...shall inherit the earth." There is no promise in the Word of God to the believer that he will inherit heaven. The only inheritance which the righteous is promised to inhabit is a new earth.

This promised inheritance takes place after the conclusion of the millennial reign of Christ, at which time this earth will be destroyed by the fierce anger of the Lord. *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heaven shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (II Peter 3:10-13).

The present earth and heavens will be destroyed by the fire of God after the conclusion of all the prophetic program of God for the ages. They will be destroyed because they have been contaminated by the devil in his rebellion against God from the beginning. When he and all who have followed him are cast into the lake of fire the earth and heavens will be destroyed. The great hope of the righteous saints of God is for His promise to create new heavens and a new earth wherein righteousness dwelleth. *"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind," and, "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain"* (Isaiah 65:17;66:22).

Whether the new heavens and new earth will be a totally new creation or a renovation of the present heavens and earth is open to speculation. The truth is, however, that regardless as to which approach God takes to the making of new heavens and a new earth; the righteous will inherit the new earth forever.

33. Daniel's Vision of 70 Weeks

One of the most obscure prophecies of the Old Testament that relates directly to the Last Days, is found in Daniel 9:24, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." While many have questioned the timing of this prophecy, the angel Gabriel clearly declares the timing to Daniel, "Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days" (Daniel 10:14).

a. The First 69 Weeks

The 70 weeks of Daniel's vision are divided into two segments: the first period consists of 69 weeks; the second period consists of one week. *"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease..."* (Daniel 9:25, 26, 27a).

In Ezekiel 4:6, God establishes an important prophetic principle that is relevant to understanding Daniel's vision. After God explains to Ezekiel the punishment that He has devised for a disobedient Israel, He tells Ezekiel the key to understanding the prophecy in verse 6, "...I have

appointed thee each day for a year." When this principle is applied to Daniel's vision, the 70 weeks (which is equal to 490 days [69 x 7]) are equal to 490 years.

The key to understanding the timing of this prophecy is to identify the date that the command to rebuild Jerusalem was issued. *"And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king...And I said unto the king, if it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) for how long shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time"* (Nehemiah 2:1a, 5, 6). King Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and the walls. According to Halley's Bible Handbook, this command was given at approximately 445 B.C. It should be noted that the names Nisan and Abib both refer to the first month of the Jewish calendar.

Some may question whether King Cyrus' proclamation in Ezra 1:1-3 (Ezra 6:1-12, 7:11-26; II Chronicles 36:22,23), should be the start date of the 69 weeks' fulfillment. *"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem."* A careful examination of these scriptures will show that King Cyrus gave a command to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. However, King Cyrus did not give a decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. In Daniel 9:25, the scripture clearly states that there are 69 weeks from the "...going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince..." Further confirmation is given in Daniel 9:25, when Daniel prophesies about the hardships that Nehemiah would encounter in his endeavor to rebuild the walls, "...the street shall be built again, and the wall even in troublous times." Nehemiah 4:16 (NIV) tells of that troublous time, "...half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall."

The church believes that there are 69 weeks (or 483 years) from the time that the command was given to rebuild Jerusalem, until the death of Jesus, thereby fulfilling the first part of Daniel's vision. Because of the inconsistency of historical dates and accounts, and conflicting Jewish and secular calendars, the church does not attempt to recognize exact dates and times; however, the church acknowledges that time and seasons can be identified.

b. The Period between the 69th and 70th Week

Many Bible scholars believe the first 69 weeks of Daniel's vision were completed with the crucifixion of Jesus, and that the 70th week relates directly to the Last Days. However, few offer any explanation regarding the time frame between the 69th and 70th week. Some have suggested that God stops counting time. The Church of God does not believe that God stops counting time, or that He ever skips time when it relates to Bible prophecy.

God always gives a time frame with regard to Israel's captivity or punishment. The first record of this is shown in Genesis 15:13-16, when God tells Abram, *"...Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years"* (Genesis 15:13b). In Exodus 12:40,41, we find that the Israelites were delivered at a precise time: *"And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty year, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."* It should be noted that the first 30 years that Israel was in Egypt with Joseph, they were not captives. The very day that the 400 years of captivity was completed, Israel was delivered.

In Ezekiel 4:1-8,13, God defines for Ezekiel the punishment He has exacted for Israel. *"For I*

have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days...so shall thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year" (Ezekiel 4:5, 6). God tells Ezekiel that Israel would be punished for 430 days, and that each day is equal to a year, making a total punishment of 430 years. What would the punishment be? *"And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them"* (Ezekiel 4:13). God's punishment was the great Diaspora of the Jewish people among the Gentiles.

The Bible tells us, and history confirms, that 70 years of the 430 years of captivity prophesied by Ezekiel, have been completed. Jeremiah 29:10, *"For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."* (Additional references: Daniel 9:2, II Chronicles 36:21) If you subtract the completed 70 years of captivity from the original 430 years prophesied, the remainder is 360 years that have not been completed.

In Leviticus 26, God is outlining for Israel the blessings and cursings He will bestow on them based on their actions. In verse 18, God makes an interesting statement: *"And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins."* When God visited Israel at the completion of their 70 years in Babylon, He rebuked them for continuing to behave as their rebellious fathers had. Zechariah 1:3,4, *"Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the Lord."* Because of Israel's continued refusal to depart from their evil ways, God multiplied their remaining punishment by seven (360 years x 7 = 2,520 years). The punishment now stands at 2,520 years that the Jews would eat their bread among the Gentiles.

Jesus confirmed this truth in Luke 21:24 when He said, *"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."* Jesus' words accurately prophesied the historical account of what happened to Jerusalem following His death (the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by Titus and the Roman army). However, He also prophesied that Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Today in Jerusalem, Gentiles still control the temple site now referred to as the Dome of the Rock. This is evidence to us that God's punishment is still being enacted on the Jews.

When Israel was taken captive to Babylon, it is estimated that the total Jewish population was between 2 and 3 million. Only ~50,000 committed Jews (Nehemiah 7:66) were willing to leave a life of relative comfort in Babylon, and endure a trip of nine hundred miles to return to Israel. Today, Jewish people are scattered throughout the world, eating their bread among the Gentiles, as they have been for over 2,000 years. This fact alone is confirmation that the original punishment of 360 years was multiplied by seven.

Adding 2,520 years to the time when Israel came out of Babylonian captivity, propels the Jews and the nation of Israel headfirst into the 21st Century. The theory that God stops counting time simply has no Biblical basis. To adhere to this time-stop theory would annul the principle of the six thousand-year periods of mankind, and the forthcoming 7th one-thousand year reign of Christ—known as the Millennial Reign—one of the basic teachings of Christianity.

In recent years we have witnessed the beginning of the completion of Ezekiel's prophecy in action. There has never been a day, such as now that Jews from around the world are making their way back to Israel—their promised homeland. The fact that God has not forsaken the Jewish people, nor the land of Israel, is a testament to the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to Abraham that his seed would be blessed and inherit the land. As always, God has a plan and He knows exactly where the Jews and the nation of Israel are in Bible prophecy today.

c. The 70th Week

The Church of God believes that the 70th week of Daniel's vision will be fulfilled during the Last Days prior to Jesus' return. This subject is currently being studied and discussed in the Council of Apostles and Elders. The following materials are not intended to be an exhaustive and complete statement regarding the 70th week, but a compilation of statements that have been unanimously accepted by the church as church doctrine at this time.

Just as the 69 weeks of Daniel's vision are equal to 483 years, the 70th week is equal to 7 years. How will we recognize when this 7-year period begins? Daniel 9:27 "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." The 7-year period will begin when the Man of Sin confirms a covenant of peace for one week (7 years). At the middle of this 7-year period, Daniel tells us that the daily sacrifice will be stopped, and the abomination of desolation is set up (Daniel 12:11; II Thessalonians 2:1-4; Matthew 24:15).

(1) The First 3 ½ Year Period

This 7-year period is commonly referred to as the Tribulation. The Church of God refers to the first 3 ½ years as Tribulation, and the second 3 ½ years as Indignation (or Great Tribulation). What will happen during the first 3 ½ years of Tribulation? The following is a list of events that the church teaches will take place:

- a. This will be a very deceptive period of time. Daniel 8:25a, *"And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many..."* The Hebrew word for craft is mirmah which means deceit or treachery.
- b. A one-world government will begin. Revelations 13:1, 2, 4, 7 (emphasis added), *"And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy...and the dragon gave him power, and his seat, and great authority...And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him...and power was given him over all kindreds and tongues, and nations."* This scripture clearly states that the Man of Sin will have authority (rule) over the entire world.
- c. The Mark of the Beast system will be inaugurated. Revelations 13:16,17, *"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."*
- d. All of the people inhabiting the earth, including the Bride, and the corporate church, will go through the first 3 1/2 years of Tribulation. The church does not believe that Christians will be raptured away before the tribulation begins.

(2) The Second 3 ½ Year Period

The church believes that the following events will take place in the second 3 1/2 year period referred to as the Indignation, or Great Tribulation. Jesus referred to this era in Matthew 24:21, 22, when His disciples questioned Him about the end of the world: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

- a. The woman will be hid. Revelation 12:14, *"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place,*

where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." Time (1), times (2), and half a time (1/2) equals 3 ½ years.

- b. God's wrath will be poured out on the earth by His Two Witnesses. Revelations 11:3, 6, *"And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth... These have power to shut heaven and it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will."* The Church of God does not believe these Two Witnesses will be men that have returned from the past.
- c. The saints of God are not appointed to God's wrath. I Thessalonians 5:9, *"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."*
- d. The 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets, 7 Vials, and 3 Woes all take place during the last 3 ½ years of the year period. These are defined in the book of Revelation starting with chapter 6 through chapter 16.

These are the statements that have been unanimously agreed upon by the Council of Apostles and Elders. It is not meant to be exhaustive or conclusive. The church believes that it will have greater understanding regarding the 70th week of Daniel's vision as that time approaches.

34. The Wrath Dispensation (March 2010)

God is a God of dispensations. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, *"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven."* As students of the Bible, we must recognize that God has defined dispensations outlined in His Holy Word. The word dispensation simply means a religious or political system prevailing at a particular time.

As we read the Old Testament, we read about the Dispensation of the Law. God gave the Law to the Israelites and He demanded that it be obeyed and followed as He decreed. When Jesus Christ gave His life on the cross of Calvary, the Grace Dispensation was ushered in. What changed? We are no longer required to fulfill the fleshly rituals and sacrificial requirements of the Law Dispensation to be saved. In the Grace Dispensation, one is required to accept Jesus Christ by faith to be saved and become part of the Kingdom of God.

There are at least two more dispensations regarding mankind: The Wrath Dispensation and the Millennial Reign Dispensation. This article will focus on the Wrath Dispensation.

1. What is the Wrath Dispensation?

- A. The Wrath Dispensation begins when God pours out His judgment/wrath upon Satan's kingdom and the sinners that remain on the earth.
- B. God has prophesied about this coming Day of Judgment since Creation when He promised to bruise the serpent's head in Genesis 3:15.
 - 1) There is a specific time when God will exercise judgment upon the wicked.
 - 2) Psalm 9:7, 8, *"But the LORD shall endure forever; **He has prepared His throne for judgment.** [8] He shall judge the world in righteousness, and He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness."*
 - a. God has a specific, prepared time for His judgment/wrath.
- C. The Old Testament is full of prophecies concerning this coming Day of Judgment when God will avenge His Word and those who have been martyred in the faith.
 - 1) Jeremiah 10:10, *"But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. **At His wrath the earth will tremble and the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.**"*
 - 2) Nahum 1:2, *"God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; the LORD avenges and is furious. **The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies.**"*

- 3) Zephaniah 1:15, *"That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, **a day of devastation and desolation**, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness."*

2. When does the Wrath Dispensation begin?

- A. The Wrath Dispensation begins in the middle of the last 7 years when the Man of Sin blasphemes the God of heaven declaring that he is as God.
- B. Daniel 7:25,26,27
- [25] ***"He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.***
- [26] ***'But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever.***
- [27] *Then the kingdom of dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."*
- 1) The KJV says in vs. 26, ***"But judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion..."***
 - 2) When does this take place? After the Man of Sin speaks pompous words against the Most High on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (the abomination of desolation).
 - 3) This takes place in the middle of the last 7 years.
- C. It is during the Wrath Dispensation that God pours out His judgment/wrath in the form of plagues upon the earth.
- 1) The 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets, 7 Vials, and 3 Woes all take place during the last 3½ years. These are defined in the book of Revelation starting with chapter 6 through chapter 16.

3. There will be no more remission of sins during the Wrath Dispensation.

- A. The Wrath Dispensation will usher in a 3½ year period when there will be no more remission of sins. In other words, unbelievers will not be able to be saved during this time.
- 1) The 3½ years will be the last half of the 7-year period before the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- B. What does Daniel 9:27 mean when it says that the Man of Sin shall bring an end to the sacrifice and offering?
- 1) Daniel 9:27a, *"Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; **but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering..."***
 - 2) This prophecy is a description of a dispensational change from the Grace Dispensation to the Wrath Dispensation.
 - 3) When we change from the Grace Dispensation to the Wrath Dispensation, what really changes?
 - a. First, the judgment/wrath of God will be poured out on the world.
 - b. Second, there will be no more remission of sins or being saved by grace once God's wrath begins.
 - 4) Is it not proper to say that every time a person is saved today that the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ is applied to cover their sins?
 - a. In other words, **there is still a daily sacrifice for sins.**
 - b. The blood of Jesus is still being applied daily to forgive the sins of the world.

- c. Remember that Satan is still accusing mankind daily to God (Rev. 12:10).
- 5) There is only one sacrifice that will take away our sins today.
 - a. Hebrews 10:12, *"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God."*

4. Something changes in the heavens during the last 3½ years.

- A. What does the Bible say about the last 3½ years?
 - 1) There is a period in heaven when God demands silence.
 - a. Revelation 8:1, *"When He opened the seventh seal, **there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.**"*
 - b. Scripture tells us that one hour equals 7 years.
 - 1. Revelation 17:12, *"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, **but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.**"*
 - 2. We know that the Man of Sin program has power for the last 7 years (Daniel 9:27, *"Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week..."*).
 - 3. If one hour is 7 years, then half an hour is 3½ years.
 - 2) No one is able to enter into the heavenly temple for 3½ years while God is pouring out His wrath.
 - a. Revelation 15:8, *"The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and **no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.**"*
 - b. It takes 3½ years to pour out the plagues of God on the earth.
 - c. Revelations 11:3,6, *"And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they **will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days**, clothed in sackcloth... [6] These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have powers over waters to turn them to blood, **and to strike the earth with all plagues**, as often as they desire."*
 - 3) Who are the "ones" entering into the heavenly temple now?
 - a. The Church of God recognizes that Satan is the accuser of the brethren and that he accuses us daily before God.
 - 1. Revelation 12:10, *"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, **'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of the brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'**"*
 - 2. We acknowledge that Satan was cast down from heaven before Creation, however, he still has access to heaven to accuse us before God (consider the story of Job).
 - 3. In the middle of the last 7 years, Satan loses his access to heaven and instead pursues the woman who is hid in the wilderness (Rev. 12:14, 15).
 - 4. Revelation 12:12, *"Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! **For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.**"*
 - 4) Since there is no one accusing us before God, there is no need of Jesus being there to intercede for us.
 - a. Romans 8:34, *"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, **who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.**"*

- 5) Part of the silence in heaven comes when the cry of the souls of the martyrs is silenced.
 - a. Revelation 6:9-11, *"When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. [10] And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' [11] Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed."*
 - b. We know that these additional martyrs are killed during the last 3½ years.
 - c. Revelation 20:4, *"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."*
- B. Since there is silence in heaven, unbelievers cannot be saved during this time of God's wrath being poured out on the wicked.
 - 1) If God still saved during the time of His wrath, who would be left to punish?
 - 2) There is coming a time when the doors will be shut for salvation.
 - a. Consider the story of Noah found in Genesis 6-9.
 - b. II Peter 2:5 says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. In other words, he preached to the people about getting their lives in order.
 - c. Jesus said in Luke 17:27, *"They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."*
 1. They had access to salvation for a time; however, when the time of God's judgment came upon the earth, their access was cut off.
 2. Judgment came upon them because they refused Noah's message of salvation and hope.
 - 3) This cut-off point for salvation comes in the middle of the last 7 years.
 - a. Daniel 12:9, 10

[9] *"And he said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.'*

[10] *"Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand."*
 - b. Revelation 22:11, *"He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."*
 - 4) Since we know that it is God's desire that everyone should be saved, how would He determine whom to save and whom to punish?
 - a. If He will allow part of the virgins in Matthew 25 to be beheaded—remember they are confessing Christians—would He allow unbelievers to be saved simply so they could avoid His judgment/wrath?
 - b. Genesis 6:3a, *"And the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever...'"*
 - c. Proverbs 1:24-28, *"Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, [25] Because you despised all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, [26] I will laugh at your*

*calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, [27] When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. [28] **Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me.***

- d. Psalm 103:8,9, *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. [9] **He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever.**"*
- 5) The scriptures in Revelations tell us that the wicked do not reach out to God in this time of trouble; they simply curse Him and wish for death.
 - a. Rev. 9:20a, *"But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, **did not repent of the works of their hands...**"*
 - b. Rev. 9:21, *"And **they did not repent** of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."*
 - c. Rev. 16:21, *"...**Men blasphemed God** because of the plague of the hail..."*
 - d. Rev. 16:9, *"And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; **and they did not repent** and give Him glory."*
 - e. Rev. 16:11, *"**They blasphemed the God of heaven** because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds."*

5. What happens to believers during the Wrath Dispensation?

- A. Believers are not appointed to God's wrath.
 - 1) I Thessalonians 5:9, *"**For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.**"*
- B. While believers are not appointed to God's wrath, they can be subject to Satan's wrath if they are not hid away.
 - 1) Some part of God's kingdom will be hid away.
 - 2) Isaiah 26:20, *"Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; **hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past.**"*
 - 3) Satan will make war with those believers who are not hid away.
 - a. Revelation 12:17, *"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, **and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.**"*
 - b. Daniel 7:21, 25, *"I was watching; and the **same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them...** [25] **"He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time."***
- C. We know that God promises that His Bride will be hid away.
 - 1) Revelation 12:14, *"But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, **that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.**"*
- D. Some of the saints that are not hid away will be martyred for their faith.
 - 1) Revelation 6:11, *"Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, **until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.**"*
 - 2) Revelation 20:4, *"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. **Then I saw the souls of them who had been beheaded for***

their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

6. Conclusion

We live in a time defined by "cheap grace". In other words, people—including Christians—believe that God is only love and therefore He would never hold them accountable for their actions and much less allow wrath to come upon them. They have been taught that God accepts whatever they decide to give Him in the way of obedience, worship, and doctrine. They have never read about or witnessed the God of judgment that is defined in the Old Testament and the book of Revelation. They are in for a rude awakening.

Since the time of Jesus Christ some 2,000 years ago, we have been living in the age of the Grace Dispensation. We are saved by grace, through faith, by believing and accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and following His Word. While most Christians would probably acknowledge that we are living in the Last Days, they have not been taught about the judgment and wrath that God is preparing for this earth. Preachers don't teach them about God's judgment and wrath because they believe they will be raptured away to heaven while the sinners on earth are victims of the plagues of the book of Revelation.

God's Dispensation of Wrath is coming upon this world. The Church of God believes that although we will be supernaturally hid, we will still witness God's wrath being outpoured on mankind based on Psalm 91—we will see it with our eyes, but it will not come near us. We will witness a God who reigns down judgment from heaven on the wicked people of this earth. It will be a new time for us; we will witness a God we have never seen before.

With the change from the Grace Dispensation to the Wrath Dispensation, unbelievers will no longer have access to God's grace for salvation. In other words, no unbelievers will be able to be saved—in the sense of accepting Christ as their Savior for the first time—during the Wrath Dispensation. It will be like the days of Noah when the door was shut: The floods came and those who did not make it to safety were killed. They were judged and ultimately destroyed.

The church's job is to warn the people about the changes that are happening all around us. We must teach the people about God's Dispensation of Wrath—a time when forgiveness of sins is no longer available—and encourage them to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior while there is still time. Last, we must teach them about a just God who will rain down judgment on the unbelievers of this world. We must let them know that although God is love, God is also just—He will avenge His Word and punish Satan and all unbelievers.

35. Jacob and Esau – Two Separate Nations (March 2010)

When Isaac, the promised son of Abraham and Sarah, was 40 years old he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram and the sister of Laban the Syrian, as his wife. At first Rebekah was barren; however, Isaac prayed to the Lord for Rebekah to conceive and she became pregnant with twins.

As the children struggled within her, Rebekah inquired of the Lord as to what was happening in her womb. The Lord answered her by saying that the two children she would bear were indeed two nations and that two peoples would be separated from her body. Rebekah subsequently bore twin boys: Esau was born first, followed by Jacob.

While the Scriptures are clear that the nation Jacob represented was Israel, the nation represented by Esau has not been clearly defined by Bible scholars. While some have taught that Jacob and Esau was simply a confirmation of the Jew and Gentile program established in Isaac

and Ishmael, a closer examination reveals that the scriptural definition of the nation of Esau does not apply to all Gentiles.

The Church of God believes that the scriptural description of the nation of Esau characterizes it as a nation that stands in direct opposition to the nation of Israel both historically and prophetically. Also, God states that He hates Esau—remember Esau represents a nation—and that He will pour out His judgment upon him. There are no blessings promised to the nation of Esau, only judgment and destruction.

The Church of God believes that the nation of Esau was a type of—and later became—the Islamic Nation that we know and see today. Is it any wonder that God hates a nation—consisting of some 1.5 billion followers—that serves a pagan god and denies that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? When we properly identify the nation of Esau according to Scripture, we will be better equipped to understand the role they play in the last days before the return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

1. The prophecy about Jacob and Esau.

A. Genesis 25:23-26

- [23] *“And the LORD said to her: **“Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.***
- [24] *So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb.*
- [25] *And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau.*
- [26] *Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.”*

B. Jacob represented and became the nation of Israel, but what nation did Esau represent and become?

- 1) First, it’s important to understand what Genesis 25 says about Esau.

C. Esau was the firstborn, therefore he was entitled to Isaac’s blessing; however, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a plate of food.

- 1) Genesis 25:33, 34, *“Then Jacob said, “Swear to me this day.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. [34] And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.”*
 - a. The word despised literally means to disesteem, disdain, show contempt for. To “esteem” means to respect and admire, so to “disesteem” means failure to respect or admire.
- 2) This is where Esau sealed his future and the future of his descendants.
- 3) This is Isaac’s prophecy concerning Esau: *“Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. **By your sword you shall live,** and you shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck”* (Genesis 27:39, 40).
- 4) The first thing that Esau did after receiving Isaac’s blessing was to promise to kill Jacob (Genesis 27:41).
- 5) Esau’s prophetic future was different from Ishmael’s prophetic future.
 - a. Isn’t it amazing that the descendants of Esau—the Arabs/Muslims—still live by the sword even to this day?

D. What did God say about Esau?

- 1) God gave Mount Seir to Esau as a place to live.

- a. Deuteronomy 2:5, *"Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because **I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.**"*
- b. In Obadiah 1:19, God takes it back.
- 2) God promises judgment on Esau.
 - a. Jeremiah 49:10, *"But I have made Esau bare; I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself. **His descendants are plundered, his brethren and his neighbors, and he is no more.**"*
 - b. Obadiah 1:9,18, *"Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end **that everyone from the mountains of Esau may be cut off by slaughter...**[18] The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; **but the house of Esau shall be stubble.** They shall kindle them and devour them, and **no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau.**"*
- 3) While God promises to bless Ishmael, there are no promises in God's Word about blessings on Esau.
 - a. In fact, God says that He hates Esau.
 - b. Malachi 1:2, 3, 4,
 - [2] *"I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved;*
 - [3] ***but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.**"*
 - [4] *Even though Edom has said, "We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places," Thus says the LORD of hosts: "They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and **the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever.**"*
 - c. This same passage is referenced in Romans 9:13.
- 4) Esau's hatred of Jacob/Israel has defiled many.
 - a. Hebrews 12:15-17
 - [15] *"Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, **and by this many become defiled;***
 - [16] *lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.*
 - [17] *For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, **he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.**"*
 - b. Because of this intense hatred and bitterness, the nation of Esau sought revenge.
 - c. Ezekiel 25:12, *"Thus says the Lord GOD: "Because of what **Edom did against the house of Judah by taking vengeance,** and has greatly offended by avenging itself on them."*

2. Five characteristics of the Nation of Esau.

1. FIRST DESCRIPTION: God says that He hates Esau and his descendants. Remember, Esau represents a nation.

A. Why would God hate a nation?

- 1) Could it be that the nation 1) rejected/despised their Godly birthright, 2) has a hatred for Israel, 3) desires to kill Israel, and 4) serves other gods, a violation of God's first commandment?

- 2) Genesis 12:3, [God speaking to Abraham] *"I will bless those who bless you; **And I will curse him who curses you**; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*
- 3) Here's how God described Esau and his descendants:
 - a. First, we must establish that Esau, Edom, Mount Seir and Idumea all refer to Esau and his descendants.
 1. Genesis 36:8, *"So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom."*
 2. When God refers to Edom or Mount Seir in the scriptures, He is referring to Esau and his descendants often in a particular region (the mountain range of Seir).
 3. Ezekiel 35:15, *"As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, **O Mount Seir, and all Idumea**, even all of it: and they shall know that I am the LORD."*
 4. The name Idumea literally means red, Edom, the elder twin brother of Jacob, hence the region occupied by him.
 5. In translations other than KJV it is often translated as Edom or Esau.

2. SECOND DESCRIPTION: The nation of Esau will hate and desire to kill Israel.

- A. The first thing that Esau did after he received his "blessing/prophecy" from his father Isaac was to make a threat concerning Jacob.
 - 1) Genesis 27:41, *"So **Esau hated Jacob** because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, *"The days of mourning for my father are at hand; **then I will kill my brother Jacob**."**
 - 2) If we remember that God said Esau represented a nation, we must acknowledge that the nation of Esau will hate Israel and desire to kill Israel.

3. THIRD DESCRIPTION: The nation of Esau will have an ancient hatred of Israel. They also will have been at war with Israel and killed them by the sword at some time.

- A. God gives us additional descriptions of the nation of Esau in Ezekiel 35, 36.
 - 1) Ezekiel 35:1-7
 - [1] *"Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying,*
 - [2] *"Son of man set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it,*
 - [3] *"and say to it, **Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O Mount Seir, I am against you; I will stretch out My hand against you, and make you most desolate;***
 - [4] *I shall lay your cities waste, and you shall be desolate. Then you shall know that I am the LORD."*
 - [5] *"Because you have had **an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword** at the time of their calamity, when their iniquity came to an end,*
 - [6] *"therefore, as I live," says the Lord GOD, **"I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; since you have not hated blood, therefore blood shall pursue you.***
 - [7] *"Thus I will make Mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it the one who leaves and the one who returns."*

4. FOURTH DESCRIPTION: the nation of Esau took possession of Israel for themselves, in other words, they claim rightful ownership/possession of Israel.

They deny Israel's right to exist (based on the concept that they were cheated out of their legitimate birthright).

A. Ezekiel 35:10, 11, 15

[10] ***"Because you have said, 'These two nations shall be mine, and we will possess them,' although the LORD was there,***

[11] ***"therefore, as I live," says the Lord GOD, "I will do according to your anger and according to the envy which you showed in your hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them when I judge you.***

[15] ***"As you rejoiced because the inheritance of the house of Israel was desolate, so I will do to you; you shall be desolate, O Mount Seir, as well as all of Edom—all of it! Then they shall know that I am the LORD."***

B. Ezekiel 36:5

[5] ***"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with whole hearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country."***

5. FIFTH DESCRIPTION: The nation of Esau consists of the nations that surround Israel geographically.

A. Ezekiel 36:7, ***"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "I have raised My hand in an oath that surely the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame."***

B. Ezekiel 36:3a, ***"Therefore prophesy, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Because they have made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations..."***

6. SUMMARY of the Nation of Esau.

1. God hates them and their descendants.
2. They hate and desire to kill all of Israel.
3. They have an ancient, well-established hatred toward Israel and have killed them by the sword.
4. They took physical possession of Israel and still claim to have a rightful ownership of Israel to this day.
5. They consist of the nations that surround Israel geographically.

7. This nation is non other than the Islamic Nation.

1. The Islamic Nation claims to trace its roots back to Abraham and Ishmael.
2. They feel that they were cheated out of their blessing/inheritance through deception (a reference to the Jacob and Esau birthright deception story).
3. They have a well-established hatred of Israel which has endured for thousands of years.
4. Muslims at one time took possession of Israel and claimed it for their own—a claim they still adhere to today. In fact, Muslims (the Palestinians) still occupy parts of Israel right now!
5. The nations that surround Israel today are primarily Muslim.
6. What other "nation" can answer "yes" to all of these characteristics/qualifications?

3. The nation of Esau's ancient hatred of Israel.

A. **While Esau and his brother Jacob eventually made up and were at peace, the descendants of Esau remained staunch enemies of the nation of Israel.**

- 1) Psalm 137:7 (Living Bible), *"O Jehovah, do not forget what these Edomites did on that day when the armies of Babylon captured Jerusalem. **"Raze her to the ground!" they yelled.**"*

B. The descendants of Esau were the first nation to attack the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt.

- 1) Exodus 17:1,8,13-16
 - [1] *"Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink.*
 - [8] *Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.*
 - [13] *So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.*
 - [14] *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."*
 - [15] *And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner;*
 - [16] *for he said, **"Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."***
- 2) Amalek was the grandson of Esau.
 - a. Genesis 36:9,10a,12a
 - [9] *"And this is the genealogy of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir.*
 - [10] *These were the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz...*
 - [12] *"Now Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz..."*

C. Later, when Moses asked the King of Edom for permission to cross his land (in their trek to Canaan), the king refused passage to the Israelites.

- 1) Numbers 20:1,14,17,18,20,21
 - [1] *"Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.*
 - [14] *Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us,*
 - [17] *'Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.'"*
 - [18] ***Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword."***
 - [20] *Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand.*
 - [21] *Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turn away from him."*

D. The nation of Esau and Israel shared a long history of battles and wars after Israel entered the Promised Land.

- 1) The books of Numbers, I & II Kings, I & II Samuel, and I & II Chronicles list the many battles and invasions between the two.
- 2) The nation of Esau also played a role in the fall of Solomon.

- a. This is what the Bible says about Solomon:
 1. I Kings 4:34, *"And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon."*
 2. I Kings 5:5, *"And behold, I will propose to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spoke to my father David, saying, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the house for My name.'"*
 3. I Kings 10:23,24, *"So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. [24] Now all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart."*
 - b. The demise of Solomon.
 1. I Kings 11:1,7,8, *"But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, **Edomites**, Sidonians, and Hittites...[7] Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. [8] **And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.**"*
 2. I Kings 11:14, *"Now the LORD raised up an adversary against Solomon, **Hadad the Edomite; he was a descendant of the king of Edom.**"*
 - 3) Eventually, the Israelites even served the gods of the nation of Esau at times.
 - a. II Chronicles 25:14, *"Now it was so, after Amaziah [king of Judah] came from the slaughter of the Edomites, that **he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up to be his gods, and bowed down before them and burned incense to them.**"*
- E. In approximately 483 BC, we find the story of Esther. Haman, the man who schemed to have all of the Jews killed, was a descendant of Esau.**
- 1) Esther 3:1,6,13
 - [1] *"After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him."*
 - [6] *...Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai."*
 - [13] *And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, **to destroy, to kill, to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.**"*
 - 2) Agag was the king of the Amalekites (the grandson of Esau).
 - a. I Samuel 15:8, *"He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive..."*
 - b. When the Bible called Haman "the Agagite", that simply means "a descendant of Agag".
- F. Herod the Great, the "Jewish" King who attempted to kill Jesus the Messiah at His birth, was a descendant of Esau.**
- 1) Matthew 2:1-3,13
 - [1] *"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,*
 - [2] *saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.'"*

[3] *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

[13] *Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; **for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.**"*

- 2) According to history, Herod was the son of Antipater (pronunciation: An-tip-a-ter) II the Idumean (pronunciation: I-du-me-an).
 - a. "Antipater II the Idumean (d. 43 BC) was the founder of the Herodian Dynasty and the father of Herod the Great...**A native of Idumea, southeast of Judea between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, and which during the time of the Hebrew Bible had been known as the land of Edom...**His genealogy was more a matter of public relations than confirmed history: although a spurious identification lists Antipater as descending from the Jewish remnant that returned from the Babylonian Captivity, **it is more likely he was an Edomite.** The Idumeans had been forcibly converted to Judaism by the Sadducee-influenced Hasmonean leader John Hyrcanus. Forcible conversion was not recognized by Pharisaic tradition, so even though Antipater and Herod the Great may have considered themselves of the Jewish faith, they were not considered Jewish by the observant and nationalist Jews of Judea, and were resented for their Edomite ancestry, their Hellenized culture, and their collusion with the Roman invaders." ("Antipater the Idumean" Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; bold emphasis ours.)

G. Edom, Moab, and Ammon were nations that shared common borders and worshiped pagan gods (remember that Moab and Ammon were cousins/half-brothers). They were the enemies of Israel and they are often linked together in the Scriptures as co-conspirators.

- 1) We have already established that the King of Edom refused passage to the Israelites, but so did the King of Moab.
 - a. Judges 11:17, *"Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let me pass through your land." But the king of Edom would not heed. **And in like manner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent.** So Israel remained in Kadesh."*
- 2) God prophesied against Edom and Moab as the Israelites prepared to take possession of the Promised Land.
 - a. Exodus 15:15, *"Then **the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.**"*
- 3) King Saul fought against Edom and Moab.
 - a. I Samuel 14:47a, *"So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, **and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom...**"*
- 4) Edom, Moab, and Ammon joined forces to attack Israel.
 - a. II Chronicles 20:22, *"Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against **the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.**"*
- 5) God often lumps Edom, Moab, and Ammon together with regards to His coming judgment upon them.
 - a. Jeremiah 25:15,16,21, *"For thus says the LORD God of Israel to me: "Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I*

*send you, to drink it. [16] And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them... [21] **Edom, Moab, and the people of Ammon.***"

- b. Ezekiel 25:8,11, *"Thus says the Lord GOD: **'Because Moab and Seir say, 'Look! The house of Judah is like all the nations,'... [11] 'And I will execute judgments upon Moab, and they shall know that I am the LORD.'***"
- 6) Mount Seir is also a reference to the mountain range that runs from the Dead Sea down to the Gulf of Aqaba (the Red Sea).
 - a. This mountain range encompasses the nations of Ammon, Moab, and Edom.
 - b. That's why God says in Ezekiel 25:3, *"...Behold, O Mount Seir, I am against you..." He is not just referring to one nation, but to all of the pagan nations in that region."*

4. Jacob and Esau do not represent the Jew and Gentile nations as Isaac and Ishmael do.

A. It must be established that the two nations represented by Jacob and Esau are not simply a duplication of the example of Isaac and Ishmael.

- 1) While Jacob may represent Israel, Esau does not represent all of the Gentiles.

B. The story of Isaac and Ishmael, God promises blessings on both of the sons of Abraham.

- 1) This is what God said about Isaac in Genesis 17:19:

*[19] "Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name **Isaac**; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him."*
- 2) God also promised to make a nation of Ishmael and bless them in Genesis 17:20:

*[20] "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. **Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.***"

C. The Scriptures do not promise any blessings on Esau.

- 1) We've already established that God hates the nation of Esau (Malachi 1:2, 3) and promises judgment upon them.
- 2) There are five particular characteristics of the nation of Esau that do not apply to all Gentiles.

D. In Obadiah 1:18b God says, "...And no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau."

- 1) We know that the Scriptures do not support the theory that all Gentiles will be destroyed.
- 2) We recognize that God has a Last Days' program that includes the Gentiles coming to Christ and even being a part of His chosen people.
- 3) So we must determine that "the house of Esau" is referring to a particular group of Gentile people or nation, not a broad reference to all Gentiles.

E. Just as the nation of Israel transformed, so has the nation of Esau.

- 1) We all recognize that the requirements to be part of God's Israel has changed.
 - a. When God changed Jacob's name to Israel—remember that Jacob and Esau represented two nations—the requirements to be a part of that nation were quite simple: You had to be born into it and undergo the rite of circumcision.

- b. We recognize that the requirements changed after Jesus Christ came on the scene.
 1. Galatians 6:15,16, ***“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation [16] And as many walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”***
 2. Romans 9:6-9, ***“But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, [7] nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, “In Isaac your seed shall be called.” [8] That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.”***
 3. Galatians 3:26-29, ***“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. [27] For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”***
- 2) Just as Jacob became Israel, and the nation of Israel has evolved and changed over the course of time, so has the nation of Esau.
 - a. God tells us that Esau became a nation. In order to be part of Esau’s nation, you had to be born into it.
 - b. Now, however, the requirements to be a part of Esau’s nation have evolved as well.
 - c. What defines whether or not you are part of Esau’s nation?
 1. Whether or not the 5 scriptural characteristics apply to you.
 2. It is not longer a requirement that you be a natural-born descendant of Esau.
 - d. The Islamic Faith (in its current form) did not exist until approximately 600 AD when the Prophet Muhammad started—or transformed—the religion.
 1. We say “transformed” because we believe Muhammad simply took an existing pagan religion—the worship of Hubal and 360 other idols—and redefined it into the Islamic Faith.
 2. We contend that the worship of Allah (whose origin can be traced back to the Baals of the Old Testament) is simply a continuation of the pagan religions that Esau and his descendants practiced throughout the centuries.
 - e. How can we say that with confidence?
 1. Just as God’s Israel today is defined by their actions, so is the nation of Esau.
 2. The Muslims can still be accurately defined by the 5 scriptural characteristics we find in God’s Word.

5. Conclusion

In Genesis 25:23 God makes an absolute statement regarding the twin boys that were in Rebekah’s womb: *“Two nations are in your womb...”* While most Bible scholars agree, and the Bible states emphatically, that Jacob became and represented the nation of Israel, the identity of the nation of Esau has not been universally agreed upon. The church does not believe that the story of Jacob and Esau is merely a duplication of the Isaac and Ishmael story—a revelation of the Jewish and Gentile nations. The church believes that the nation of Esau was a type of—and eventually became—the Islamic Nation.

The Church of God does not believe that the Word of God is silent regarding the Islamic Nation which consists of some 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide. Its roots can be traced back to Esau with its ancient hatred and proposed annihilation of the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. Even today, the Islamic Nation still fits the Biblical descriptions given by God for the nation that Esau represented: 1) God hates them (because of their pagan god/religion), 2) they hate and desire to kill Israel, 3) they have an ancient, well-established hatred of Israel, 4) they took possession of Israel for themselves and they claim a legitimate right to the land (consider the claim of the Palestinians), and 5) the Islamic Nation consists primarily of the nations that surround Israel. What other modern-day nation fits this description?

The Islamic nation is a pagan religion with a false god, Allah, whose origins can be traced back to Baal. It is nothing more than the continuation of a false religion but with a particular twist. What's peculiar about the Islamic Nation? Its pronounced hatred of Israel and even the modern-day Christian faith. According to Islam, all non-Muslims are referred to as "infidels" (*def. a person who has no religion*) and are subject to death. God's Word is adamant that strict judgment will come upon the house of Esau including the Islamic Nation. Isaiah 34:5, "For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; indeed it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse, for judgment."

As Christians, we need to be aware of what the Bible says about the Islamic Nation, and watch and pray without ceasing for God's will to be accomplished in these Last Days.

a. The Seven World Empires (November 2010)

In Revelation 13:1 we read, "Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name." In Revelation 17:10 we are told, "There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes he must continue a short time."

The Church of God recognizes that John prophesied concerning 7 world empires that would dominate Israel and Jerusalem. This article will identify these kingdoms and their role in Last Days prophecy.

1. There are seven world empires that have dominated the Holy Land.

A. Most Bible scholars agree that the seven world empires are:

- 1) Egyptian Empire [1600 - 1200 BC]
- 2) Assyrian Empire [900 - 607 BC]
- 3) Babylonian Empire [606 - 536 BC]
- 4) Persian Empire [536 - 330 BC]
- 5) Greek Empire [330 - 146 BC]
- 6) Roman Empire [146 BC - 476 AD]
- 7) Ottoman/Turkish Empire (Islamic) [299 - 1923 AD]

B. Some historians say the Roman Empire lasted until 1453 AD when the Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire was conquered by the Ottomans/Turks.

- 1) There are also discrepancies about when each empire began and how long they lasted. The dates listed are taken from Halley's Bible Handbook, pgs. 40, 41.

C. The City of Jerusalem – It should be noted that although the Ottoman Empire did not officially begin until 1299 AD, Jerusalem came under Muslim control in 638 AD when Caliph Omar (or Umar), a Muslim ruler, conquered the city after a 2-year siege.

- 1) *"Muslims first entered Jerusalem in 638 AD and since then more or less they have been in control of the temple mount and its platform except for a brief period of seventy years when crusaders became victorious in the land; therefore*

the entire covered structures one sees at the temple mount bear the signatures of Muslim architects. The two readily visible structures are "Dome of the Rock" located in the middle and northern part of the platform and "Al-Aqsa mosque" located at its southern corner." ("Jerusalem and the True Legacy of Caliph Umar (RA)," by Dr. Mohiuddin Waseem, www.abrahamfaiths.com)

D. Dome of the Rock – The proof that the Muslims have controlled Jerusalem for centuries is the Dome of the Rock mosque, built in 692 AD, and the Al-Aqsa mosque built in approximately 705 AD. Both of these Muslim mosques are built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

2. These seven world empires are talked about in the book of Revelation.

A. Revelation 17:10, 11

[10] "There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.

[11] "The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition."

B. "Five have fallen..."

1) Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greek.

C. "...one is..."

1) The Roman Empire.

2) This was the ruling empire when this text was written approximately 96 AD by the Apostle John (according to Halley's Bible Handbook).

D. "...and the other has not yet come."

1) According to history, the Ottoman/Turkish Empire (Islamic) was the next world power to dominate Israel.

2) At the time Revelations was written, the Ottoman Empire had not yet come.

E. We refer to the Ottoman Empire as the Islamic Empire because of the overspread of Muslim tradition, culture and influence wherever the Empire dominated.

1) *"The Ottomans are one of the greatest and most powerful civilizations of the modern period. Their moment of glory in the sixteenth century represents one of the heights of human creativity, optimism, and artistry. **The empire they built was the largest and most influential of the Muslim empires of the modern period, and their culture and military expansion crossed over into Europe.** Not since the expansion of Islam into Spain in the eighth century had Islam seemed poised to establish a European presence as it did in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. **Like that earlier expansion, the Ottomans established an empire over European territory and established Islamic traditions and culture that last to the current day (the Muslims in Bosnia are the last descendants of the Ottoman presence in Europe).***

The Ottoman empire lasted until the twentieth century. While historians like to talk about empires in terms of growth and decline, the Ottomans were a force to be reckoned with, militarily and culturally, right up until the break-up of the empire in the first decades of this century. The real end to the Ottoman culture came with the secularization of Turkey after World War II along European models of government. The transition to a secular state was not an easy one

and its repercussions are still being felt in Turkish society today; nevertheless, secularization represents the real break with the Ottoman tradition and heritage." ("The Ottomans" by Richard Hooker, 1996).

3. According to Revelations 17, the seventh kingdom exists, stops existing, and then exists again in the form of an eighth kingdom.

A. Revelation 17:8,11

[8] *"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, **when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.***

[11] *"The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition."*

B. The 8th beast that goes to perdition is the Man of Sin.

- 1) He comes from the seventh kingdom (the Ottoman/Islamic Empire).
- 2) In other words, the Man of Sin appears to be Muslim.
- 3) He will be the 8th king to rule the world (albeit briefly).
 - a. Rev. 13:8, *"All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."*

C. The Islamic Empire.

- 1) The Ottoman/Islamic Empire has stopped existing as of 1923. What was left of the Empire after World War I became the country of Turkey.
- 2) Although the Ottoman/Islamic Empire does not technically exist anymore, they still exist in the form of 1.5 billion followers worldwide. How difficult will it be for them to reorganize themselves when prophecy demands it?

4. Is the 7th World Empire the Roman Catholic Church?

A. There is a lot of teaching in the Christian community that the 7th world empire is the Roman Catholic Church.

- 1) They argue that the Roman Catholic Church followed the Roman Empire which most historians recognize ended in 476 AD.
- 2) If this were the case, why didn't John just say, "the seventh king will be of the sixth"?
- 3) That's exactly what he said about the Man of Sin.
 - a. Rev. 17:11, *"The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition."*

B. The church does not believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the seventh empire for a number of reasons.

- 1) Do we have the right to change the definition of "world empires"—remember Rev. 17:10 calls them kings—to include a religious organization?
 - a. In other words, the 6 kings that John referred to were actual armies that conquered the Holy Land and controlled it by force.
 - b. Can we expand the definition of "world empires" to accommodate a non-military church presence/organization?
 1. The church acknowledges that the Roman Catholic church has a unique history filled with violence and forced compliance; however, we do not believe that this qualifies it as a "world empire."

- c. The church recognizes that the Roman Catholic Church has a special identity in Scripture—Babylon, the Great Whore—however; we do not believe that she has to be listed as a “world empire” to fulfill her prophetic role in the Last Days.

C. Many have said the 7th kingdom is the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope will be the Antichrist.

- 1) While nothing is impossible with God, it would be a far stretch for the Pope—who is recognized worldwide—to implement the Mark of the Beast system and behead Christians for not worshipping the beast.

D. Revelation 17:12-18

[12] *“The ten horns which you saw are the ten kings who have received no kingdoms as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast.*

[13] *“These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.*

[14] *“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”*

[15] *Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.*

[16] ***“And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.***

[17] *“For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.*

[18] *“And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”*

- 1) In this scenario, the ten kings—who give their power to the Antichrist—hate the harlot.
 - a. We know that the harlot is the Roman Catholic Church. If the Antichrist is the Pope, why would the Pope allow the ten kings to make the Roman Catholic church desolate and naked?
 - b. Would he allow them to “eat her flesh and burn her with fire”?

5. The church believes that history has identified the 7th kingdom as the Ottoman/Turkish Empire (1299 - 1923 AD).

A) Just like we have turned to history to identify the previous 6 kingdoms, a review of history will determine the 7th kingdom.

B) While the Ottoman/Turkish Empire has not had much effect on our western civilization—thus explaining why we know very little about it—the Ottomans wielded much dominance and influence in their day.

1. ***“At the height of its power (16th-17th century), it spanned three continents, controlling much of Southeastern Europe, Western Asia and North Africa... The empire was at the center of interactions between the Eastern and Western worlds for six centuries. With Constantinople (Istanbul) as its capital city, and vast control of lands around the eastern Mediterranean...the Ottoman Empire was in many respects an Islamic successor to the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire.”*** (“Ottoman Empire,” Wikipedia).

C.) Finally, the motto of the Ottoman/Turkish Empire was “The Eternal State.” Consider their motto with what the Scriptures says about how they will exist, stop existing, but exist again.

b. The beast that was mortally wounded but was healed (November 2010)

In at least three passages in the book of Revelation a reference is made to a beast that was mortally wounded but was ultimately healed. The references are vague at best; however, it must be accepted that this particular description is important to properly understand Last Days prophecy.

Here are the characteristics given concerning this particular beast:

1. It was mortally wounded.
2. Its deadly wound was healed.
3. It is referred to as the “first beast.”
4. It was wounded by the sword.
5. Despite its wounds, it still lived.
6. Once its wounds were healed, it received great power.

The beast that was wounded was none other than the Islamic Nation. They receive a mortal wound during the First Battle of Gog and Magog when all but one-sixth of the Islamic armies that come against Israel are destroyed. The Islamic Nation re-emerges with its’ deadly wound healed and is given great power by Satan to continue his last-ditch effort to destroy the people of God and rule the earth unchallenged.

(NOTE: The passages in Revelation 13 intermittently refer to this particular beast as one of the seven heads, and other times as a beast. For the purpose of this article we will refer to this seventh head as a beast.)

1. The beast that had a mortal wound.

A. Revelation 13:1,2

[1] *“Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, **having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.**”*

[2] *Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth was like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.”*

B. The events that the Apostle John wrote about in verse 1 represent an overview of historical events that have taken place over thousands of years along with future prophecies yet to be fulfilled.

- 1) The Bible student should not construe John’s words to mean that all of the events will take place during the Last Days.
- 2) The Apostle John was writing about a series of events that started being fulfilled even before the Garden of Eden was created.

C. Let's break down verse 1 and define each element.

1) Who/what is the beast rising up out of the sea?

- a. **This beast is the Babylonian system of confusion that was authored by Satan** when he allowed pride to arise in his heart in heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15). He subsequently deceived one-third of the angels of heaven out of paradise never to be reunited with their Creator (Jude vs. 6). Obviously this process of the beast rising out of the sea began before Creation when Satan deceived the angels. It was through deception/confusion that Satan corrupted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
- b. While the Roman Catholic Church is part of the Babylonian system defined in Revelation 18, it is just a part—not the whole. This Babylonian system includes everything that is contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ—including the Islamic faith—and that seeks to pollute the truths of God's Word through deception.

2) The seven heads represent seven kings with empires.

- a. Rev. 17:10, **"There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time."**
- b. Each of these seven kingdoms represent a defined era of time starting with the Egyptian Empire which started approximately 1600 BC.
- c. Again, for the sake of clarity, the seven kingdoms are empires that ruled over Israel and Jerusalem. There have been other huge empires in the world (example: Asian, etc.) that have not ruled over God's Holy Land.

3) The ten horns with crowns represent 10 kings that receive authority for one hour—or seven years—with the beast.

- a. Rev. 17:12, **"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast."**
- b. These ten kings have not received their kingdoms as of yet. Their reign will last for 7 years which is the amount of time that the Man of Sin will be on the world stage.

4) The horn with the blasphemous name is none other than the Man of Sin.

- a. Daniel 7:24,25b

[24] *"The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings."*

[25] **He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High..."**

5) The dragon is the Devil.

- a. Rev. 12:9a, **"So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan..."**

D. Who is the seventh king to arise?

- 1) The Apostle John wrote Revelation 17:10 during the Roman Empire and he stated that five had been, one was, and that there was one more kingdom to come.
- 2) The Roman Empire ended 476 AD.
- 3) In 638 AD, the city of Jerusalem came under the control of Caliph Omar (or Umar), a Muslim, after a 2-year siege.
 - a. *"Muslims first entered Jerusalem in 638 AD and since then more or less they have been in control of the temple mount and its platform except for a brief period of seventy years when crusaders became victorious in the land; therefore the entire covered structures one sees at the temple mount bear the signatures of Muslim architects. The two readily visible structures are "Dome of the Rock" located in the middle and northern part of the platform and "Al-Aqsa mosque" located at its southern corner."* ("Jerusalem and the True Legacy of Caliph Umar (RA)", by Dr. Mohiuddin Waseem, www.abrahamicfaiths.com)
 - b. Proof of the Muslim's control of Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock mosque which was built in 692 AD. To this day, the mosque sits undisturbed on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.
 - c. The other mosque on the Temple Mount, Al-Aqsa, was built approximately 705 AD. It is believed to be the site where Muhammad was supernaturally transported to from Mecca during a "night journey." It is considered one of Islam's most holy places.
- 4) The Ottoman/Turkish Empire (1299 - 1923 AD) followed the Roman Empire.
- 5) It has been stated that the Ottoman/Turkish Empire was, in many respects, an Islamic successor to the Roman (Christian) Empire.
 - a. The Ottoman/Turkish Empire was dominated by the Islamic faith and their flag used the crescent moon and five-pointed star—the same symbols used by Muslims today.
 - b. Because of the overspread of the Islamic faith during the Ottoman/Turkish Empire, we subsequently refer to it as the Islamic Empire/Nation.
- 6) Thus, the seventh king is the Islamic Empire (or nation).

E. One of the seven heads (or kingdoms) is mortally wounded, but later is healed.

- 1) Revelation 13:3

[3] **"And I saw one of its heads as it is was mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast."**
- 2) This mortal wound to the Islamic Nation occurs during the attack on Israel in the First Battle of Gog and Magog.
 - a. It is an Islamic Confederacy army that attacks Israel—not all Muslims come up against Israel.
 - b. However, the confederacy is symbolic of all the Islamic Nation's desire to see Israel annihilated and the land returned to the Muslims.

- c. Ezekiel 38:4-6 lists the modern-day countries of Iran, Sudan, Libya and Turkey as the attackers of Israel.

F. What is the wound inflicted on the seventh head/beast—the Islamic Nation?

- 1) Ezekiel 39:1,2,

[1] *“Therefore, thou son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:*

[2] ***“And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come up from the north parts, and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel.”***
- 2) In Ezekiel 38 we read that a large army from a group of Islamic Nations comes up against Israel. God says of this number, *“You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, **you and all your troops and many peoples with you**”* (Ezekiel 38:9).
- 3) God supernaturally destroys the Islamic armies in the mountains of Israel. Ezekiel 38:21, *“I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains,” says the Lord GOD. **“Every man’s sword will be against his brother.”***
 - a. Notice the reference to the sword in this passage.
 - b. In Revelation 13:14 it says that the beast’s wound was inflicted by a sword.
- 4) All but one-sixth of the attackers are killed; thus the mortal wound is inflicted.
- 5) A point of interest: Six is the number of man.
 - a. Revelation 13:18, *“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, **for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.**”*
 - b. It is from the one-sixth that is left, which is later healed and strengthened, that the ultimate rebellion of mankind is made against his Creator in the Man of Sin and his evil programs.

G. Who can make war with the healed beast?

- 1) Revelation 13:4

[4] *“So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worship the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? **Who is able to make war with him?**”*
- 2) Notice the reference to war in this passage.
 - a. They are talking about the beast who once had a deadly wound.
- 3) Now the question is: Who is able to make war with such an expanded and immense army now that its wound has been healed?

H. The beast is wounded by the sword.

- 1) Revelation 13:12-14

[12] *“And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship **the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.**”*

[13] *“He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.”*

[14] *“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image of **the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.**”*

2) The beast was “wounded by the sword and lived.”

- a. The word “sword” implies that there was a battle that took place.
- b. The Greek word for sword (*machaira*–*makh-ahee-rah*) means a knife, dirk, figuratively war, judicial punishment, sword.
- c. The Greek word for wound (*plege*–*play-gay*) means a stroke, by implication a wound; a calamity.
- d. The word *calamity* means an event causing great and sudden damage or distress.

3) In this battle, the beast (Islamic Nation) was wounded, but it still lived on (1/6 of it).

- a. The phrase “*the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived*” could be interpreted “*the beast who suffered a great calamity by war and lived.*”

2. God’s remnant principle.

A. God has always used the principle of allowing a remnant of people to remain so that His promises/curses would be continued to succeeding generations.

B. While God often shows the remnant principle regarding Israel–how He would always preserve a remnant amongst His people–He also uses the same principle concerning Israel’s enemies.

C. Such is the case found in II Kings 17 and 18 concerning the siege of Jerusalem by the wicked King Sennacherib.

- 1) Sennacherib was the king of Assyria.
- 2) The majority of Israel was conquered and Sennacherib came up against Jerusalem to lay siege on it to conquer it.
- 3) Sennacherib was so certain of his victory that he made frequent and loud boasts against the God of the Israelites.
- 4) Finally, God had enough of Sennacherib’s boasts.
- 5) In II Kings 19:28 God says to Sennacherib, “*Because your rage against me and your tumult have come up to My ears, therefore **I will put My hook in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came.**”*

- 6) Notice the similarity to the passage in Ezekiel 38:4a concerning Gog and Magog: **"I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army..."**

D. God supernaturally destroyed the Assyrian army encamped about Jerusalem, however, He allowed a remnant—including King Sennacherib—to return home to Nineveh to tell of their defeat at the hand of God.

- 1) II Kings 19:35,36

[35] *"And it came to pass on a certain night that **the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand;** and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead.*

[36] *So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh."*

E. Why did God permit a remnant of the Assyrians to escape and return home?

- 1) Because He had not fulfilled all of the prophecies concerning King Sennacherib and the Assyrians.
- 2) God allowed them to escape because He had plans to use them in the future.
- 3) In II Kings 19:7, God had prophesied the following about King Sennacherib: *"Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; **and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.**"*

F. God's prophecy against Sennacherib was fulfilled years later.

- 1) We find the account in II Kings 19:37, *"Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, **that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword;** and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place."*

G. This account in the Old Testament shows that God uses the principle of preserving a remnant—including those of Israel's enemies—because He intends to further use the enemy remnant to fulfill Bible prophecy.

- 1) God uses this same principle in the First Battle of Gog and Magog when He allows one-sixth of the Islamic Confederacy armies to return home to regroup and ultimately come up against God again in the battle of Armageddon (along with all of the other nations of the world).

3. CONCLUSION

The beast that was mortally wounded—but was later healed—is none other than the Islamic Nation/Kingdom that received a deadly wound when it attacked Israel during the First Battle of Gog and Magog. While only a numbered group of Islamic Nations attacked Israel, it was representative of the entire Islamic Nation's desire to see Israel annihilated and "wiped off the face of the map."

The beast's wound was later healed and the Bible says that the whole world eventually bowed down to this beast saying, *"Who is able to make war with the beast?"* The understanding of the beast that was wounded and later healed substantiates the church's doctrine that the Islamic Nation/Kingdom is indeed the 7th world empire prophesied of in Revelation 17:10.

While the Ottoman Empire—the successor to the Roman Empire—ended in 1923, this too was in fulfillment of Bible prophecy. According to Revelation 17:8b (*"...the beast that was, and is not, and yet is"*) the 7th world empire would exist, stop existing, then exist again. Also, the 8th beast was prophesied to come from the 7th beast (Revelation 17:11).

What does that mean? While the Ottoman/Islamic Empire does not technically exist anymore, there are approximately 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide making it the second largest religion on the planet. According to Bible prophecy, the Islamic Nation will come to power again in the form of the Man of Sin—remember Revelation 13:7 tells us that he will have authority over every nation thus making him a world ruler. It's interesting to note that the official motto of the Ottoman Empire was: "The Eternal State".

God's Word is very precise. He gives us landmarks or markers to ascertain where we are according to His prophetic timetable. As the time of the fulfillment of these prophecies draws near, He is revealing His Word to us so that we can be children of the light. We can be watchmen who see and understand as God's prophetic Word unfolds in front of us.

c. **The false peace agreement before the First Battle of Gog and Magog. (November 2010)**

The Church of God recognizes that Daniel 9:27 prophesies of a coming Man of Sin (the Antichrist) who will make a worldwide peace covenant which will signal the beginning of the last 7 years before the return of Jesus Christ at the Last Trump. However, the church also believes that prophecy dictates that a false peace treaty will be signed by an Arab Confederacy prior to the Man of Sin's peace covenant. The failure of this peace treaty will usher in the First Battle of Gog and Magog: An attack on the mountains of Israel by an Arab Confederacy. It is after the First Battle of Gog and Magog that the Man of Sin takes the world stage and ushers in the final 7 years of tribulation and indignation.

There are two battles of Gog and Magog prophesied of in the Scriptures. The First Battle of Gog and Magog takes place before the return of Christ, the Second Battle of Gog and Magog takes place at the end of the Millennial Reign. This article will focus on the First Battle of Gog and Magog which takes place prior to the Man of Sin appearing on the world stage.

1. **What is the book of Obadiah about?**

A. **Obadiah only has one chapter and 21 verses.**

- 1) It was written approximately 841 BC—which would be approximately 240 years before Jerusalem was captured and Solomon's temple destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar.
- 2) First, we must establish that Esau, Edom, Mount Seir and Idumea all refer to Esau and his descendants.
 - a. Genesis 36:8, *"So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. **Esau is Edom.**"*
 - b. Deuteronomy 2:5, *"Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because **I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.**"*

- c. When God refers to Edom or Mount Seir in the scriptures, He is referring to Esau and his descendants often in a particular region (the mountain range of Seir which runs from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba).
- d. Ezekiel 35:15, *"As thou didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do unto thee: thou shalt be desolate, **O Mount Seir, and all Idumea**, even all of it: and they shall know that I am the LORD."*
- e. The name *Idumea* literally means *red, Edom, the elder twin brother of Jacob, hence the region occupied by him*. In translations other than KJV it is often translated as Edom or Esau.
- f. Also, we must remember that Esau represented a nation just like Jacob represented the nation of Israel. When God talks about Esau, He is also talking about the nation that proceeded from his descendants—the Islamic Nation.

B. Obadiah is a prophecy about God's judgment being poured out on Esau.

- 1) Obadiah vs. 1, *"The vision of Obadiah. **Thus says the LORD GOD concerning Edom** (We have heard a report from the LORD, and a messenger has been sent among the nations, saying, "Arise, and let us rise up against her for battle")."*
- 2) Remember that Edom is Esau.
- 3) Edom is a reference to the house of Esau or the descendants of Esau.
 - a. Obadiah vs. 18:

[18] *"The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame; **but the house of Esau shall be stubble**; They shall kindle them and devour them, and no survivor shall remain in the house of Esau."*

C. What happens to the house of Esau?

- 1) Vs. 2, *"Behold, I will make you **small among the nations; you shall be greatly despised.**"*
- 2) Vs. 8, *"Will I not in that day," says the LORD, **"Even destroy the wise men from Edom, and understanding from the mountains of Esau?"***
- 3) Vs. 18b, *"....They shall **kindle them and devour them**, and **no survivor shall remain in the house of Esau.**"*
- 4) God promises to completely destroy the house of Esau.

D. Who is the house of Esau today?

- 1) When Isaac's wife Rebekah became pregnant with twin boys, God told her that there were two nations in her womb.
 - a. Genesis 25:23, ***"Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."***

- b. Esau was born first followed by Jacob.
 - c. Esau represents a particular nation among the Gentiles, while Jacob represents Israel.
 - d. The church believes that Esau's nation, the Edomites, have evolved into the Islamic Nation as we know it today.
- 2) The prophecy of Obadiah is a judgment against the house of Esau because of their violence against Israel.
- a. Vs. 10,11,12
 - [10] ***"For violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever."***
 - [11] *In that day that you stood on the other side—in the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem—even you were as one of them.*
 - [12] *But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress."*
 - b. This prophecy is against the Nation of Esau—and their descendants— that surrounded Israel and gloated over her demise. This started when Nebuchadnezzar carried Israel away into captivity in 606 BC all the way up to the current day.

E. When does this prophecy take place?

- 1) Vs. 15, ***"For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head."***
- 2) This prophecy happens when "the day of the Lord upon all nations" arrives.
 - a. This has not happened as of yet.
 - b. This is an end-time prophecy.
- 3) How do we know for sure that it is an end-time prophecy?
 - a. Vs. 21, ***"Then saviors [deliverers] shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD's."***
 - b. It's a time when a Savior/Deliver shall come to Mount Zion (Jesus Christ). It's a time of judgment, and the Lord will reign over the kingdoms of this earth.
 - c. None of these events have happened historically thereby making this an end-time prophecy.

F. The judgment against Esau takes place at the conclusion of Israel's punishment and captivity.

- 1) Lamentations 4:21,22
 - [21] *"Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz! The cup shall also pass over to you and you shall become drunk and make yourself naked."*

[22] *The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no longer send you into captivity. **He will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins!***

- 2) When the punishment of Israel is accomplished, remember her punishment is to eat her defiled bread scattered among the nations of the world, then God will turn His cup of fury to Esau and it will be time for her punishment to take place.
 - a. What is the punishment of Esau?
 - b. The outpouring of God's wrath on the wicked of this earth.
- 3) Since the reestablishment of Israel as a nation in 1948, we have witnessed the Jews returning home from all over the world. This signals the coming of the end of Israel's punishment.
 - a. This also signals the beginning of judgment upon the daughter of Esau—the Islamic Nation.

2. A peace treaty with a trap.

A. Obadiah prophecies concerning an Arab confederacy and a false peace treaty.

- 1) Obadiah vs. 6,7:

[6] *"Oh, how Esau shall be searched out! How his hidden treasures shall be sought after!"*

[7] **All the men of your confederacy shall force you to the border; the men at peace with you shall deceive you and prevail against you. Those who eat your bread shall lay a trap for you. No one is aware of it.**
- 2) What are these scriptures saying?
 - a. First, we must acknowledge that vs. 7 calls for a confederacy of Arab nations to be formed.
 - b. On March 22, 1945, the "Arab League," officially called the "League of Arab States," was formed.
 - c. Today, it consists of 22 members.
 - d. Second, we must recognize that a peace treaty is established ("*...the men at peace with you...*").
 1. However, vs. 7 tells us that this "peace treaty" with an Arab confederacy contains a "trap".
 2. What is the purpose of this trap? To "*....force you to the border...*"
 3. The border of what?
 4. Their border with Israel.
 - e. All of the Arab nations that surround Israel geographically including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Saudi Arabia, are members of the Arab League.
 1. Israel is surrounded on 3 sides (north, east, south) by Arab nations.
 2. The Mediterranean Sea forms their western border.
- 3) Even if the false peace treaty does not include Israel, the church believes it will be used to provoke a military response from Israel.

- a. It could be that an Arab peace treaty would require that one Arab nation defend the honor of another Arab nation that came into conflict with Israel.
- b. For example, if Israel would take action against Hamas in the Gaza Strip that could provoke the surrounding Arab nations to retaliate because of a peace treaty they have involving Hamas.
- c. What if Israel attacked Iran over its nuclear program? Could we see a scenario where Iran's allies come to her defense?

B. The church believes that the failure of this false peace treaty with an Arab Confederacy will be the start of the First Battle of Gog and Magog.

- 1) This is the catalyst that brings the Arab Confederacy against the borders of Israel.
 - a. This is a description of the First Battle of Gog and Magog.
 1. In the First Battle of Gog and Magog, the attackers only make it into the mountains of Israel—not the cities—and they are destroyed in the mountains.
 2. Ezekiel 39:2, *"And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come up from the north parts, **and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel.**"*
 3. Ezekiel 38:21a, *"**I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains,**" says the Lord GOD..."*
 - b. The First Battle of Gog and Magog is separate from the battle of Armageddon where the attackers make it into the cities of Israel.
 1. Zechariah 14:2, *"For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; **the city shall be taken**...Half of the city shall go into captivity..."*
- 2) The battle of Gog and Magog has 2 parts:
 - a. The First Battle of Gog and Magog takes place before the return of Christ (Ezekiel 38,39).
 - b. The Second Battle of Gog and Magog takes place after the Millennial Reign when the wicked of the earth once again come up to attack Jerusalem (Revelation 20:7-10).

3. Other scriptures supporting a failed peace treaty.

A. Psalm 83:1-8,11,13-15

- [1] *"Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God!*
- [2] *For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head.*
- [3] ***They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones.***
- [4] *They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.*

[5] For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You:

[6] The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and Hagrites;

[7] Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;

[8] Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot. Selah."

B. Satan has a master plan to destroy Israel using an Arab Confederacy.

- 1) Vs. 5 tells us that they—the Arab nations named in vs. 6-8—have come together to form a confederacy.
 - a. The word *confederacy* is defined as *a covenant, league*.
 - b. In other words, a group of Arab nations have made a covenant together, or formed a league, **whose primary objective is to see Israel destroyed.**
 - c. This is the same story found in Obadiah vs. 5 where it refers to a confederacy (*"All the men of your confederacy..."*).
- 2) Who will make up this confederacy?
 - a. Vs. 6-8 – Notice that the first group of people identified are *"the tents of Edom."*
 - b. This corresponds with Obadiah vs.1 (a prophecy against Edom).

C. Is Psalm 83 a prophecy against Arabs and Muslims?

- 1) Psalm 83:11,12
 - [11] "Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb, yes, **all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,***
 - [12] Who said, "Let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for a possession."*
- 2) Who are Zebah and Zalmunna?
 - a. Judges 8:21, *"So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man is, so is his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, **and took the crescent ornaments that were on their camels' necks.***
 - b. Zebah and Zalmunna were idol worshipers who used crescent moon symbols in their worship.
 - c. Remember that the crescent moon is the official symbol of the Muslims (and is still represented on their flag today).
 - d. This passage in Judges was written approximately 1197 BC.

D. What is the final judgment of God in the Psalm 83 prophecy?

- 1) Psalm 83:17,18
 - [17] **"Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; yes, let them be put to shame and perish,***

[18] *That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth."*

- 2) Notice how this judgment compares with Obadiah's prophecy.
 - a. Both prophesy shame:
 1. Psalm 83:17, "...yes, let them be put to shame..."
 2. Obadiah vs. 10, "...shame shall cover you..."
 - b. Both prophesy that they shall perish or be destroyed.
 1. Psalm 83:17, "...yes, let them be put to shame and perish."
 2. Obadiah vs. 18, "...and no survivor shall remain in the house of Edom."
 - c. Both prophesy that understanding shall be removed and the people dismayed.
 1. Psalm 83:17, "Let them be confounded and dismayed forever..."
 2. Obadiah vs. 8, "...even destroy the wise men from Edom, and understanding from the mountains of Esau."

E. How does God enact His judgment detailed in this prophecy?

- 1) It begins with the First Battle of Gog and Magog.
- 2) Psalm 83:13,14,15

[13] *"O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind!*

[14] *As the fire burns the woods, **and as the flame sets the mountains on fire,***

[15] *So pursue them with Your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm."*
- 3) Notice the reference to the mountains in vs. 14.
 - a. Remember that the First Battle of Gog and Magog takes place before the last 7 years when a group of Arab nations come up against Israel.
 - b. All but 1/6 of the Arab Confederacy that comes against Israel is destroyed in the mountains of Israel.
 - c. The First Battle of Gog and Magog is described in Ezekiel 38:19-21

[19] *"...Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel..."*

[20] *...The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.*

[21] *...I will rain down...great hailstones, fire, and brimstone."*
- 4) The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy takes place in the Second Battle of Gog and Magog at the end of the Millennial Reign when God destroys the wicked forever (Revelation 20:7-10).

F. Another scripture supporting a failed agreement.

- 1) Daniel 11:6, *“And at the end of some years they shall join forces, for the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North **to make an agreement; but she shall not retain the power of her authority, and neither he nor his authority shall stand; but she shall be given up,** with those who brought her, and with him who begot her, and with him who strengthened her in those times.”*
 - a. The king of the South is generally a reference to Egypt.
 - b. The king of the North is a reference to the Man of Sin (identified in Daniel 11:40-45).
- 2) This sounds very similar to Obadiah’s peace treaty when the people involved force one of their members “to the border.”
 - a. If you force someone to do something, they do not retain their power or authority.
- 3) The Koran permits Muslims to lie to infidels for the greater good. In other words, Muslims can lie if it promotes or propels fundamental Islamic goals or beliefs.
 - a. What is more fundamental to Muslims than the destruction of Israel and the return of the land to what they consider the rightful owner–themselves?

4. Conclusion

The Last Days are prophesied to be a very deceptive time. It will be a time of prosperity and peace agreements in the land. Why peace agreements? Because Satan is once again trying to mimic the coming Prince of Peace who will establish a lasting peace during His reign.

As children of the light, we need to be watching what is happening all around us. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul in I Thessalonians 5:3, *“For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”*

We need to be aware that prophecy talks about two distinct peace treaties in the Last Days. The peace treaty which contains a trap found in Obadiah will precede the First Battle of Gog and Magog. This will be a peace treaty that is centered around an Arab Confederacy and will ultimately lead to those nations attacking Israel causing a war; however, this will not be the battle of Armageddon.

What better setup for the Man of Sin to announce a worldwide peace treaty than at the conclusion of the First Battle of Gog and Magog? This is the second peace treaty we are watching for found in Daniel 9:27a, *“Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week...”* The implementation of this peace treaty will begin the last 7 years before the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

d. The First Battle of Gog and Magog (November 2010)

The first purpose of this article is to scripturally define and distinguish one of the two battles/wars that is prophesied to occur in the Last Days. This article will focus on the First Battle of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38,39). We specify “The First” because there is another Battle of Gog and Magog talked about in the Bible. It is referenced once in Revelation 20:7-10. The Second Battle of Gog and Magog takes place at the end of the Millennial Reign when Satan is loosed again

and brings a multitude of people against Jerusalem. They are ultimately destroyed when God rains down fire from heaven.

The second purpose of this article is to differentiate between the First Battle of Gog and Magog and the Battle of Armageddon. Many in the kingdom of God think the two battles happen simultaneously. The Church of God recognizes that the First Battle of Gog and Magog precedes and is separate from the battle of Armageddon which will take place at the end of the last 7 years at the 7th trump when Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

1. Who are Gog and Magog?

A. Ezekiel 38:1-3

- [1] *"Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,*
- [2] *"Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him,*
- [3] *"and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal."*

B. Who is Gog?

- 1) He is the ruler of the land of Magog including Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.
- 2) These nations are the descendants of the sons of Noah.
 - a. Genesis 10:1,2
 - [1] *"Now this is the genealogy of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And sons were born to them after the flood.*
 - [2] *The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras."*

C. Where did Noah's Ark land?

- 1) According to Genesis 8:4, it landed on Mount Ararat.
 - [4] *"Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat."*
- 2) Where are the mountains of Ararat located?
 - a. Mount Ararat is located in Eastern Turkey on the borders of Iran and Armenia.

D. Where is the land of Magog today?

- 1) The word Gog literally means *name of a northern nation*. The word Magog means *barbarous northern region*.
- 2) Some believe Magog to be Rosh or Russia.
 - a. This would make sense as the descendants of Noah spread out to repopulate the world.
 - b. *"Rosh, as seen in early Greek writings, is a name which was then used for all the nations of the north. Meshech and Tubal, now believed to be Phrygia and Cappadocia were located at that time in the vicinity of Magog, clearly the area of*

*Russia. Thus if Rosh is Russia, Magog would be the land of Russia. **The suggestion has been made that Meshech and Tubal constitute the old names for the former western and eastern capitals of Russia: Moscow and Tobolsk.*** (www.latter-rain.com)

- 3) We know that Russia is an atheistic nation that frequently mocks the existence of God.
 - a. Joseph Stalin is quoted as saying, *"We have deposed the czars of the earth and we shall now dethrone the Lord of heaven."*
 - b. As the Russian rocket, Sputnik, observed the heavenly anomalies, this comment was heard on the radio: *"Our rocket has bypassed the moon, and is nearing the sun. We have not discovered God."*

E. Who else is involved in the war?

- 1) Ezekiel 38:4-6
 - [4] *"I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, and all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords."*
 - [5] ***"Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them,** all of them with shield and helmet;*
 - [6] ***"Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah** from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you."*
- 2) Notice that this group is a numbered, labeled group of nations.
 - a. It is not the "all nations" described in Zechariah 14:2 regarding the battle of Armageddon.
 - b. Who are the modern-day nations listed in vs. 5,6?
 - Persia is Iran which is 98% Muslim.
 - Ethiopia is Sudan which is over 50% Muslim.
 - Libya is still Libya which is 97% Muslim.
 - Gomer and Togarmah are Turkey which is 95% Muslim.

F. Russia and Turkey's relationship.

- 1) History tells us that Russia and Turkey have had a long history of wars and fighting.
 - a. *"The Russo-Turkish wars were a series of wars fought between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire during the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. **It was one of the longest conflicts in European history.**"* ("History of the Russo-Turkish wars," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)
- 2) Today unprecedented attempts are being made to establish a peaceful and prosperous relationship between the two countries. Excerpts from article dated 02/14/09: "Russia, Turkey declare new era with 'strategic' document."
 - a. *"Back in December 2004, during a landmark visit to Ankara by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who was president at the time, the two countries signed a "Joint Declaration on the Intensification of Friendship and Multidimensional Partnership." **Putin's visit was the first presidential visit in the history of Turkish-Russian relations ...**"*

- b. **“Russia is an important trade partner for Turkey, with a total annual trade volume of \$38 billion between the two countries,** and has close political relations with common strategic interests, especially in Central Asia and the Caucasus.”
- c. **“Turkey depends on Russian energy supplies,** but it is also a transit route for Russian energy exports. Russia, Turkey’s main supplier of natural gas, is the biggest market for Turkey’s construction firms and millions of Russian tourists visit Turkey’s Mediterranean coast every year.”
- d. Something has changed in the relationship between Russia and Turkey. They are no longer enemies, they are now working together as allies.

G. Russia supplies the Middle East nations with weapons.

- 1) While most Bible scholars predict that Russia will attack Israel in the First Battle of Gog and Magog, it seems more likely that their role will be to provide ammunition and artillery for such an attack to their Arab allies.
- 2) Excerpts from article dated 08/26/08: “Russian weapons in the Middle East.”
 - a. *“First, Moscow hosted MVSU–2008, an international show of weapons and military equipment. Then King Abdullah II of Jordan visited the show, met with designers and producers and had a discussion with President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. A few days previously, President Bashar al-Assad of Syria had flown in for talks with Dmitry Medvedev. The press and television in Amman [Jordan], Damascus [Syria] and Tel Aviv [Israel] made much of the events, especially the Syrian visit.”*
 - b. *“It is another matter that military technical cooperation between Moscow and Damascus needs re-evaluating. **Syria owes Russia \$3 billion for weapons supplied to it, and this on top of Damascus’ \$10 billion debt for armaments sold in Soviet times which Moscow forgave,** incidentally, for a pledge to spend another \$2 billion on arms purchases from Russia.”*
 - c. *“Jordan lives up to these words. In recent years it has bought from Russia two...military transport planes worth a combined \$100 million, and six light multi-role Ka-226 helicopters...other equipment includes armored personnel carriers, fighting infantry vehicles...anti-tank missile systems...ground-to-air missiles...silent sniper rifles...and silent pistols...”*
 - d. *“The target mentioned at the Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, of exporting \$8 billion worth of Russian arms and supplies in 2008, compared with \$6.2 billion in 2007, does not seem far-fetched.”*
- 3) Russia is the 2nd largest arms supplier in the world (the USA is the largest).
 - a. It was number one in 2005.
 - b. The majority of its sales were to Iran and China.

2. What happens in the First Battle of Gog and Magog?

A. Ezekiel 38:7-16

- [7] *“Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them.*

- [8] *"After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely.*
- **First, this prophecy is identified specifically as occurring in *"the latter years"*.**
 - **Second, notice the reference to the mountains of Israel. This is one of the key distinguishing differences between the First Battle of Gog and Magog and Armageddon.**
- [9] *"You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you."*
- [10] *'Thus says the LORD GOD: "On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan:*
- **God is placing thoughts inside evil people's minds to fulfill His prophecies.**
- [11] *"You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates—*
- [12] *"to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.*
- **First, note the reference to a people gathered from the nations. This is the Last Days' prophetic return of the Jews to the land of Israel.**
 - **Second, notice that the reason for this attack is to gain possessions: to take booty and to plunder.**
- [13] *"Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, 'Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty, to take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder?"*
- [14] *"Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "On that day when My people Israel dwell safely, will you not know it?"*
- [15] *"Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army.*
- [16] *"You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes."*
- **First, notice that a requirement for this prophecy is that Israel dwells safely in her land. This is happening today.**
 - **Second, God specified that this group will come from the far north.**
 - **Third, God again specifies that this will be an attack against Israel in the latter days.**
 - **Fourth, God says that He will bring this army against Israel.**
 - **Fifth, what is the purpose of this battle? So that the nations of the world will recognize the hand of God. (NOTE: God does not say that the purpose**

of this battle is establish Jesus Christ as King of kings in the world as is the case with Armageddon.)

B. What happens to the armies that come against Israel?

1) Ezekiel 38:18-23

[18] *"And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," says the Lord GOD, "that My fury will show in My face.*

[19] *"For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: 'Surely in that day **there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel,***

[20] *'so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. **The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall,** and every wall shall fall to the ground.'*

[21] *"I will call for a sword against Gog, throughout all My mountains," says the Lord GOD. **"Every man's sword will be against his brother.***

- They shall turn against each other and kill each other.
- Notice that God specifies "throughout all My mountains".

[22] *"And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; **I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.***

- God will rain down fire from heaven to destroy them.

[23] *"Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD."*

- Notice that God does not say that He will be known in EVERY NATION...He says "many nations."
- This distinguishes this battle from Armageddon where every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

3. When does the battle take place?

A. The church believes that the First Battle of Gog and Magog will take place 1) as a result of the failure of the false peace treaty prophesied of in Obadiah, 2) before the Man of Sin is revealed, 3) before the last 7-year period of tribulation and indignation, and 4) at least 7 years prior to the battle of Armageddon.

B. According to Ezekiel 39:9-12, the people of Israel will burn the weapons for seven years, and for seven months they will bury the dead.

- 1) This coordinates perfectly with the timing of the last seven years before the return of Christ.
- 2) Nowhere in the Bible does it specify that the first seven years of the Millennial Reign will be used to clean up the land and bury the dead.
- 3) The Bible tells us that the enemies of God will be completely destroyed or consumed when Jesus returns and fights in the battle of Armageddon.

- a. II Thessalonians 2:8, “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.”
- b. Zechariah 14:12, “And this shall be the plagues with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.”
- c. Will we need to bury people who are dissolved? The word *dissolve* is defined as to melt, dwindle, vanish.

C. Ezekiel 39:9-14

- [9] “Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years.
- [10] “They will not take wood from the field nor cut down any from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them,” says the Lord GOD.
- [11] “It will come to pass in that day that I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call it the Valley of Hamon Gog.”
- [12] “For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land.
- [13] “Indeed all the people of the land will be burying, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified,” says the Lord GOD.
- [14] “They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party, to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search.”

D. Vs. 9 says that Israel will burn their enemies’ weapons for 7 years. Vs. 10 implies that they will use these abandoned weapons for fuel or energy to heat their homes.

- 1) It must be acknowledged that the writers of the Old Testament described what they saw or prophesied concerning the future, in the terms which they were familiar with in their day.
 - a. Such is the case with the description of the automobile in Nahum 2:4 where they are described as chariots that seem like torches and run like lightning.
 - b. The same is true with the description of the motorcycle in Joel 2:1-4 where they are described as horses that sound like a fire devouring stubble.
- 2) Is there a material in use today that can be used to provide energy and also be used as a weapon for destruction?
 - a. We know that the developed nations of the world are using nuclear technology to produce electricity and to produce very powerful weapons.
- 3) Consider the situation that is going on right now concerning Iran and its nuclear program.

- a. On Wednesday, December 2, 2009, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared, *"The Zionest regime (Israel) and its (western) backers cannot do a...thing to stop Iran's nuclear work."*
 - b. *"Iran said Wednesday that it would produce whatever nuclear fuel it needed on its own, the latest indication it was rejecting a U.N.-backed deal aimed at reining in Tehran's nuclear program over fears it is geared to produce weapons."*
 - c. *"I declare here that with the grace of God, the Iranian nation will produce 20 percent (enriched uranium) and anything it needs itself," Ahmadinejad told a cheering crowd of thousands in the central city Isfahan."*
 - d. *"While Iran maintains its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes to produce electricity, the process of enriching uranium for fuel can be taken further, to levels around 90 percent, and produce material for a nuclear warhead."*
- 4) Can we see here that the same materials that are used to produce weapons can also produce fuel?
- a. This is what the prophecy said in vs. 9 and 10.
 - b. Israel will burn the captured or discarded weapons for 7 years as fuel.
 - c. In 2007, approximately 14% of the world's electricity came from nuclear fuel.

4. Comparison of the First Battle of Gog and Magog and Armageddon.

FIRST GOG AND MAGOG	ARMAGEDDON
• Limited number of northern nations come against Israel (Ezekiel 38:1-6).	• All nations come up against Israel (Zechariah 14:1,2).
• Battle takes place in the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8).	• Battle makes it into the cities of Israel (Zechariah 14:2).
• The enemies of Israel devise a plan to attack and to plunder and take booty from Israel (Ezekiel 38:12,13).	• All the nations of the world come to destroy Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:12) and God will plunder them (Zechariah 14:1,14).
• Enemies are destroyed by earthquake and soldiers turning on/killing each other, fire rains from heaven (Ezekiel 38:18-22).	• Enemies are destroyed by the brightness of Jesus Christ's 7 th trump return (II Thessalonians 2:8).
• It takes seven months to bury the dead and seven years to burn their weapons (Ezekiel 39:9,12).	• The enemies who are killed do not need buried because they have "dissolved" (Zechariah 14:12).

5. Are Muslims looking for a war in the Last Days?

A. Yes, they believe a severe earthquake/calamity will bring forth the Mahdi.

B. Excerpts from the Koran:

- a. ***"Severe calamity from the direction of their ruler will befall my people during the Last days. It will be a calamity which, in severity, shall be unprecedented. It will be so violent that the earth with injustice and corruption will shrivel for its inhabitants.*** *The believers will not find refuge from oppression. At that time God will send a man from my family to fill the earth with justice and equity just as it is filled with injustice and tyranny..."*
- b. ***"Listen to the good news about the Mahdi! He will rise at the time when people will be faced with severe conflict and the earth will be hit by a violent quake.*** *He will fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with injustice and tyranny. He will fill the hearts of his followers with devotion and will spread justice everywhere."*

C. This is why former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was not afraid to flaunt Iran's nuclear ambitions in front of the whole world regardless of the consequences.

- a. He was looking for someone to stand up against him and start a world-wide calamity/war.
- b. He thinks this will bring the promised Muslim savior—the Mahdi.

6. What happens after the First Battle of Gog and Magog?

A. The birds of the air and the beasts of the field will feast on the carcasses of the dead in the mountains of Israel.

1) Ezekiel 39:17-20

- [17] *"And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field: "Assemble yourselves and come; gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing on the mountains of Israel,*
- [18] *You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams and lambs, of goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan.*
- [19] *You shall eat fat till you are full, and drink blood till you are drunk, at My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you.*
- [20] *You shall be filled at My table with horses and riders, with mighty men and with all the men of war," says the Lord GOD."*

B. The stage will be set for the Man of Sin to declare a 7-year worldwide peace treaty.

- 1) What better time to negotiate worldwide peace then after a major war?
- 2) Most of our current peace treaties were established and implemented after World War II ended in 1945.
 - a. On April 25, 1945 delegates from 50 countries assembled in San Francisco to endorse a charter which officially created the United Nations.
 - b. The UN's mission statement: *"We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind..."*

- 3) The world will demand peace at any price—including allowing the Man of Sin to establish a one-world government (Rev. 13:7, “...*And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.*”).

C. Because of the First Battle of Gog and Magog, God will be made known among the nations of the earth.

- 1) Ezekiel 38:23, “*Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.*”
- 2) It’s a proven fact that people turn to God in the midst of trouble.
- 3) Is it possible that this could be the beginning of the scales being removed from the Jewish people’s eyes?
 - a. When they see God move on their behalf?
 - b. Of course many people will not recognize or acknowledge God’s role of that we can be sure.
- 4) We must acknowledge that many people think that God is nonexistent today. They have not seen—or at least not recognized—the hand of God moving in their lifetime.
 - a. Such is the state of many Jewish people. They feel that God has abandoned them, or that He does not exist at all.
 - b. Just imagine the awakening that will take place when they witness fire, great hailstones and brimstone raining down from heaven to defeat their enemies.
 - c. The prophecy says at that time God *will* be known among many nations and they shall acknowledge that He is the Lord.

7. Conclusion

The church believes that the failure of the false peace treaty of Obadiah will bring about the First Battle of Gog and Magog making it one of the next prophetic events to take place. It will happen when a group of Arab nations in the Middle East attack the nation of Israel in the mountains. The Bible says that it will be a great multitude coming against Israel.

Yahweh God will intervene by 1) causing a great earthquake in Israel, 2) raining down fire and brimstone from heaven, and 3) causing the attacking armies to turn on and kill each other. The attacking armies will not advance into the cities of Israel (as they do in Armageddon) and it will take 7 months to bury the dead and 7 years to burn their weapons.

At the completion of the First Battle of Gog and Magog, the world stage will be set for the Man of Sin to step up and declare a 7-year worldwide peace treaty. Seven years after this declaration, Jesus Christ will return to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords!

36. What Does the Oil in Matthew 25 Represent? (November, 2008)

As we review the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins found in Matthew 25, the question is often asked, “*What does the oil in this parable represent?*” While numerous answers have been offered including: the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, the anointing, and so on, we must search the Scriptures for the correct answer. The Church of God believes that the *oil* in this parable represents *truth*. *Truth* is the only commodity—much like the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45,46)—that the Bible instructs us to “buy” and then ultimately “not sell.”

Matthew 25:1-4,8-12

- [1] *"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom*
- [2] *"Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*
- [3] *"Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them,*
- [4] *"but the wise took oil in their lamps.*
- [8] *"And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'*
- [9] *"But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'*
- [10] *"And while they went out to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.*
- [11] *"Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!'*
- [12] *"But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'"*

I. WHAT DOES THIS PARABLE TELL US ABOUT THE OIL?

A. We know that all of the kingdom of God started out with some measure of the oil.

- 1) It takes some measure of the truth to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior—the requirement to be part of the kingdom of God.

B. Those who were wise took additional oil with them.

- 1) This statement implies that they made a decision to bring additional oil.
- 2) The wise had additional insight into what was happening.
- 3) The wise had a little more truth to the point that they knew how to prepare for the Last Days.

C. The foolish virgins' oil ran out.

- 1) The foolish did not have enough truth to sustain them in the Last Days.
- 2) The foolish did not know enough to sufficiently plan for the events of the Last Days.
- 3) The foolish did not have enough truth to know how to go out and meet the Bridegroom.

D. The foolish virgins were instructed to purchase oil from those that sell it.

- 1) Proverbs 23:23, *"Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding."*
 - We have a biblical command to buy the truth.
 - We also have a command not to sell it.
- 2) We are not instructed to "buy the anointing."
 - Acts 8:18-21
 - [18] *"And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,*
 - [19] *saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'*
 - [20] *But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!*
 - [21] *'You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.'*
 - The sons of Sceva, the Jewish High Priest, were whipped by demons when they attempted to vicariously use the anointing/power that Paul used to exorcise the people (Acts 19:11-16).
- 3) We cannot buy the Word of God or salvation.
 - It is a free gift.

- 4) We are instructed to SEEK the following: God, peace, God's precepts/commandments, good, wisdom, knowledge, judgment and even the "book of the LORD."
- 5) However, the only thing we are instructed to buy in the Bible is the truth.
- 6) It should be noted that we are instructed to "sell it not"...maybe that's why the wise wouldn't sell to the foolish.

E. After they found oil, they returned to the wedding festivities and asked to be let in.

- 1) After they discovered truth—simply by being in the midst of it (ex. not being raptured, Man of Sin on the world stage, etc.), they tried to apply the truth...but it was too late.
- 2) You cannot ignore truth your whole life and think that one day you will honor/cherish it when it becomes necessary ...it's called being deceived.
- 3) The foolish, although saved, opted to ignore truth and pursue pleasure (Christmas, Easter, etc.) and it cost them their place at the wedding supper.

F. The Bridegroom refused them entrance saying that He did not know them.

- 1) This is the scenario where a Christian's works are burnt up but they themselves are saved.
- 2) We must remember that all of the 10 virgins are part of the kingdom of God.

2. WHAT DOES THE OIL REPRESENT?

A. The oil represents truth.

B. We have to assume that the virgins took lamps with them so that they could have light to find their way.

- 1) That Bible is clear that the lamps are the Word of God.
 - Ps. 119:105, *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*
- 2) Matt. 25 tells us that all of the kingdom of God had the Word of God.
 - They all had the Word of God yet one-half of them could not operate/interpret it properly.

C. One-half of the kingdom was able to rightly-divide the Word of God enough to find the Bridegroom.

- 1) They all heard the call...only the wise could navigate the path to meet Him.

D. The five foolish virgins were not able to interpret the Word of God enough to find the Bridegroom.

- 1) They were not able to rightly divide the Word of God.
- 2) They didn't understand enough about God's Word to know what it required during the last 7 years.

E. Because of the foolish virgins lack of truth, the Bridegroom said that He did not know them.

3. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT TRUTH?

A. First of all it must be established that Jesus Christ, Himself, is truth.

- 1) John 14:6, *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*
- 2) Accepting truth (Jesus Christ) is the only way to heaven.
 - It cannot be accomplished by works.
 - It is a gift.

- Eph. 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”

3) It is a fact that everyone who is part of the kingdom of God has accepted truth to some degree.

- Everyone one of the 10 virgins had a degree of truth.
- John 3:16 says that you must believe on Him to be saved.

B. In our often lax Christian environment today, truth is often touted as “optional.” However, following truth is a requirement for serving God.

- 1) I Samuel 12:24, “Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.”
- 2) We are required to walk in truth.
 - Ps. 25:5, “Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.”
 - II Kings 20:3, “I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.”
 - II John 1:4, “I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.”
- 3) If we walk in truth we will reach perfection (maturity).
 - Noah reached perfection because he *walked* in his generation.
 - Genesis 6:9, “...Noah was a just man, perfect in his generation. Noah walked with God.”

C. If you follow truth it will take you down a designated path.

- 1) Ps. 25:10, “All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.”
- 2) Ps. 86:11, “Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.”
- 3) The 5 wise virgins could identify the path to find the Bridegroom.

D. We can choose to walk in truth.

- 1) Ps. 119:30, “I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.”
- 2) Jeremiah 5:1, “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.”
- 3) God’s promises are contingent on our obedience.

E. Truth brings light.

- 1) Ps. 43:3, “O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.”
- 2) John 3:21, Jesus speaking, “But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”
- 3) II Peter 1:19, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”
- 4) The 5 foolish virgins ultimately did not have enough light to find the Bridegroom.

F. Truth is our guide.

- 1) John 16:13, "*Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.*"
 - Here we are promised that the Holy Spirit will lead us in truth and even show us what to expect.
 - The 5 wise virgins knew what to expect because they prepared themselves for a journey to meet the Bridegroom.

G. Truth brings acceptance.

- 1) John 8:32, "*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*"
- 2) Isaiah 26:2, "*Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.*"
- 3) The 5 wise were accepted...the 5 foolish rejected.

H. Even if we begin with truth, we can lose our way.

- 1) Galatians 5:7, "*Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?*"
- 2) II Thessalonians 2:10, "*And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*"
- 3) John 12:35, "*Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.*"

I. The Word of God has to be revealed and interpreted.

- 1) II Timothy 2:15, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*"
- 2) Matthew 11:25, "*At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.*"

4. WHAT DID JESUS MEAN WHEN HE SAID I KNOW YOU NOT?

A. The word *know* found in Matthew 25:12—when Jesus told the five foolish virgins, "...I do not know you,"—means *to be aware, behold, consider, look on, perceive, see, be sure, tell, understand*.

- 1) Since it is established in the beginning of the parable that all of the 10 virgins were part of the kingdom of God, its hard to understand how Jesus could say that He did not know them.
 - In our modern interpretation of the word *know*, as it is used in this context, we interpret it to mean *to be familiar or friendly with, have personal experience of*.
 - So it almost seemed like Jesus was contradicting Himself.
 - In other words, how can someone be a part of the kingdom of God and Jesus not know them?
- 2) It makes better sense to expand upon the definition of the word *know*.
 - It would make perfect sense for Jesus to say, "I am not aware of you."
 - Or, "I do not consider you."
- 3) This substantiates the argument that Jesus is not denying that they are part of His kingdom, He just is not aware of their works because they are not based on His truth.
 - He is not rejecting them as far as salvation is concerned, He is simply not recognizing or accepting their works.

B. *Knowing God* is more than just intellectual assent that He exists.

- 1) James 2:19, *"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!"*
- 2) Jesus repeatedly told the Israelites that they did not "know" Yahweh God.
- 3) John 8:19b, Jesus said, *"...You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also."*

C. In today's environment of easy-believism, a lot of people claim to "know" God. However, "knowing God" is being obedient to His Word—or His truth.

- 1) John 8:55, *"Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word."*
- 2) According to Jesus, knowing God is keeping His Word.
- 3) It's just like saying that you love God.
 - We can say it all we want; however, it's our actions that determine whether we love God or not.
 - John 14:15,21 Jesus speaking...
 - [15] *"If you love Me, keep My commandments.*
 - [21] *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."*
 - The word *manifest* means *to exhibit in person, disclose, appear*.
 - In other words, Jesus will show Himself to those who love Him.
 - Is this what happened in Matt. 25?
 - Jesus revealed Himself to those who loved His truth, and rejected those who did not obey His Word/truth/commandments.

D. Can you be a Christian and God not *know* you?

- 1) Salvation is a free gift based on accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior.
- 2) When Jesus told the 5 foolish virgins *I know you not*, was He talking about their works?
 - Matt. 25:1 already specifies that all 10 virgins were part of the kingdom of God.
 - They all had achieved salvation.
- 3) Consider the words of Paul in I Corinthians 3:11-16:
 - [11] *"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*
 - [12] *Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,*
 - [13] *each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.*
 - [14] *If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.*
 - [15] *If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*
- 4) Paul is referring to Christians who have worked for Christ but in the end their works were burned up yet they were still saved.
 - What made their works not stand the test of fire?
 - Because their works were not founded on a solid foundation or truth.
 - Example: They taught things in their Christian ministry that were not based on biblical truths like guaranteed prosperity, pre-tribulation rapture message, once saved always saved, etc.
 - I Corinthians 3:11, *"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*
 - We've already established that Jesus Christ is truth. If you build your works on anything but the truth, they will not withstand the test of fire.

- 5) The 5 foolish virgins had not built their works on truth, that is why they were still saved (remember they were members of the kingdom of God), yet Jesus did not acknowledge their works and permit them to enter the wedding festivities.

E. Matthew 7:21-23

- [21] *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*
- [22] *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?"*
- [23] *"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"*
- 1) We do not decide who gets into the kingdom of heaven...God does.
 - 2) The King James Version uses the word *iniquity* instead of *lawlessness* in vs. 23.
 - 3) The Greek word is *anomia* which means *illegality, violation of law, wickedness, transgression of the law, unrighteousness*.
 - 4) There are many Christians today who are saved, but they violate the commandments of God.
 - They ignore the truths of God's Word (ex. the blessing of the Sabbath).
 - They teach doctrines that are not biblically sound but entice potential followers.
 - They teach fables as the Word of God (Christmas, Easter, etc.).
 - They allow their manmade traditions to make the Word of God of none effect.

F. Luke 13:23-30

- [23] *"Then one said to Him, 'Lord are there few who are saved?' And He said to them,*
- [24] *"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*
- [25] *"When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,'*
- [26] *"then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets,'*
- [27] *"But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'"*
- [28] *"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.*
- [29] *"They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.*
- [30] *"And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."*
- 1) The Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah because they failed to accept Him and the truths that He spoke.
 - 2) Their traditions had made the Word of God of none effect.
 - 3) What effect will the modern-day tradition of the "pre-tribulation rapture theory" have on the kingdom of God during the last 7 years?
 - Many people will be disillusioned.
 - Many Christians will be deceived...because they are unprepared.
 - Many Christians will miss the Messiah because they have not embraced His truths.

5. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE 5 FOOLISH VIRGINS?

A. Matthew 25:

- [11] *"Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!'*
- [12] *"But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you."*

B. The 5 foolish virgins were not permitted to enter the wedding festivities where the Bridegroom and the Bride were assembled.

- 1) We have already established that the Matthew 25 scenario takes place in the middle of the last 7 years at the beginning of the Great Indignation.
- 2) Since the foolish virgins were not permitted to attend the wedding festivities, they were left to endure the last 3 ½ years while God's wrath was being poured out on the earth.

C. Can ignoring truth cause you to miss out of God's divine protection plan?

- 1) The Bible talks about the saints of God who endure the last 3 ½ years.
- 2) Daniel 7:21,22
 - [21] *"I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them,*
 - [22] *"until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom."*
- 3) A group of people called "saints" are battling the devil until the time that Jesus returns as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- 4) Revelation 12:17, *"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."*
 - We see 2 groups of people identified in this scenario.
 - There is the woman who is nourished and protected for 3 ½ years, and there are the others who are part of her ("rest of her offspring") who are battling Satan.
 - Anyone who keeps the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus Christ has to be a Christian.
- 5) According to Daniel 7:22, there are a group of saints who make it through the last 3 ½ years.

D. Ignoring God's truths...even while you are a Christian...can cost you the divine protection of God.

- 1) Ignoring truth is dangerous.
- 2) Matthew 13:37-43
 - [37] *"He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.*
 - [38] *"The field is the world, and the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.*
 - [39] *"The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.*
 - [40] *"Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.*
 - [41] *"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,*
 - [42] *"and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*
 - [43] *"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*
- 3) In the first part of this parable the tares are separated from the good seed.
- 4) Starting at vs. 41 Jesus states that angels will gather out of God's kingdom all things that offend—those that practice lawlessness.
 - It seems to me that He is not referring to "tares" at this point...He is talking about lawlessness (iniquity) within the kingdom of God.
 - This is the scenario in Matthew 25.

- Those who did not have enough truth were cast out...or not permitted in.
- 5) Is this “furnace of fire” the same “test by fire” referred to in I Corinthians 3:13?
- 6) Remember, we are talking about rewards here...not salvation.
- 7) Would God consider celebrating Christmas as lawlessness?
 - How about Easter?
 - What about Halloween?
- 8) II Thessalonians 2:9-12
 - [9] *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all powers, signs, and lying wonders,*
 - [10] *and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*
 - [11] *And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,*
 - [12] *that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*

6. CONCLUSION

The importance of understanding and loving God’s truth in these Last Days is vital to the survival of every Christian. The Parable of the 10 Virgins in Matthew 25 is a window into what the Kingdom of God will look like in the Last Days. Verse 5 tells us that while the Bridegroom is delayed the whole Kingdom of God will slumber and sleep.

When the Midnight Cry is made, the Kingdom of God will awake. It is then that one-half of the Kingdom discovers that they do not have enough truth and/or understanding to answer the call, *“Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him!”* As a result of their lack of truth, they set out on a search to buy truth in order to attend the wedding festivities with the Bridegroom. They ultimately find their way to the wedding, however, they are denied entrance to the festivities and turned away.

The Church of God believes that the Scriptures support the conclusion that the “oil” in this parable represents “truth.” While the Word of God is our Lamp to guide our way, it must be studied and rightly-divided in truth in order to understand and operate it properly. One simply needs to look at Christianity today to verify that the Word of God has been widely interpreted and even misinterpreted at random, hence the deluge of churches and organizations all claiming to be the church of the Bible.

It is walking in truth and following the Lamb of God, wherever He leads us, that will ultimately a.) lead us to perfection (personal maturity), b.) provide divine protection for us, and c.) enable us to navigate the last 7 years of trouble and be united with our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Failure to love and embrace truth will result in our a.) being lost in these Last Days, b.) having no oil to burn in our lamps to illuminate our pathway, and c.) being rejected by the Bridegroom and forfeiting our invitation to the wedding supper.

37. Will God’s Temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem before the return of Christ? (November 2010)

When we begin to talk about the fulfillment of Last Days’ prophecy, there is a question that arises about whether or not the Scriptures require that an actual temple be built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The argument for a rebuilt temple is based on Paul’s discourse concerning the Man of Sin found in II Thessalonians 2:3,4.

The flip side of this argument is based on the premise that since the Apostle Paul was a student of the Law and the Prophets, he was simply teaching what he knew about the Man of Sin from the words of the Prophet Daniel. So, the question becomes: Did Daniel prophesy that a physical temple would be standing on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem when the Man of Sin is on the world stage?

We will examine the argument that the Apostle Paul was simply making a reference to an exact world-renowned location—as Jesus did in Matthew 24:15—as opposed to implementing a new requirement to be watched for in the Last Days.

1. What does II Thessalonians 2:3,4 say?

A. II Thessalonians 2:3,4

- [3] *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,*
[4] *who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”*

B. The church believes that the Apostle Paul was making a reference to an exact world-renowned location as opposed to prophesying an irrefutable landmark reference.

- 1) The church always bases its doctrine on the premise of 2 or 3 witnesses supporting the same conclusion.
- 2) In other words, we do not adopt a doctrine based on one scripture. Any scripture must be rightly divided with other scriptures regarding the subject.
- 3) For example: In I Corinthians 14:34, Paul states that women should be silent and not permitted to speak in the church. This scripture makes absolute declarations that some people to this day use to say that women cannot minister in a church service.
- 4) The church, however, does not adhere to the doctrine that women cannot speak in church because 1) we believe that Paul clarified his statement in the following verse (women should question their husbands at home), and 2) other relevant scriptures in the Old and New Testament show that God uses women to speak His Word to His people.
- 5) The conclusion is that we used other scriptures to rightly divide and understand an absolute declaration that Paul made in I Corinthians 14:34. And, we must acknowledge that some people say that we have violated what Paul said with our “rightly divided” understanding.

C. The church does not intend to violate what the Apostle Paul said. We simply want to use the same mandate to “rightly divide” the scripture in II Thessalonians and see if other relevant scriptures support this statement.

- 1) The church believes that the Old Testament does not set forth a requirement that an actual temple must be built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

D. If we state that a temple must be rebuilt, perhaps we will discount other relevant events that are taking place because we don’t see an actual temple sitting in Jerusalem.

2. The Apostle Paul was a student of the Law and the Prophets.

A. It would make perfect sense to say that Paul was simply relating his knowledge of Bible prophecy to the Thessalonians.

- 1) Paul was a student of the Law.
 - a. Acts 22:3, [Paul speaking], *“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.”*
 - b. Gamaliel was a highly-respected teacher of the law. Acts 5:34a, *“Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people...”*

- 2) Since Paul was most likely relating what he had studied from the Prophets, it is logical to conclude that the book of Daniel would require that a temple be rebuilt as well.
- 3) There is no New Testament record that Jesus taught that a temple would be reconstructed on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

B. If the rebuilding of the temple was an irrefutable landmark for all to watch for, why did Jesus not make mention of it when He taught about this subject?

- 1) Jesus addresses this issue in Matthew 24:15,16
 - [15] *"Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),*
 - [16] *"then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."*
 - a. Jesus instructs us to watch for the abomination of desolation to stand in the holy place.
 - b. Notice that He does not set forth a temple requirement here.
 - c. Jesus was defining a particular event to watch for in a particular location (the abomination of desolation).
 - d. While parts of this scripture were fulfilled when the Roman General Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, the prophecy itself was not completely fulfilled as indicated in vs. 21 when Jesus says that there will be great tribulation such as has never been (an obvious Last Days prophecy that is unfulfilled as of yet).
 - e. Because of His ability to see and know the future, Jesus knew that the Temple would be destroyed. Perhaps that's why He didn't refer to it being there.
 - f. The word *place* used in this passage simply means *a spot, or location*.
- 2) Here's Mark's version of the same teaching found in Mark 13:14, *"So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."*
 - a. In Mark's rendering of Jesus' words, he does not make a point of identifying a temple as being rebuilt.
 - b. Mark's rendering simply reinforces that Jesus was referring to a location— not a building.
- 3) Some have made the argument that Jesus' reference to the Man of Sin standing in "the holy place" could only be speaking about the Holy of Holies found in God's Temple.
 - a. This is of course an assumption. Jesus does not specify that He was referring to the Holy of Holies in the Temple.
 - b. Ezekiel 43:12, *"This is the law of the temple: The whole area surrounding the mountaintop is most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple."*
 - c. According to God, the whole top of the mountain is "most holy." Jesus' reference would make perfect sense since God considers the whole mountain top to be a holy place.
- 4) Notice that Jesus was addressing the issue of the abomination of desolation.
 - a. Jesus qualifies this statement by saying, *"spoken of by Daniel the prophet."*
 - b. The church believes that Jesus gives us the right to investigate what the Prophet Daniel prophesied regarding this matter.
 - c. In other words, we have to revert back to Daniel's prophecies to properly identify what to look for.
- 5) What does the term "abomination of desolation" mean?
 - a. What is the literal meaning of the words?
 - 1) Abomination: *disgusting, an abhorrence, especially idolatry, an idol.*
 - 2) Desolation: *to stun, devastate, make amazed.*
 - b. So the term literally means *an abhorrence—especially idolatry—that stuns or devastates.*

3. So, the next question is: What did the Prophet Daniel say about the abomination of desolation?

A. There are 4 major passages in Daniel that address the abomination of desolation.

B. Daniel 8:11-14

1) Daniel 8:11-14

[11] *"He even exalted himself as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down.*

[12] *Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered.*

[13] *Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to the certain one who was speaking, "How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, and the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?"*

[14] *And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed."*

2) This prophecy was historically fulfilled when Antiochus Epiphanes ruled over Jerusalem from 175 BC until his death in 164 BC.

a. Antiochus (IV) Epiphanes was a Seleucid king who reigned over the Syrian division of the Greek Empire from 175 to 164 BC.

b. In 171 BC, Antiochus appointed Menelaus as the High Priest over the Temple in Jerusalem.

1. For the first time since the second Temple had been built, the title of High Priest was held by someone who was not of the tribe of Levi nor had he ever been a priest.

2. Menelaus bribed Antiochus into appointing him High Priest because he had plans to forcefully Hellenize the Jewish people.

3. It was Menelaus who would introduce a statue of Zeus and have it placed in the Temple.

c. Antiochus attacked the Temple in Jerusalem in 167 BC. In the month of Kislev (November/December) 167 BC, the Jewish Temple was immediately dedicated to the god Zeus. On the 25th day of Kislev sacrificial offerings of pigs began with their blood being sprinkled on the Holy of Holies.

3) There are 2 key statements to be evaluated in this prophecy:

a. The time frame: 2,300 days.

b. The call for the sanctuary to be "cleansed."

4) The time frame: If you divide 2,300 days by the number of days in a Jewish year, 354, you get 6½ years (this is of course estimating the length of a year when this prophecy was written in 551 BC).

a. A time frame of approximately 6½ years is given. Notice that this is completely different from the 1,290 days prophesied in Daniel 12:11 and the 1,335 days prophesied in Daniel 12:12.

5) The "cleansing" of the Temple.

a. The time from when Menelaus, the Antiochus-appointed High Priest, defiled the Temple in 171 BC, until it was cleansed in 165 BC, is approximately 7 years.

b. In 165 BC, the Temple was liberated and rededicated (cleansed) by Judas Maccabe.

c. This is the 2,300 days that Daniel prophesied about.

- d. This act of rededicating the Temple is the basis for the festival Hanukkah which is observed by the Jewish people today. The Bible refers to it as the Feast of Dedication.
 - e. Jesus even observed the festival in John 10:22,23, *"Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. [23] And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch."*
- 6) The church believes that this prophecy has been historically fulfilled.

C. Daniel 11:29-31

(NOTE: This is a continuation of the same story found in Daniel 8:11-14 when Antiochus Epiphanes attacked both Jerusalem and God's Temple.)

- 1) Daniel 11:29-31
 - [29] *"At the appointed time he shall return and go toward the south; but it shall not be like the former or the latter."*
 - [30] *"For ships from Cyprus shall come against him; therefore he shall be grieved, and return in rage against the holy covenant, and do damage. So he shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant."*
 - [31] *"And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation."*
- 2) Some have said the reference in vs. 31 to "sanctuary of fortress" is a prophetic requirement for the Temple to be rebuilt in the Last Days.
 - a. This theory will be dispelled after studying the historical fulfillment of this prophecy.
- 3) This prophecy was written in 536 BC. It was fulfilled when Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem in 167 BC and offered swine's flesh on the altar of God in the Temple of God.
- 4) What did he do?
 - a. In 168 BC, Antiochus led an attack on Egypt and also sent a fleet of ships to capture Cyprus; however, he was stopped by the Romans.
 - 1. This is a direct fulfillment of vs. 30, *"For ships from Cyprus shall come against him..."*
 - b. In 167 BC, Antiochus, enraged because of his defeat at the hands of the Romans, attacked Jerusalem with a vengeance.
 - 1. Again, this is a direct fulfillment of vs. 30, *"...and return in rage against the holy covenant..."*
 - c. 2 Maccabees 5:11-14, *"When these happenings were reported to the king [Antiochus Epiphanes], he thought that Judea was in revolt. Raging like a wild animal, he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy those whom they met and to slay those who took refuge in their houses. There was a massacre of young and old, a killing of women and children, a slaughter of virgins and infants. In the space of three days, eighty thousand were lost, forty thousand meeting a violent death, and the same number being sold into slavery."*
 - 1. Vs. 30 says that he will *"do damage."*
- 5) How did Antiochus fulfill prophecy? He defiled the Temple of God and set up a pagan idol on the site.
 - a. *"In 168 BC Antiochus Epiphanes dared to occupy Jerusalem, enter the Holy of Holies, desecrate the sanctuary by offering unclean animals upon the altar of burnt offerings, pollute the whole building by sprinkling it with water with which flesh had*

been boiled, dedicated the Temple itself to Jupiter Olympius, and erected the statue of that deity and plundered the Temple treasures.” (“Antiochus Epiphanes”, [www.http://latter-rain.com/Israel/antep.htm](http://latter-rain.com/Israel/antep.htm))

1. This was a direct fulfillment of vs. 31, “...they shall defile the sanctuary fortress and place there the abomination of desolation.”
- 6) The church believes that this prophecy has been historically fulfilled.

D. Daniel 11:36

- 1) Daniel 11:36, “Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done.”
- 2) Vs. 36 starts out with the word “then.” We’ve already discussed that some of verses prior to vs. 36 have been fulfilled historically.
 - a. Vs. 29-31 details the attack of Antiochus Epiphanes on Jerusalem.
 - b. Vs. 32-35 details events that took place after Antiochus including the time of the Dark Ages.
 1. Daniel 11:32-35
 - [32] “Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.
 - [33] “And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering.
 - [34] “Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue.
 - [35] “And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time.”
 - c. Note the reference to “many days” in vs. 33 and the reference “until the time of the end” in vs. 35. These scriptures reference a span of time from approximately 150 years before Christ until the present day.
 - d. The word “then” in vs. 36 denotes a succession of events. In other words, this is the next thing to happen.
- 3) Vs. 36 is a prophecy concerning the Last Days.
 - a. Again, we have the prophecy concerning the abomination of desolation when the Man of Sin blasphemes against God.
 - b. Notice the phrase, “...and shall prosper...” One of the main descriptions of the last 7 years regarding the Man of Sin is that he will use prosperity to deceive the people.
 - c. Last, notice the reference to “...till the wrath has been accomplished...” This is a reference to the wrath of God being poured out on mankind.
- 4) Notice that there is no temple requirement made in the vs. 36 Last Days’ prophecy.
 - a. What did Daniel tell us to look for?
 - b. A man who would blaspheme God and declare that he is as God.
- 5) The church believes that Daniel 11:36 is a Last Days’ prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled.

E. Daniel 9:27

- 1) Daniel 9:27, “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of

abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even unto the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.”

- 2) This is a Last Days’ prophecy predicated by the requirement that the Man of Sin will confirm a “covenant with many for one week.”
 - a. There has been no historical fulfillment of this prophecy since it was written some 2,500 years ago.
 - b. The Church of God believes this occurs when the Man of Sin confirms a world-wide peace agreement which will initiate the last 7 years before the 7th Trump return of Jesus Christ.
- 3) The church believes that this prophecy is a Last Days’ prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled.

F. The church does not believe that the prophecies set forth by the Prophet Daniel require that a temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem.

- 1) Some say that the prophecies regarding the stopping of the daily sacrifices by implication demands that a temple be present.
 - a. In other words, Jews will not offer sacrifices unless there is a temple to sacrifice in.
 - b. This of course is a theory: The scripture does not mention that the daily sacrifices took place in a temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

4. What is II Thessalonians 2:4 saying?

A. II Thessalonians 2:4, “*Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*”

- 1) We have already established that the Apostle Paul was teaching what he knew about the Last Days from his knowledge of the prophecies of Daniel.
- 2) The church believes that the book of Daniel does not prophesy that a new temple will be erected in Jerusalem.
- 3) With this understanding in mind, the church believes that the Apostle Paul was making a reference to an explicit location on earth rather than making a new prophecy regarding the Last Days.

B. To whom was the Apostle Paul writing to in this passage?

- 1) II Thessalonians 1:1, “*...To the church of the Thessalonians...*”
- 2) Where was Thessalonica?
 - a. Thessalonica was the second largest city in Greece.
 - b. Paul had preached there on his second missionary journey.
- 3) In other words, the Apostle Paul was writing to foreigners.
- 4) The church believes that his use of the phrase “the temple of God” was designed to instruct them concerning a world-renowned location that has not changed over thousands of years.
 - a. Most educated people know that God’s Temple is found in Jerusalem.
 - b. Remember, Paul wrote this letter some 2,000 years ago. He was telling them that they weren’t living in the Last Days yet and that a number of prophecies had to be fulfilled first.
- 5) When Paul wrote the phrase “the temple of God,” there was an actual Temple sitting on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.
 - a. It would make perfect sense for him to refer to it—while identifying the location to foreigners—because it was the most recognizable symbol of the Temple Mount.
 - b. In other words, the people of Thessalonica would know exactly where he was telling them to watch for certain events to take place in the future.

- c. And, Paul's description was so accurate that even today we know exactly where to watch for the Man of Sin to blaspheme Yahweh God.
- 6) It would also make sense for Jesus not to refer to the Temple in Matthew 24:15 because He could see through prophecy that the Temple would be destroyed; however, the Holy Place—or Temple Mount—would be there for generations.

5. How does a temple built by man become God's?

A. If we accept the premise that a literal interpretation of II Thessalonians 2:4 must be applied, the next question becomes, "What makes a man-made temple today acceptable to God?"

- 1) What structure could be erected today that would qualify for God to say: "That is My Temple"?
- 2) Would God permit His Temple to be erected by non-Christians on a site already occupied by the Muslim Dome of the Rock—a pagan temple?
 - a. Consider the account of Dagon and the Ark of the Covenant in I Samuel 5. The Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant from Israel and placed it in the house of their god, Dagon. God would not permit the pagan god to stand upright in the ark's presence. In fact, God destroyed the idol by breaking off its head and hands.
 - b. II Corinthians 6:16, "***And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."***"
 - c. Furthermore, the tensions existing between the Israelis and the Palestinians concerning the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is volatile to say the least.
 - 1. In a September/October 2010 article entitled, "Temple Mount Repairs Leave Eyesores," author Hershel Shanks writes, "*Two unsightly scaffolds hang from the walls of the Temple Mount, one on the southern wall and a second on the eastern wall. The question is whether they will be there forever. Worse things have happened in Jerusalem. An old wooden ladder sits above the entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It has been there for more than 200 years and cannot be moved because of warring factions of priests and jurisdiction in the church.*"
 - 2. Shanks goes on to write that the scaffolding was left on the walls because of repairs made to the walls. The Israelis did not trust the Palestinians to repair the walls, and the Palestinians did not trust the Israelis to tamper with the site. A compromise was reached allowing Jordanians to undertake the task and they left the scaffolds hanging upon their departure. Neither Israel nor the Palestinians will allow either group to remove the scaffolding.
 - 3. Although nothing is impossible with God, the possibility of any group of people trying to erect a new temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem—in view of the existing hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians—would be nonexistent.

B. The New Testament tells us that God does not dwell in a man-made temple.

- 1) We recognize that this dispensational change took place when the Law Dispensation was replaced by the Grace Dispensation through Jesus Christ.
 - a. In the Law Dispensation, God DID choose to dwell in man-made temples as demonstrated in the Wilderness Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon.
- 2) In the Grace Dispensation, however, God no longer dwells in temples made by man.
 - a. Acts 7:48, "***However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says.***"

- b. Acts 17:24, "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, **does not dwell in temples made with hands.**"
- 3) Are we saying that the Apostle Paul says God will again inhabit a man-made temple? If not, how can we call it the "temple of God"?
 - a. Again, this is why the church believes Paul was referring to a location– not a building.
 - b. Remember Jesus said "place" which means *a spot or location*–He did not specify a structure.

C. In the Grace Dispensation, Jesus Christ is the Temple wherein our sins are forgiven.

- 1) Hebrews 9:11, "*But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the **greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands**, that is, not of this creation.*"
 - a. John 2:19-21
 - [19] "Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."
 - [20] Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"
 - [21] **But He was speaking of the temple of His body.**"
 - b. Jesus was referring to a dispensational change: A man-made temple was no longer required to obtain forgiveness for sins.
 - c. Jesus became the Temple from which we receive forgiveness of sins.
 - d. In other words, one does not have to be in a particular location to receive forgiveness of sins, they only have to pray to Jesus for forgiveness.

D. Today, the Temple of God is spiritual.

- 1) I Corinthians 3:16,17
 - [16] "**Do you not know that you are the temple of God** and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"
 - [17] *If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy Him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."*
- 2) Ephesians 2:19-22
 - [19] "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
 - [20] *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,*
 - [21] **In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple of the Lord,**
 - [22] **in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**"
- 3) I Peter 2:5, "**You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house**, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

E. Finally, in an attempt to address all relevant scriptures regarding this matter, we must look at Revelation 13:6, "Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven."

- 1) Some have used this scripture to say that there must be a temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the Man of Sin to blaspheme.
- 2) The Man of Sin is blaspheming God in heaven: First His name, second His dwelling place, and third, those who are dwelling in heaven with Him.
- 3) The Scriptures are clear that God inhabits His Temple in heaven.

- a. Revelation 11:19, *"Then **the temple of God was opened in heaven...**"*
- 4) Consider the New International Version translation of Revelation 13:6, *"He opened his mouth **to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.**"*
- 5) When the Man of Sin commits the "abomination of desolation" in the middle of the last 7 years, He blasphemes everything about God: His name, His Temple (His dwelling place in heaven), and last, those who are dwelling in heaven with Him.
- 6) The church does not believe that this scripture sets forth a requirement for a temple to be rebuilt on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem prior to the return of Christ.

6. Conclusion

The church does not believe that either Jesus Christ nor Daniel the Prophet taught that God requires His Temple be rebuilt on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem before the return of Christ. The church believes that the Apostle Paul's reference to the "temple of God" in II Thessalonians 2:4 was to identify a world-renowned location to the foreigners he was teaching concerning where to watch for the abomination of desolation that would take place in the Last Days.

The Last Days are promised to be full of deception and trickery. The church would not want to miss what is happening in prophecy because we are waiting for the physical rebuilding of a temple in Jerusalem. Here is our consolation: If a temple is rebuilt, so be it. However, if we do not see a temple, we should not convince ourselves that we still have time or that we can dismiss relevant prophetic events that may be happening all around us.

38. THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD

The Holy Spirit is the motive force of God which acts on the Word of God to produce the results which God desires. The seven channels through which the Holy Spirit operates are called the Seven Spirits of God. These seven manifestations of God's Spirit are revealed in the pattern of heaven by the seven-branch golden candlestick. Revelation 4:5b states, *"...and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God."* Since the golden candlestick is also a revelation of the church as the *"light of the world,"* it follows that the church is the instrument through which God has chosen to manifest the workings of His Spirit to the world. By understanding these Seven Spirits, we can better realize the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives and we can be more effective in our service to Him.

In order to get a more definitive understanding of the Seven Spirits of God, we need to read Zechariah the 4th chapter. In this chapter the prophet is given a vision concerning the restoration of God's Temple. The spiritual fulfillment of Zechariah's vision is the rebuilding of the Church of God, a principle that is well-established in the New Testament. I Peter 2:5 declares, *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."* Paul also set forth the Temple as a type of the church in Ephesians 2:20-22, *"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."*

The message that God speaks through Zechariah is directed to Zerubbabel, the head of the tribe of Judah at the time of their return from Babylonian captivity. Zerubbabel was responsible to see that the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt, a task that had been halted through much resistance. Zerubbabel would need the supernatural help of the Lord in order to complete the work which God had called him to do. It is for this reason that God spoke through the prophet Zechariah and said, *"This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it... The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish*

it" (vs 6-9). The message is clear. The work of rebuilding God's spiritual temple, the church, can only be accomplished by the working of the Spirit of God. This is confirmed by Psalms 127:1, a decree to Solomon which says, *"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it."*

In Zechariah's vision, the prophet sees a golden candlestick with seven lamps (vs 2). It is not until the 10th verse that we get a better understanding of what these seven lamps on the candlestick represent. It states, *"For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth."* In Zechariah's vision, the seven lamps represent *"the eyes of the Lord"*. This is a stunning prophecy when one understands exactly what *"the eyes of the Lord"* are looking for in the earth. The answer to this question is found in II Chronicles 16:9a, *"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him..."* The Lord was revealing that His Spirit would be with Zerubbabel in order to help him accomplish the work of rebuilding the Temple.

Both the seven-branch candlestick and the seven eyes are a revelation of Jesus Christ who is in the midst of the church. Since Colossians 2:9 tells us that in Jesus *"dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"* we can expect the Seven Spirits of God to be found in Him. This aspect of Jesus' identity was set forth in prophecy by the prophet Zechariah. He declared, *"Listen to me, O Jeshua the high priest, and all you other priests. You are symbols of things to come. Soon I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. 9 Now look at the jewel I have set before Jeshua, a single stone with seven facets. I will engrave an inscription on it, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, and I will remove the sins of this land in a single day"* (Zechariah 3:8,9 NLT).

The King James translates this passage to say, *"...upon one stone shall be seven eyes."* This reference to *"a single stone with seven facets"* has been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus to be the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. There can be no mistake as to the identity of this stone with seven eyes when it is compared to the passage found in Revelation 5:6, *"And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth."* The same seven eyes that Zechariah saw are now revealed to be found in Jesus, the Lamb of God.

This confirms the statement of Jesus, *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing"* (John 15:5). In order for the work of the church to be accomplished, Jesus Christ must be at the center of that work. In the first three chapters of Revelation, John is given messages from Jesus to be delivered to the seven churches of Asia, in which He both admonishes them for their good works, and rebukes them for where they are falling short. When John began to receive these messages he said, *"And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle"* (Revelation 1:12,13). Later in verse 20, Jesus reveals to John *"the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."* It is the Living Savior, Jesus Christ—walking in the midst of the church by the Spirit—who will bring the church to perfection.

The number seven represents completion or perfection and is associated with power and spirit throughout the Scriptures. One example of this is found in Leviticus 16 where the high priest would sprinkle blood in the most holy place seven times before the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement. Afterward, he sprinkled blood seven times on the altar and on the horns of the altar. Another example of this principle of Divine Law is seen in the seven locks of hair on the head of Samson. Judges 16:19 says, *"And she (Delilah) made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him."* Without those seven locks, Samson lost his strength. The

number seven also played a key part in the days of Joshua (Joshua 6:13-16). Seven priests blew seven trumpets for seven days as they marched around the walls of Jericho. On the seventh day, they marched around seven times and the walls of the city fell.

This pattern of God was also manifest in the New Testament when the Apostles appointed *“seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom”* to be responsible for the business of the church (Acts 6:3). These seven were also ministers of considerable ability as evidenced by the talents of Stephen and Philip. Of Stephen the scripture says, *“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people...And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake”* (Acts 6:8,10). In Acts 21:8, Philip is identified as *“the evangelist”* because of his powerful ministry.

The appointment of seven men of wisdom coincides with the pattern of God that is revealed in the make up of the golden candlestick of Exodus 25 (see also Article V,G,2, *“The Golden Candlestick”*). At the top of each of the seven shafts of the candlestick is a bowl. Verse 31 says, *“And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same.”* The purpose of these bowls is to hold up the light of God so that it may give light to all that are in the house. Just as the Seven Spirits of God burn before the altar in heaven as a visible manifestation of God's power, the responsibility of the seven men of wisdom in the pattern of God is to uphold the Seven Spirits of God before the church. Along with the rest of the pattern which God has established, they are to *“serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount”* (Hebrews 8:5).

It needs to be clearly understood that there is only one Spirit. Paul establishes this fact in Ephesians 4:4 by stating, *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”* However, just as the golden candlestick is only one light which is manifested through seven different channels, there is only one Holy Spirit who is revealed in seven different manifestations called the Seven Spirits of God. The work of the Seven Spirits of God should permeate through each and every person who is a part of the church which Jesus proclaimed to be the light of the world. A church or even an individual that is full of the Holy Ghost will find themselves manifesting the work of the Spirit in many different ways. The distinct qualities of each of these Seven Spirits are distinguished in the messages of Jesus as revealed to John in the letters which were written to the seven churches of Asia.

1. THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

More than just a God of love, I John 4:8 reveals to us that *“God is love.”* It is for this reason that love is foundational to everything that God does for us. This is expressed in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* Through His actions, Yahweh demonstrated that true love is manifest in the sacrificial giving of one's self for another. This type of love is to be the identifying trademark of true followers of Jesus Christ. John explained this further as he wrote, *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit”* (I John 4:11-13). A church full of the Spirit will be full of love *“because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”* (Romans 5:5). It is because of the work of the Holy Ghost that those who have put their faith in Christ can fulfill the great commandments as spoken by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

The Spirit of Love is revealed as one of the seven manifestations of the Spirit of God in the message of Jesus to the church in Ephesus. It was to this church that Jesus said, *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love"* (Revelation 2:4). At the center of all that the church does must be a love for God and a love for our fellow man. Without the love of God working in us, we become *"as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."* In other words, we become useless. However, by the empowerment of the Spirit, we are given the capacity to love even as He loves.

2. THE SPIRIT OF PRESERVATION

God has always been a protector of His people. He is known in the Scriptures as Yahweh-Jireh (the Eternal Provider). King David understood the preserving nature of God and said of Him, *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want"* (Psalms 23:1). That same shepherd-like quality that is found in God will also be found at work in the church when it is driven by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of Preservation is revealed in Revelation 2:10b when Jesus says to the church in Smyrna, *"...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."* It is part of the work of the Spirit to help us *"endure until the end."* This is confirmed by the Philippians 1:5 which says, *"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."*

It is through the operation of the Spirit of Preservation that we find the Holy Spirit leading and guiding us to give strength and encouragement to one another. This is the message of Hebrews 3:12-14, *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."* The ability to be able to endure unto the end is a direct result of the work of God's Spirit in the church. The Apostle Paul knew this and proclaimed, *"...I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23,24).

3. THE SPIRIT OF MARKING

Another unique quality of the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Marking. Jesus said to the church in Pergamos, *"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it"* (Revelation 2:17). Through this work of the Spirit, things that would otherwise go unnoticed or be quickly forgotten are clearly marked in such a way as to reveal the reality of God and His Word. This is stated clearly by Paul in Romans 1:20, *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."*

It has always been God's plan to make Himself known to mankind. Through the Spirit of Marking, the invisible God and His work among men is made known. This principle is seen in everything that God has made. Psalms 19:1-3 expresses this: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard."*

It is through the Spirit of Marking that the church is able to identify times and places that are significant in spiritual history and mark them much like the Lord had Joshua do when the Children of Israel crossed the Jordan River. Joshua 4:9 says, *"And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day."* It is also by this work of the Spirit that the church is able to identify and mark the fulfillment of prophecy (see also articles V,D,1-6, "Material Programs").

4. THE SPIRIT OF TEACHING

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide believers into all truth. Jesus said in John 14:26, *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."* In order to fulfill the Great Commission as given by Jesus to go into all the world and teach all nations, it is also imperative that the church have the Spirit of Teaching at work as revealed in the message of Jesus to the church in Thyatira.

Jesus reveals the importance of teaching when He says, *"Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach"* (Revelation 2:20). Proper teaching is essential in the work of establishing God's people in the truth of God's Word. It is for this reason that among the five-fold gifted ministry is the gift of teacher. Without the Spirit of Teaching at work, the church would be *"tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine."*

5. THE SPIRIT OF PERFECTION

Jesus said in Matthew 5:48, *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."* Jesus did not give instructions to the church that would be impossible to attain unto. The word *perfection* in the Scriptures is translated from Greek words that mean *to complete* [teleios] and *to fit thoroughly or to adjust* [katartizo]. These meanings indicate that perfection is an adjusting process toward the completion of our Christian experience. This thought is summed up in Proverbs 4:18, *"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."* As we follow Jesus and behold the glory of the Lord, we are *"changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (II Corinthians 3:18b). In the message of Jesus to the church at Sardis is revealed the Spirit of Perfection. Jesus tells them to, *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God."* God's church will be continually moving on to perfection.

The Apostle Paul expands upon this in Philippians 3:12, *"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."* It is the Holy Spirit working through the five fold gifted ministry that will bring this perfection into reality in the church.

Ephesians 4:11-13 states, *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."* Jesus, as the Lamb through which the Seven Spirits of God are manifest, gave His life for the church *"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish"* (Ephesians 5:26,27).

6. THE SPIRIT OF PUBLISHING

The Spirit of Publishing is the manifestation of the Spirit which specializes in communication. It is revealed in the message of Jesus to the church in Philadelphia in which He tells them, *"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it"* (Revelation 3:8). The word *publish* in the Scriptures means *to cause to hear*. This is what is meant in Mark 13:10 when Jesus says, *"And the gospel must first be published among all nations."* In this context it is easy to see that at any time that we are proclaiming the Word of God, whether by voice, printed matter, or telecommunications, we are using the Spirit of Publishing. All of these means are tools that the Lord has given as a way to open doors for the proclaiming of the Gospel and the expansion of the church. Psalms 68:11 says, *"The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it."*

7. THE SPIRIT OF EVANGELISM

Finally, the seventh manifestation of the Spirit, the Spirit of Evangelism, is revealed in the message of Jesus to the church of the Laodiceans in which He tells them, *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot"* (Revelation 3:15). This work of the Spirit is two-fold in that it both stirs the believer to be enthusiastic in their own relationship with God while it also stirs the believer to maintain a burden for the souls of those who are lost that they might win them to Christ.

An important part of the work of evangelism is the stirring up of the memory of God's people to the truths of the Scriptures and the operation of the Holy Spirit. Peter wrote, *"...beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour"* (II Peter 3:1,2). Through the operation of the Spirit of Evangelism, God's people will be *"a peculiar people, zealous of good works."* (For more details on the operation of the Seven Spirits of God within the church see Article IV,E,1-7.)

In Revelation 1:4 states, *"John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne."* It must be very important for us to understand the message of the Seven Spirits of God because John describes this message as coming from before the throne of God. It is through the work of the Seven Spirits of God that the church will accomplish all that it has been called to do as the candlestick light of God in the earth. God's church will follow Jesus Christ who is, *"a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth."* Without Jesus, we can do nothing, but with Him, we can do all things. God's church will be built *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."*

39.THE VISION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION THAT THE APOSTLE JOHN RECEIVED (November, 2017)

The Church of God believes that the Apostle John began to receive the vision of the book of Revelation on the day that Jesus was crucified which was Passover, Wednesday, Abib 14, AD 31. This is the *"imperial day of the Lord"* named in Revelation 1:10. The Apostle John continued to receive this vision—in his spirit—over the span of the next 4 days culminating on Sunday morning when he witnessed the appearance of the resurrected Jesus in heaven to open the scroll which was sealed with seven seals.

The Church of God does not believe that the Apostle John received the vision of Revelations on the Isle of Patmos in AD 96. The Church believes that it was *because* of John's preaching of this revelation that he was exiled to Patmos. The Church does, however, believe that history supports the conclusion that the Apostle John wrote the vision *after* his return from the Isle of Patmos. According to historians, John returned to Ephesus in AD 96 (Halley's Bible Handbook, p. 684) where he wrote the vision that he had seen in AD 31.

1. WHAT AUTHORITY DO WE HAVE TO STUDY THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION?

A. When Daniel was given his vision concerning the end times, he was instructed to seal it up.

1) Daniel 12:4, *"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and **seal the book until the time of the end**; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."*

B. That's why the book of the Revelation has not made sense to you and I.

1) It was under a prophetic lock. It was sealed until a specific time—the time of the end.

C. The Church believes that we are living in the Last Days.

1) Therefore, we have the authority to study this book now because much of it was sealed for this time—the Last Days.

- 2) II Timothy 3:16 tells us that all Scripture was given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.
- 3) This includes the book of Revelation. It is not acceptable to God for us to ignore or discount this book because it takes time and effort to understand it.
- 4) While we admit that it is not recreational reading, it is well worth your investment of time and thought to understand the truths contained therein.

D. When you read the book of Revelation you are venturing out into the deep things of God.

- 1) I Corinthians 2:10, *"But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God."*
- 2) II Timothy 2:15, *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

2. IF YOU WANT TO CHRONOLOGICALLY READ THE BOOK OF REVELATION, YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHEN THE APOSTLE JOHN RECEIVED THE VISION.

A. In II Corinthians 12:1-4, Paul mentions that he knew a man who told him about being caught up into the 3rd heaven and into paradise and he states that it happened 14 years ago. There is only one man referenced in the New Testament that reported such an incident and that was the Apostle John.

- 1) II Corinthians 12:1-4, *"It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: [2] I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. [3] And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—[4] how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."*
- 2) Theologians state that II Corinthians was written approximately AD 56. That would mean that Paul had to have met the Apostle John approximately AD 42.
- 3) Some contend that Paul never met the Apostle John. Paul clearly states in Galatians 2:1,9 that not only had he met the Apostle John, he also received John's blessing on his ministry.
 - » Galatians 2:1,9, *"Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me...[9] and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised."*
- 4) Others contend that Paul was speaking about himself in II Corinthians 12:1-4; however, in verse 5 of the same passage, Paul clearly refutes that theory: *"Of such a one I will boast; **yet of myself I will not boast**, except in my infirmities"* (II Corinthians 12:5).

B. The first mention of Saul/Paul in the New Testament is found in Acts 7:55 when he witnessed the stoning of Stephen which took place in AD 34.

- 1) At this time, AD 34, Jesus was already seated at the right hand of God which was apparent when Stephen gazed up into heaven before his death.
 - 2) If John had the vision in AD 96 as most theologians say, Jesus would have already been seated at the right hand of God (since at least AD 34). Thus, when the hunt for someone to open the scroll ensued (Revelation 5:1,2), Jesus would have been in heaven seated beside God. This was not the case according to Revelation 5:3,4.
-

3. THE CHURCH BELIEVES THE APOSTLE JOHN RECEIVED HIS VISION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION STARTING ON THE DAY THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED WHICH WAS PASSOVER, WEDNESDAY, ABIB 14, IN THE YEAR AD 31.

A. Since Passover and the crucifixion of Christ took place on a Wednesday, and Jesus' subsequent appearance in heaven occurred on the following Sunday, John apparently spent 4 days in-and-out of a vision.

- 1) While Paul was uncertain as to whether John bodily went to heaven or not, John clarifies the matter in Revelation 4:2 when he stated that he was indeed *"in the Spirit"*.
 - » Revelation 4:2, ***"Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne."***
 - » The Church believes that John was "in the spirit" throughout this vision.
- 2) John received this vision over the course of 4 days. The Church does not believe that he was in a coma or unconscious the whole time.
 - » It's entirely possible and probable that he would receive part of the vision, then go about his daily routine, and receive more of the vision at a later time.
 - » Consider the example of Peter found in Acts 10:9-11, *"The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth."*
 - » Peter was waiting for a meal to be cooked when he had his vision. In other words, he was engaged in the everyday affairs of life and suddenly he had a vision from God.
 - » The Church believes that the Apostle John received the vision of Revelations the same way. He received the vision while participating in the daily routine of his life.
 - » This accounts for how he was able to be called by Mary Magdalene to come view the empty tomb of Jesus on the first day of the week (John 20:1-10) and later that same day see a vision of Jesus in heaven (Revelation 4,5).
 - » It should be noted that John most likely shared the vision immediately after he received it—much like Peter did. Since Jesus had put John in charge of caring for His mother, Mary, it is most likely that John shared this vision/revelation with her. Think of how that must have blessed and comforted Mary to know the ultimate fulfillment of her Son's life and ministry.

4. MOST THEOLOGIANS WOULD ARGUE THAT JOHN RECEIVED THE VISION ON THE ISLE OF PATMOS IN APPROXIMATELY AD 96.

A. Revelation 1:9, *"I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."*

- 1) The original Greek is interpreted *"on account of the word of God and the witness of Jesus."*
- 2) In other words, John was not exiled to Patmos to receive a revelation, he was exiled because he refused to stop preaching the revelation and testimony of Jesus Christ. He had already suffered tribulation because of his sharing the Word of God long after the other apostles had been killed/martyred.

5. THERE SEEMS TO BE MUCH CONFUSION CONCERNING THE PHRASE "ON THE LORD'S DAY" FOUND IN REVELATION 1:10.

A. Revelation 1:10, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.”

- 1) Most theologians concur that this phrase is only used once in the New Testament. The word ‘Lord’ (κυριακος) is used only twice in the New Testament, once in I Corinthians 11:20 to refer to the ‘Lord’s Supper’ (κυριακον δειπνον) and once in Revelation 1:10 to refer to the ‘Lord’s Day’ (κυριακη ημερα).
- 2) Many scholars interpret this passage to mean that John received this revelation on a Sunday—“the Lord’s Day.” They try and use the fact that this phrase was not used elsewhere in the New Testament to establish their belief that it was already the practice of the Early Church to gather together on Sunday. This, however, is purely conjecture and unsupported theory.
 - » NOTE: While Revelation 1:10 is not a reference to “Sunday,” it is important to note that John did receive part of the vision on a Sunday, Abib 18, which was 4 days after the Crucifixion, as he notes in Revelation 5 when he witnessed the resurrected Jesus appearing in heaven to open the scroll.
- 3) Others say that John received this revelation on a Sabbath—“the day of the Lord.”
- 4) Regardless of one’s particular interpretation of this phrase, its interesting to note that the very fact that it was only used once in the entire New Testament gives it special

Ἰησοῦ.	10	ἐγενόμην	ἐν	πνεύματι	ἐν
of Jesus.		I came to be	in	[the] spirit	on
τῇ	κυριακῇ	ἡμέρᾳ,	καὶ	ἤκουσα	ὀπίσω
the	imperial*	day,	and	heard	behind
μου	φωνὴν	μεγάλην	ὡς	σάλπιγγος	
me	² voice	¹ a great(loud)	as	of a trumpet	
11	λεγοῦσης·	ὃ βλέπεις	γράψον	εἰς	βιβλίον
	saying:	What thou seest	write	in	a scroll
καὶ	πέμψον	ταῖς	ἐπτὰ	ἐκκλησίαις,	εἰς
and	send	to the	seven	churches,	to
* See I. Cor. 11. 20.					

This is the literal Greek to English interpretation of Revelations 1:10,11. This is a photocopy from the book THE INTERLINEAR GREEK-ENGLISH NEW TESTAMENT (Nestle/Marshall, 1958) p. 957.

importance to the Bible student. There was something unique and special about this day, so much so that the Apostle John used a very particular and unique phrase to describe it.

B. The original Greek says “the imperial day” with a notation to refer to I Corinthians 11:20 (THE INTERLINEAR GREEK - ENGLISH NEW TESTAMENT, Nestle/Marshall, p. 957).

- 1) I Corinthians 11:20, “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper.”

- 2) The context of chapter 11 is that of Paul instructing the Corinthians on the proper way to celebrate the Communion of our Lord.
- 3) The same Greek word interpreted as “Lord’s” was used to define His supper (Communion—I Corinthians 11:20) and subsequently “day” (Revelation 1:10— we submit “Passover”). Isn’t it interesting that these two seemingly unrelated events are linked together by the use of a particular Greek word found only twice in the New Testament? The Church believes that the Holy Spirit linked these two scriptures together to help solve the mystery of when John received his apocalyptic vision.
- C. The truth is that this phrase that was interpreted as “*the imperial day*” and it is used only once in the Bible.**
- D. The Church believes it was a very special day unlike any other.**
- E. It should also be noted that the expression “on the Lord’s day” would better be translated “in the Lord’s day,” as a reference to this specific prophetic time period. The Greek preposition *en* is more usually rendered “in.”**

6. IT MAKES SENSE THAT GOD CHOSE THE FEAST OF PASSOVER TO SHARE THE VISION OF REVELATION WITH THE APOSTLE JOHN.

- A. The Church believes that God chooses His divinely-appointed, eternal feast dates to manifest His ultimate plan for mankind just as He has always done.**
- B. Consider the following examples:**
 - 1) Noah’s Ark came to rest at Tabernacles (Genesis 8:4).
 - 2) Israel delivered from Egypt at Passover (Exodus 12:27).
 - 3) The Law given at Pentecost (Exodus 16:1).
 - 4) Jesus’ birth at Tabernacles (Isaiah 9:3; Luke 2:1-14; John 1:14).
 - 5) Jesus’ death at Passover (John 19:14-18).
 - 6) Jesus’ return at Tabernacles (Matthew 13:37-39; Revelation 21:3).
 - 7) Holy Spirit given at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
- C. The Church believes that the Apostle John received the vision of Revelations during the Feast of Passover.**

7. PASSOVER ON ABIB 14, AD 31 WAS A VERY SPECIAL DAY FOREORDAINED BEFORE THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORLD (REVELATION 13:8).

- A. There will never be another day like it.**
 - 1) It was on this date that the fate of all mankind hinged.
 - 2) What Jesus accomplished on this date will never be repeated, nor will there ever be any other sacrifice offered for sin (Hebrews 10:26).
 - 3) It was a day of redemption like none other.
- B. The point is that it was indeed an “imperial” day.**
 - 1) The word *imperial* means *relating to an empire or emperor, characteristic of an emperor, majestic or magnificent.*
 - 2) It was the beginning of a new dispensation, the dispensation of grace. It was a magnificent day ushering in a new empire—the dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:1-5).

8. THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE TIMING OF THIS VISION IS BASED ON REVELATION 5:1-9.

- A. The Apostle John is in Paradise/Heaven and he is witnessing the following scene:**
 - 1) Revelation 5:1,2, “*And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. [2] Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals”*
 - The “One” on the throne is none other than Yahweh God the Father.

- The angel is searching heaven to find someone worthy to open the scroll with the seven seals.
- 2) Revelation 5:3,4, *“And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. [4] So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.”*
 - Notice that there was no one found worthy to open the scroll in heaven, nor on the earth, nor under the earth.
 - According to this passage, Jesus was not seated at the right hand of God at this time because He was not found in heaven.
 - John was so upset at this revelation that he wept.
 - 3) Revelation 5:5, *“But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”*
 - John was instructed to stop weeping, because someone had been found to open the scroll.
 - Why was John weeping? Perhaps it was because he knew that Jesus had already resurrected—remember his visit to the empty tomb earlier that day (John 20:1-10)—and yet it wasn’t quite time for the prophetic revelation of the resurrected Redeemer to open the scroll.
 - The Lion of Judah and the Root of David is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.
 - Also, note that the word “prevailed” is inserted in this passage.
 - What was the angel saying? What had changed? What did Jesus prevail over?
 - Answer: That Jesus had now **prevailed over death and the grave** and was now found worthy to open the scroll whereas in the previous scripture this was not the case.
 - 4) Revelation 5:6-9, *“And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.[7] Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. [8] Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. [9] And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”*
 - The fact that Jesus was slain as the Lamb of God now made Him worthy to take the scroll with the 7 seals from the right hand of God.
- B. Now the question becomes: When did Jesus become the Lamb of God that was slain and subsequently prevail over death and the grave so that we could be redeemed? The answer is simple: On Abib 14, AD 31 when He was crucified at Calvary on the day of Passover.**
- 1) This correlates with the statement that John received this vision/revelation during the week of Passover when Christ was crucified.
 - 2) Note that at the beginning of Revelation 5 when John was in heaven, there was no one that was found to be worthy to open the scroll.
 - 3) Why? Because after Jesus died on the cross, He first descended into hell to minister to the souls trapped there (I Peter 3:18-20).
 - 4) Therefore the statement that there was no one worthy in heaven, on earth, or under the earth was accurate at that time because Jesus had *not yet prevailed* and reclaimed the keys of death and the grave.
 - 5) However, while John was still in heaven, the triumphant Jesus appears.

C. After Jesus died on Passover, Wednesday, at 3:00 PM, He was placed in the grave for three days and three nights. He arose from the grave on Saturday afternoon at 3:00 PM (Matthew 12:40, Mark 16:25-37).

- 1) Jesus appeared to Mary at the tomb while it was beginning to get dark.
 - Remember that God said the day starts in the evening.
 - Genesis 1:5b, *"...So the evening and the morning were the first day."*
- 2) Jesus instructed Mary not to touch Him.
 - John 20:17, *"Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"*
 - Jesus did not allow Mary to touch Him because He had not received His glorified body as of yet.

D. When Jesus appeared in heaven on Sunday Morning, He did the following:

- 1) He received His glorified body.
 - John 20:26, *"And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!'"*
 - When Jesus returned from His visit to heaven, His body was able to appear in a room without entering through the door. He had received His glorified body.
- 2) He opened the scroll which would reveal God's master plan for the Last Days.
 - According to Revelation 5:9b, this plan of salvation and redemption was now open to *"...every tribe and tongue and people and nation."*
 - We know for a fact that this took place only once when the veil of the temple was torn in two at the time of Christ's crucifixion.
 - After the death and resurrection of Jesus, all mankind were placed on an equal playing field with the only requirement for salvation simply being that one must be born again. This opened the door of salvation to everyone—not just the Jews.
- 3) He became the fulfillment of the wave sheaf offering of the firstfruits before God.
 - I Corinthians 15:23, *"But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."*

E. Why was it necessary for Jesus to open the scroll when it was not yet time for the judgments contained therein to be implemented?

- 1) First, it should be noted that Jesus did indeed *open* the scroll and *loose* its seals (Revelation 5:5).
 - In verse 4 the cry was made for someone to *"...to open and read the scroll, or to look at it."*
- 2) The scroll needed to be open so that the Apostle John could read and look at the prophecies and information contained in them to record for you and I.
 - Obviously God summoned John to heaven to show him *"things which must shortly take place"* (Revelation 1:1 *partial quote*).
- 3) If the scroll had not been opened, we would not have the detailed record of the events which would take place in the last 3 ½ years before the return of Jesus Christ at the 7th trump (other than those contained in the Old Testament book of Daniel).
 - We know that God uses 2-3 witnesses to establish present truth (II Corinthians 13:1).

F. Some would argue that Revelation 5 is a futuristic prophecy reserved for the Last Days.

- 1) If this is true, are we saying that there would be another time in the future when Jesus would be found unworthy to open the scroll with the 7 seals that God held in His hand?

- 2) Does this mean that Jesus would have to be slain again because His first crucifixion was somehow nullified?

G. The fact is that there was only a small window in time when no one was found worthy to open the scrolls.

- 1) Revelation 5:2-4 says that a call was made and a search ensued.
- 2) They looked in heaven, they looked on the earth, and they looked under the earth for someone to open the scroll.
- 3) They were looking for Jesus—the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Root of David.
- 4) The only time Jesus was removed from His heavenly glory and role was during His time here on the earth—a period of 33 ½ years.
 - Hebrews 2:9 says that He was made a little lower than the angels to suffer death.
- 5) Regardless of when the search for Jesus to open the scroll began, we know that it ended when He appeared in heaven on Sunday, Abib 18, AD 31 after He resurrected from the grave.
 - He was slain at a particular time in history: Wednesday, Abib 14, AD 31—The Day of Passover.
- 6) After Jesus was slain as the Lamb of God and subsequently resurrected with the keys to death and the grave, He was then found worthy to take the scroll and open it according to Revelation 5:5-9.
- 7) According to Revelation 5, John was still in heaven when Jesus appeared and he subsequently looked at the scroll which had now been opened. John then recorded what he saw in the scroll.
 - His writings are now referred to as the Book of Revelation—which is the last of the 66 books canonized in God's Holy Word.

H. According to Acts 7:55, Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father just before his death. That is where Jesus still is today. Historians conclude that Stephen was martyred in AD 34—approximately 3 years after Jesus was crucified (AD 31).

- 1) When John had the vision, according to Revelation 5:3-5, Jesus was not yet seated at the right hand of God (because He was not found in heaven) and He had not yet prevailed over death and the grave.
- 2) After the resurrection of Jesus and His appearance in heaven to receive His glorified body and to open the scroll with the 7 seals, Jesus returned to earth for approximately 40 days (Acts 1:3) where He was seen by over 500 brethren (I Corinthians 15:6).
- 3) Jesus then returned to heaven before the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 1:9) and subsequently waved the loaf offering (the resurrected saints—Matthew 27:53; I Corinthians 15:23) before the Lord and sat down at the right hand of the Father to intercede for you and I (Mark 16:19; Hebrews 12:2).
- 4) Jesus will remain in heaven until His enemies become His footstool (Matthew 22:44; Psalm 110:1).

9. WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THAT JOHN RECEIVED THE VISION OF REVELATIONS IN AD 31, WE MUST ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA FOUND IN REVELATION CHAPTERS 2 AND 3 WERE PROPHETIC IN NATURE.

A. Most Bible theologians believe that the letters to the seven churches were simply commentaries based on problems that existed within the seven churches listed.

B. The Church now understands that the seven letters were prophecies that were issued before the churches even existed.

- 1) Please remember that the Apostle Paul founded the churches listed and his ministry did not begin until after the time of Jesus.

- C. Since the seven letters were prophetic in nature, we can also conclude that these letters were meant to identify the Seven Spirits of God for the use and edification of the body of Christ and the entire kingdom of God.**