

The Mystery of His Will



A Study
of God's
Eternal Plan
Marv Adamo

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By Marv Adamo

To the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, and to the Father who sent him, and to the Holy Spirit who reveals him.

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Preface

Words convey thoughts and carry meaning. When we refer to the Bible as being the word of God, what we are saying is that God communicates *his thoughts* to us through words, or more specifically, through the *meaning* of words. The meaning of words, then, is fundamental to understanding the thoughts of God. That's what interpretation is about—arriving at the meaning of words. In interpreting the scriptures, the goal of course, is to arrive at their *true* meaning. That is the challenge of every Bible student. While I intend to say more about interpretation later, I do want to make a brief statement now. First of all, we can be confident that the truth can be known. The Lord Jesus made it clear that *every* word of God is essential for life (Matt 4:4, Deut 8:3). It follows, then, that we must have his word in order to live by it. My personal conviction is that God has preserved his word throughout all the generations of history. And he has done so despite attempts to corrupt it and despite the arduous process of transcription and translation necessary to pass it on throughout the centuries. Wouldn't you agree, he would be a very weak God and unworthy of our homage if he was not able to preserve his word? In fact he promised to do so in Psalm 12:6-7:

“The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them [your words], O LORD, you shall preserve them [your words] from this generation for ever.” (NKJV)

The generation the psalmist is referring to, according to the context, is the generation of the wicked, spanning all the centuries of human history.

Secondly, I recognize that there are almost as many interpretations of the Bible as there are believers. Obviously we don't all interpret the scriptures in the same way. In fact, I have yet to find two believers who agree completely on every point of scripture. The reason for this also ought to be obvious. None of us has *all* the truth, as the Apostle Paul said, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know *in part*, but then I shall know just as I also am known.” (1 Cor 13:12)

The good news is that one day we will all see eye to eye. God is going to bring us into the *unity* of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God (Eph 4:13). That is a promise (albeit, implied) that I personally long to see fulfilled. It may take the resurrection of the believers to bring it about, but it will happen nonetheless. Until then, we must grapple with the scriptures, looking to the Lord for the revelation of the truth, being patient with one another in the process.

How then do we come to the true interpretation of the scriptures? While there may be many appropriate answers to that question, I will cite very briefly two rules of interpretation that are essential to arriving at the truth. One, the interpretation must fit the *context* in which it is written. And, two, the interpretation must be *consistent* with the whole of scripture. That is to say, it cannot contradict any other part of the Bible. In my opinion, most misinterpretations and erroneous teachings result from violating either one or both of these rules. There are other rules of interpretation, but close attention to these two will go a long way toward arriving at the truth.

Of course, when considering the interpretation of the word of God, the issue of Bible translations is unavoidable. Personally, I prefer the King James Version of the Bible over the modern translations of our day. The modern translations, while perhaps easier to read, often sacrifice consistency of thought and meaning and in some cases alter the meaning of the original languages altogether.

Nevertheless, to avoid the stumbling block that King James English may present to today's readers, I will be quoting from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

You will notice that I use italics extensively throughout this study to emphasis my points. Therefore, to avoid confusion, I have deliberately not shown the italics as found in the translations I have referenced. The author is aware that such italics exist and are used in the translations to indicate words that were not found in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts from which the translations were derived. Such words were added to complete the meaning in the English. So, throughout this study, whenever you see italics, know that they are mine and are used for emphasis.

I have also used brackets [] frequently to clarify or expand words, phrases, and thoughts. When you come upon these in quotes, understand that they are my personal comments and inclusions and not part of the quote. I note this once now so I won't have to cumber the text with such explanations.

Lastly, in preparing this study, I have assumed that my readers are familiar with the Bible. In other words, I am drawing from your knowledge and experience of the scriptures as you interact through the study.

Introduction – Who done It?

Most of us enjoy a good mystery. There is an inquisitive nature in our humanity that motivates us to want to know the unknown. We want to figure out things, to solve the riddle, to complete the puzzle. We find satisfaction in solving the problems of life, whether they are monumental, such as discovering the cure to a devastating disease, or relatively minor, such as solving a math problem. And we often enjoy the quest for the solution as much as discovering the solution itself.

I believe God deliberately designed humanity with this inquisitive bent and uses it to motivate us to seek him out. Isaiah wrote, “Truly you are a God who hides yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior.” (Isa 45:15). The Lord responded to Isaiah’s statement through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah: “And you shall seek me and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart.” (Jer 29:13)

God does not flaunt himself as his arch enemy does. Instead he intends for us to *seek* him and to *find* him. He delights in making himself and his mysteries known to us. But he has conditioned such disclosure upon the attitude of our hearts.

King David wrote, “The secret [or mystery] of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.” (Ps 25:14). A reverent heart is the condition upon which God makes himself known. To those who reverence him, he reveals his mysteries.

I hope an inquisitive nature and a reverent attitude are alive in you and that you are excited about seeking God and exploring the *Mystery of His Will*. If so, I think you will enjoy what follows, regardless of your conclusions when we reach the end of this discussion.

One thing I can assure you—this is one mystery that need not remain a mystery to us any longer. For the scriptures state explicitly that it has *already* been revealed. Discover that for yourself in the pages that follow.

(Note to publisher: The following parenthetical statement goes above the chapter one title in parentheses and italics)

(To get the most out of this study, I recommend you read both the Preface and the Introduction, if you haven’t done so already. You will find explanations in each of these that will be helpful in understanding what follows.)

Chapter 1 – Premises, the Real Starting Point

Premises, you can't get around them. They are the beginning points, the points of reference, the preconceived ideas upon which we develop our thoughts and draw our conclusions. Any attempt at human reasoning begins with premises. Whether stated or unstated, whether conscious or unconscious, premises are unavoidable. They are to human thought what conception is to the embryo—you can't have the one without the other. And therein is the potential pitfall. If our premises are wrong, the conclusions we will draw from them are very likely to be wrong also. Ah, woe is us. We may very well lose the race before we leave the starting blocks.

Let me give you an example based on a statement you may be familiar with: "I think, therefore I am." I learned this would-be axiom in Philosophy 101. But while some might find this statement to be a satisfying explanation for the existence of a human, it would never do for a brick. "I don't think, therefore I am not," just doesn't work in the brick's case. Why? Because the brick exists despite the fact that it doesn't think. So, what is wrong with the *I think, therefore I am* philosophy? The problem is in the unstated and no doubt unconscious premise, which is this: Thinking is the evidence of existence.

If the earth's atmosphere should mysteriously disappear into space, life as we know it would cease to exist. But good old Mr. Brick would continue on in his blissful state of non-thinking despite an erroneous premise.

Okay, maybe it's a poor example. I was never good at philosophy, or physics either, for that matter. Let me try another.

For centuries men believed the earth was flat. It isn't difficult to see how they came to that conclusion. Fred Flintstone took a vacation to Miami and on a clear day gazed out to sea. As his eyes scanned the horizon, what he saw (or what he thought he saw) was a straight line. From his limited perspective the arc of the earth was not apparent. He thought about this and said to himself, "Aha! The earth is flat!" Then he went home and wrote an article for the *Bedrock Gazette* proclaiming the earth to be flat. A faulty premise had led him to an erroneous conclusion.

The faulty premise: His perspective was the complete picture. He may not have consciously reasoned out the premise, but he very well acted upon it to draw his conclusion.

The moral: Beware of faulty premises. If your premises are wrong, you are very likely to draw the wrong conclusions.

With respect to the study and interpretation of the Bible, if we base our interpretation on faulty premises, that interpretation most likely will be wrong.

* * * *

Premises—they are unavoidable. Here are my premises for what follows. You decide if they are valid.

1. God exists.

2. He has a plan.
3. His plan is specific, explicit, and singular.
4. He has revealed his plan.

By singular I mean that God has *a* plan—one single plan for all humanity, or more specifically, for all believers. A sort of *one-size-fits-all* plan, if you will.

My goal in this study is not to prove the existence of God. I will leave that to the philosophers. Rather, my goal is to make clear and understandable the marvelous plan of God to which these premises point. It is a lofty goal, I admit. But if I fail in the attempt, I shall no doubt be the wiser for the quest. No one has ever sought to know the will of God and been the worse for it. My hope and prayer is that you also will benefit from this study.

The plan of God. The Apostle Paul called it *the mystery of his will*. Today it could very well be called *the revelation of his will*, because he has indeed clearly revealed it. But don't take my word for it. Let's go to the authority—the word of God.

* * * *

Chapter One key points:

1. Premises are unavoidable
2. Faulty premises lead to erroneous conclusions.
3. Faulty premises concerning the Bible lead to erroneous interpretations of the Bible.
4. God has one single plan and intention for all believers.
5. God has clearly revealed his plan.

Chapter 2 – The Other Starting Point

“Your left, your left, your left, right, left. Your *other* left, knucklehead.”

Anyone who has been through boot camp is likely to remember this sarcastic remark from a drill sergeant correcting a trainee who is out of step. “Your *other* left, knucklehead.” (Admittedly, knucklehead is a euphemism). Well, this is the *other* starting point, the beginning after the real beginning. Our focal scripture passage for this study will be Ephesians 1:9-10. Let’s take a close look at these two verses as groundwork for what follows. Understanding them is critical to demystifying the mystery of God. I will quote from verse seven, the beginning of the sentence in which verses nine and ten are found:

“In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace,⁸ which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,⁹ Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself:¹⁰ That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth—in Him.” (Eph 1:7-10)

As you can see, the title of our study derives from these verses. We’ll look at them a clause at a time beginning at verse nine. If this approach seems tedious, bear with me. These are pivotal passages and warrant close scrutiny. Once we lay the groundwork, we can move ahead at a faster pace.

“Having made known to us the mystery of his will...”

The first thing I want you to notice about the beginning of this passage is the tense. What is made known, has *already* been made known—past tense. It isn’t something yet to be revealed, but that which has already been revealed.

Next, what has been made known, or revealed, has been revealed *to us*. The context makes clear the *us* the Apostle Paul is referring to are believers, whom God has blessed (v. 3), chosen (v. 4), predestined (v. 5), accepted (v. 6), and abounded toward (v. 8).

What has been made known to us believers is *the mystery*. The Greek word translated mystery here literally means *to shut the mouth*, and refers to a *secret*.

Finally, the mystery, or secret, concerns God’s *will*. The Greek word translated *will* is defined as a *determination* or *choice*. God has determined, or chosen, to do something. In other words, he has a plan. God’s will *is* his plan and we can be assured he will bring it to pass. (See Isa. 14:27)

“...according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself...”

We might take this statement to mean that God is pleased to make this mystery known to us, and obviously he is, or he wouldn't have done so. But it can also be interpreted to mean that it is his pleasure *to do* what he has determined. In other words, it is his pleasure to *perform* his will in this thing which he has revealed.

In any event, this good pleasure which he has determined to do, he determined *in himself*. I am inclined to believe that this is a reference to the trinity. In other words, this plan was devised, determined, and purposed between the three members of the Godhead. You may have a different interpretation. But however we view this particular phrase, it is not essential to the meaning of the mystery.

Now, as we take a look at verse ten, I want to make the point that the mystery which has been made known to us is clearly stated in this verse. Verse ten, then, is pivotal to everything else that follows in this study.

“That in the dispensation of the fullness of times...”

Admittedly, the phraseology in this portion of our text is cumbersome. But a few definitions will clarify the meaning. The Greek word translated *dispensation* simply means administration, or management—more specifically, the management of a household or estate. Hold on to this thought, for we will be restating the passage shortly.

The next word we want to consider is *fullness*. The meaning behind the Greek word translated fullness is *repletion* (totally full) or *completion* (consummated, finished). The context favors the latter.

According to the context, then, what will ultimately be consummated, finished, brought to completion are the times or seasons of history—the fullness of times.

“...he might gather together in one all things in Christ...”

This portion of the passage contains three key elements on which we need to elaborate. First, the phrase *in one*. I will be saying more about oneness later, but for now consider that the Apostle didn't say in two or in any other multiple, but *in one*.

The second thing I want to point out is the phrase *all things*. What a wonderful, refreshing word is the word *all*. It's the kind of word that Bible students love, because it leaves no room for misinterpretation. It's explicit. It's all inclusive. It leaves nothing out. It literally means *everything*. Underscore, circle, highlight the word *all* in this passage. Such a little word and yet so weighty. It is a key word in understanding the plan of God.

The third phrase I want to underscore here is the phrase, *in Christ*. This phrase, in my opinion, is the single most important phrase in the Bible. To gain an understanding of what it means to be *in Christ* is to come to an understanding of the New Covenant. Oh how I love the phrase, *in Christ*. I will have much to say about it in chapter five.

“...both which are in heaven and which are on earth...”

This statement serves to expand the previous statement and gives us further insight into the plan of God. Lest we should imagine that God has a separate plan for those things which are in heaven (whatever those things might be) the Apostle Paul is

explaining to us that God’s plan—this mystery of his will—encompasses both heaven and earth, or more specifically, both the things which are *in heaven* and the things which are *on earth*. The point I want to emphasize here is that God doesn’t have two different plans, one for the things which are in heaven and another for the things which are on earth. God has one plan for both. Does not the context bear this out?

“—*in Him.*”

This phrase serves to emphasize the statement preceding it, and is a form of repetition. I think you will agree that repetition is one of the keys to learning. The Lord Jesus employed repetition often in his teachings. One of the best examples of this is found in the Gospel of John, chapter six. In the context of explaining to the people that he was the bread of God, the Lord said no less than four times within fifteen verses that he would raise up those who believe in him on the last day (Jn 6:39,40, 44, &54). Now that is repetition. I get the picture that the Lord wants us to be assured of the resurrection, don’t you?

Repetition is not only a key to learning, but it is a form of emphasis as well. The King James Version adds the word *even*: “...*even* in him.” This is double emphasis. No room for doubt. What God is going to do, according to these verses, he is going to do *in Christ*. I hope that is clear to you.

I encourage you to reexamine Ephesians 1:9-10 again, comparing these verses among other translations, if you like. Having a good understanding of their meaning will be advantageous for the rest of our study.

Now I would like to summarize what I have said about these verses by means of a paraphrase:

God has revealed his plan to us believers, which in the past he kept secret from humanity. The three members of the Godhead devised and determined this plan together. It is their good pleasure to make it known and to perform it.

And this is his plan: That in managing his household of believers throughout all the seasons of history and continuing to the end of the age, he has been gathering together into one body all believers. Indeed, he is gathering all things into Christ, both things which are in heaven and which are on earth—everything in Christ.

In these passages, then, God clearly states his plan and purpose for humanity. Remember, in the past God’s plan *was* a mystery, but now he *has* revealed it to us. What he means by gathering together in one all things in Christ will be the focus of the rest of our discussion. However, first let us consider in more detail the concept of oneness.

* * * *

Chapter Two key points:

1. The mystery of God's will is no longer a secret.
2. It has been revealed to believers.
3. God's will is to gather together in one all things in Christ.

Chapter 3 –The Other Central Theme of God

I think few believers would dispute that love is the central theme of God. The Bible reveals many attributes of God, all of which are beautiful and glorious and which characterize the divine perfection. These constitute the sum total of all that we worship and love about God. Mercy, faith, truth, justice, holiness, righteousness; the list is long and glorious. His attributes describe him, help us to understand him, and motivate us to serve him.

But have you considered that these divine qualities also *define* him? The Bible more than suggests this. Take love for example. Love not only describes God—tells us what he is like—but defines him—tells us what he *is*. “God *is* love,” (1 Jn 4:8).

The Bible also tells us that God is *light and spirit* (1 Jn 1:5, Jn 4:24). Light and spirit, like love, define God—tell us not only what he is *like*, but what he *is*. These concepts may indeed be hard for us to grasp. After all, what is light, what is spirit? But they are indisputable Bible truths nonetheless.

I believe that most, if not all, of the attributes of God not only describe him, but define him as well. It could just as well be said that God *is* mercy, or God *is* truth, or God *is* goodness. These and other qualities of God are more than mere concepts or attributes, they define the essence of his being.

This may sound a little abstract, but then, is not the almighty, eternal, invisible God abstract? When we talk of God being omnipresent—everywhere at once—are we not talking about the abstract? At any rate, of all the divine attributes of God, wouldn't you agree that love is central to his divine disclosure?

Yes, I believe that love is the central theme of God. Yet, at the risk of being grammatically incorrect, I believe there is another central theme of God, equally and supremely important in defining him. A theme so central to the gospel message and the eternal plan of God, and yet so seldom emphasized. That theme is *unity*.

Unity—oneness (these terms are synonymous and I use them interchangeably). The Bible has much to say about unity:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is *one* LORD.” (Deut 6:4)

“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are *one*.” (1 Jn 5:7d)

Oneness is the theme of the Gospel of John, chapter seventeen:

“...Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me, that they may be *one*, as We are.” (Jn 17:11b)

“That they all may be *one*, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they all may be *one* in Us...” (Jn 17:21)

“And the glory which You have given Me I have given them, that they may be *one* just as We are *one*...” (Jn 17:22)

“I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in *one*.” (Jn 17:23)

Unity is a common theme in the Apostle Paul’s writings. He spoke of *one* mind, *one* mouth, *one* accord. He used the terms *one* flesh, *one* new man, *one* in Christ. These all speak of unity.

Paul tells us in Ephesians that we are to endeavor to keep the *unity* (oneness) of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 1:3). The word *peace* literally means to join or unite. Paraphrased, it might read: We are to endeavor to guard the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting principle of peace.

Paul goes on to tell us what unity is all about:

“ There is *one* body and *one* Spirit, just as you were called in *one* hope of your calling; ⁵*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism; ⁶*one* God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Eph 4:4-6)

How can we miss this? Unity is a major theme of God and of the gospel. At the core of God’s being—his very essence—is the quality, the attribute, of unity—oneness.

The psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows his handiwork.” (Ps 19:1). And thus we have the universe. The *uni*-verse, literally, *one* verse—*one* cosmos. That *one* cosmos declares the divine character of God. Oneness, along with love, is the central theme of God and of all that he has planned.

Have I wearied you with repetition? Forgive me if I have, but this is such an important theme. We can never understand the plan of God if we don’t understand the concept of unity.

* * * *

Now before we go any further with this thought, I want to clarify what I do not mean by oneness. I do not mean that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one and the same person. I don’t believe that for a moment. As I have quoted, there are *three* that bear witness in heaven, not one. As that verse reveals, those three *are* one, that is, they are in perfect unity with each other. In fact, apart from the triune nature of God, the concept of unity would have no biblical foundation. Unity is a central theme of the Godhead.

The triune nature of God—the doctrine of the trinity—is, in my opinion, one of the clearest teachings of the Bible and is one of the easiest doctrines to substantiate. Please don’t confuse what I am saying with certain teachings that repudiate the doctrine of the trinity.

Throughout the centuries, many erroneous teachings have arisen out of a failure to recognize the concept of unity in both the character of God and his eternal plan. That eternal plan again: That he might gather together *in one*—in perfect unity—all things in Christ.

Here is a challenge for you: Keep before your eyes the doctrine of unity when you interpret every other doctrine of the faith. Remember, if we begin with erroneous premises, we are very likely to come to erroneous conclusions.

* * * *

Chapter Three key points:

1. Unity is a central theme of God.
2. Understanding the doctrine of unity is essential to understanding the plan of God.
3. Unity is oneness.

Chapter 4 –Labels, Insidious Enemies of the Gospel

It seems appropriate to me at this time to say something about labels. This is what I have to say about labels: “Oh how I hate them!”

There is something in the human psyche that deems it necessary to categorize things. We feel more secure if we can place things into compartments—precise, orderly boxes—with which we are familiar. I think it has to do with the fear of the unknown. The mind seems to think that if it can place things into structured, defined categories, it can somehow maintain a control over them and therefore be less threatened by them. This is just an opinion, of course, but I think that’s the way it works.

If a person can determine where someone is coming from, he can activate pre-constructed defense mechanisms to protect himself, or his ideas, from another’s attack. In Star Trek language it’s, “Shields up, Number One.” The subconscious thought process may go something like this: *You’re a Democrat (or Republican)? Oh, I know all about you then, because I have compartmentalized Democrats and Republicans and know (or think I know) what they are about.*

I can then implement pre-established defense mechanisms which I have developed to deal with Democrats or Republicans (or whatever).

Another example: *You’re a Baptist (or a Pentecostal)? Then I know what you are about, because I have pre-formulated my opinions about Baptists and Pentecostals.*

Be honest, don’t you do the same? This process is natural to us all. There seems to be no getting around the tendency to label people and ideas *and* pass judgment on them. That is, unless we make a conscious effort not to do so.

The way I see it, there are two main problems with labeling. First is the inherent tendency toward gross generalization and therefore inaccuracy. Few, if any, fit neatly into preconceived descriptive boxes. We are all unique, complex individuals. Not all Democrats think alike and not all Republicans either. The only category we all fit into accurately is that of human being. (I suppose there are accurate sub-categories, such as gender, but you get my point, don’t you?) Anything beyond such fundamental differences tends toward inaccuracy.

The second problem is perhaps more pertinent to our current study and certainly more insidious. Put bluntly it is this: Labels divide people. Even more specifically—and more tragically—labels divide the body of Christ.

God’s eternal plan involves uniting all the peoples of the earth in and through Christ. God’s Son had to suffer and die to bring such unity about. Labels are an affront to the cross of Christ. Labels divide. The Bible has this to say about division and disunity:

“These six things the LORD *hates*, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷A proud look, ¹⁸A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁹A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, ¹⁹A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows *discord* among brethren.” (Pro 6:16-19)

Discord—disunity. The Lord hates disunity. It is an abomination to him. Strong language, wouldn’t you say? I can think of no greater crime against Christ than to

perpetuate disunity amongst his redeemed. But that is exactly what we do when we label or assume labels.

Now don't pick up stones to stone me. This is not intended to be an attack against the body of Christ. To do so would be to negate the very goal toward which I am aiming. I offer these things as an appeal to the church to recognize what we are doing when we label or take labels.

The Apostle Paul addressed this error in his letter to the Corinthian church, calling those believers who distinguished themselves from the rest of the body of Christ carnal—fleshly:

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be *perfectly joined together* in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. ¹²Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:10-13)

Think about it. Don't we do the same thing? One says, “I am a Baptist.” Another says, “I am a Pentecostal.” Another, “I am a whatever.” *Is Christ divided?*

“Now I plead with you,” Paul says. *Plead*, that's a strong word. Friends, this is a serious matter. Why then do we take it so lightly? My answer: We have been desensitized by centuries of tradition to the point that we don't see the error in our divisive practices. On the contrary, we accept them as appropriate, even necessary. We call it diversity.

True, there *is* a great diversity in the body of Christ, as individual members—diversity of gifts, diversity of vocations, diversity of abilities (see 1 Cor 12). As I have said, we are all unique. There is no one else exactly like you. No one else can take your place in the ranks. No one else can accomplish your unique, God-designed purpose but you. But corporately, we are all *one* in Christ. For the sake of Jesus our Savior let's put an end to division.

I don't ever want to be known as anything but a believer in Jesus Christ. As such I am inextricably united with every other believer in Jesus Christ. And so are you, if you also are a believer in him.

We can't take the time here to pursue this issue further. Suffice it to say that labels gender disunity among the body of Christ. Labels, oh how I hate them! Away with them! Away with them all!

* * * *

Chapter Four key points:

1. Labels divide people.
2. Labels divide the body of Christ.
3. Labels are an affront to the cross of Christ.
4. Centuries of tradition have rendered division and disunity in the body of Christ acceptable.
5. God hates division and disunity in the body of Christ.
6. Christ is not divided!

Chapter 5 –Where it all happens

I have claimed that the phrase, in Christ, is the most important phrase in the Bible, and to understand this phrase is to understand the New Covenant and the plan of God. Let's take a closer look at this phrase, because to be in Christ is the imperative need of all humanity.

First of all, what does it mean to be in *anything*? The little word, *in*, is a preposition, denoting position. If I tell you that I am in my house, I am saying that with respect to geography, I am located within the walls of my dwelling place. If you are looking for me, that is where you will find me; in my house.

With respect to spiritual life, if I say that I am in Christ, I am telling you that my spiritual residence is *in Christ*. He is my spiritual dwelling place, the place where my spirit lives, the place where I live in the Spirit. If you are looking for me, spiritually speaking, you will find me in Christ.

The Bible says that life—spiritual life—is in Christ (Jn 1:4). In fact, he is *the* life (Jn 14:6). *He* is eternal life (1 Jn 1:1-2). How serious a matter is this issue of being in Christ? The Apostle John puts it succinctly:

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (1 Jn 5:12)

The kind of life John is talking about here in John 5:12 is eternal life. The verses immediately before and after make this clear:

“And this is the testimony: that God has given us *eternal life*, and this life is in His Son. ¹²He who has the Son has (eternal) life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have (eternal) life. ¹³These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have *eternal life*, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (1 Jn 5:11-13)

It can't get any plainer than that. There is no life—no spiritual life, no eternal life—outside of Christ. Why? “For all (except Christ) have sinned...” (Rom 3:23). Because all are dead in sins (Eph 2:1).

It might be prudent to insert a definition of sin at this time, because the issue of sin is interwoven into the message of the gospel and therefore pertinent to any discussion about the gospel and the plan of God.

Sin is a very common word in the Christian vernacular; one that you might think needs no defining. It is a four-letter word to the world of unbelievers, and I suspect a word misunderstood by many of us believers. The Bible defines sin as the transgression of God's law (1 Jn 3:4). This is clear and concise. But is that all there is to the meaning of sin? If your concept of sin is merely the idea of disobeying God then you are very likely to develop a performance-based mentality. This in turn will lead to a misunderstanding of the gospel of grace altogether.

The line of reasoning of a performance-based mentality might go something like this: God has established rules that I must keep in order to get into and/or maintain a right relationship with him. If I keep these rules there will be pleasant consequences, but if I don't keep them there will be unpleasant consequences.

That line of reasoning has some truth to it, but it has some error also. True, there are pleasant consequences for obeying God and there are unpleasant consequences for disobeying him. Anyone who has walked the pathway of faith for even a short period of time has discovered this.

But it is not true that keeping the rules (or attempting to) will gain or maintain a right relationship with him. No one can be justified—made innocent—by keeping the rules (Rom 3:20). Faith alone makes us innocent in his sight (Rom 5:1).

Sin is the transgression of God's law, to be sure, but dare we ask the question, why? Why is sin the transgression of God's law and why are there unpleasant consequences for disobeying it? The answer to both of these questions is implied in the verse that I have only half quoted above:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23)

I submit to you, friends, that the true definition of sin is *falling short* of the glory of God. In the Greek, the word translated *sin* literally means *to miss the mark*. The picture is that of an archer shooting an arrow at a target, but missing the bull's eye. The bull's eye is the glory, that is to say, the character of God. All of us have missed the bull's eye. Worse yet, we have missed the target altogether. All of us have come short, so very far short, of the glory—the divine character and nature—of God.

When we transgress God's law, what we are really doing is violating his divine character—falling short of his divine perfection. Anything less than God's divine perfection is less than what God intends for us, less than what God created us for. Humanity was created to bear the image of God, to reflect his divine character and nature (Gen 1:26). More than that, we were made to be *partakers* of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Anything less than that is wrong *because* it is less than God's intended plan. Sin is wrongdoing, true, not merely because we have broken rules, but because the rules are a reflection of God's holy nature. When we violate them, we misrepresent God's nature—God's glory. Does that make sense?

Because we have missed the mark, God sent his only begotten Son to redeem us. *He* is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). The Hebrew writer puts it even more clearly. Speaking of Christ, he says:

“...who being the brightness of His [God's] 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 at the right hand of the Majesty on high...”
(Heb 1:3)

The express image of God's person. That means Christ is the *exact representation* God. He is in fact God in human flesh (1 Tim 3:16, Jn 1:1&14). That is why he could tell his disciples that if they have seen him, they have seen the Father (Jn 14:8-9).

We all have missed the mark, but Christ has hit the mark exact center. In reality he *is* the mark, the bull's eye, the exact representation of the glory (character) of God. When we come into him through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, we receive his divine character. We become a new creation *in Christ*. We are given *his* mind, *his* righteousness, *his* holiness, everything that pertains to *his* divine nature. It is true we spend a lifetime growing up in him, learning how to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of who he is and who he has made us. But we are complete in him nonetheless (Col 2:10). Outside of Christ we are dead in trespasses and sins. Do you see then how important it is to be in Christ?

To have the Son is to be in him and he in you. To have the Son *means* to be in him and he in you. And to be in Christ, the Son, is to be in his body. You can not be in Christ and not be in his body. As the phrase is used in the Bible, there can be no other meaning. Consider 1 Corinthians, chapter twelve:

“For as the body is *one* and has many members, but all the members of that *one* body, being many, are *one* body, so also is Christ. ¹³For by *one* Spirit we were all *baptized into one* body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into *one* Spirit.” (1 Cor 12:12-13)

There can be no mistake. The *one* body the apostle is referring to is *the body of Christ* (v.12). The body of Christ is the church (Eph 1:22-23, Col 1:18).

How does this relate to our study of the eternal plan of God? Once again, God's plan is to bring all things together into perfect unity in Christ. So then, if you are not in Christ, that is to say, in his body, you have no future in God's eternal plan.

Would that be true of those who lived in Old Testament times? You bet it would. I will elaborate on their part in the plan of God later in this study. But I have said repeatedly and am attempting to prove, God has only *one* plan for all humanity and that plan finds its fulfillment, its culmination, in Christ.

* * * *

Chapter Five key points:

1. Life—spiritual life, eternal life—is in Christ.
2. Sin is *anything* that falls short of God’s divine nature. His divine nature *is* his glory.
3. Christ is the brightness of God’s glory, the exact representation of his divine character and nature.
4. To have Christ is to be in him and he in you.
5. To be in Christ is to be in his body.
6. The church is his body.
7. If you are not in Christ, you have no future in God’s eternal plan.
8. Old Testament believers are a part of that plan.

Chapter 6 – Why Don't You Just Spit It Out?

Okay, I will. After all, you are probably wondering what I am really up to, and I can't keep you in suspense indefinitely. So I will state my point now. For the benefit of the skeptics, I will state it as a hypothesis, though I am fully persuaded it is the truth. I submit to you that the church is both the body and bride of Christ and is comprised of *all* believers, both Old Testament and New Testament, from Adam to the end of the age.

There, I said it. What a claim! Preposterous, you say. Possibly. Anyone can be wrong. But before you write me off as a heretic, give me the opportunity to prove my hypothesis biblically. Even if I don't convince you, you may gain further insight into the plan of God simply by the exercise. After all, how much do we accept as gospel truth simply because people have always believed a certain way? That's what tradition is about—accepting something as truth simply because it *has been accepted* for a long time.

Such was the case with the Jews when the Lord Jesus walked the earth. Can it be a serious matter? You bet it can. In the case of the Jews, they had voided the commandments of God by their traditions (Matt 15:6). Worse yet, because he didn't fit the description of the teachings handed down to them, they crucified the Messiah. I would call that serious, wouldn't you?

Not all traditions are erroneous, of course. The Apostle Paul told the Thessalonian believers to retain the traditions, or precepts, which they had been taught. We simply need to know for ourselves that what has been handed down to us is truly biblical. Have you ever misconstrued the scriptures? Of course you have. And so have I. And so have those who have gone before us. Consider the Old Testament Jews in their interpretation of what the Messiah would be like. They were expecting a conquering king, not a pacifist who would be crucified. None of us is infallible. The quest for truth is an ongoing challenge. Let's seek it together. And let's keep in mind the promise of the Lord Jesus: "If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed, *and you shall know the truth* and the truth shall make you free." (Jn 8:32)

My hypothesis again: The church is both the body and bride of Christ and is comprised of all believers, both Old Testament and New Testament, from Adam to the end of the age. By the end of the age, I am referring to the time immediately after the great tribulation, when the Lord Jesus returns to reign on the earth.

You are probably thinking, what a dummy. Everyone knows that the church began on the day of Pentecost as recorded in the Book of Acts. Did it? Or did it exist all along as a mystery hidden from the understanding of men until the day of Pentecost, when it was openly revealed? Or did it actually begin with the resurrection of Christ? I believe these are legitimate questions and worthy of our consideration.

We will look with some depth into the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians in just a moment. But as a prelude, I would point your attention to the fact that according to Ephesians 2:4-6 when Christ rose from the dead, we believers rose with him. Furthermore, when he sat down in heaven, we believers sat down together with him.

Are you a believer? When did you arise from the dead? When you were born again, or when Christ arose? A question to ponder, isn't it? You have been raised from the dead, you know (Col 2:13, 3:1). That's what spiritual rebirth is all about, being raised

from death to life. Of course, I am not speaking of the resurrection of the body, which is to come on the last day of the age. But, according to the Apostle Paul, when Christ arose from the dead, you and I as believers arose with him.

Now the entire human race, male and female, was created in the loins of Adam on the day that God created him. That is evidenced by the fact that God finished his work of creation on the seventh day:

“Thus the heavens and the earth, *and all the host of them*, were finished. ²And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Gen 2:1-3)

All the peoples of the earth—every race, every color—are the *generations of Adam* (Gen 5:1-2). We were created in Adam, though we did not arrive on the scene until our appointed time in history.

Similarly, God’s elect were created in Christ Jesus, chosen in him before the foundation of the world (Eph 2:10 & 1:4). We believers were in the loins of Christ, so to speak, from the very beginning. How could that be? The Apostle Peter gives us the answer:

“...*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...” (1 Pet 1:2, KJV)

God, in his foreknowledge, knew from the beginning who would believe the gospel. Those people, the ones who would believe, he calls his elect—his chosen. As such, they were chosen in Christ *before* the foundation of the world. Don’t misunderstand me. *Anyone* can be saved, through simple faith in Christ. The fact that God, in his foreknowledge, knows who they are in advance does not preclude the freedom of choice, but rather attests to his divine omniscience and Godhood.

We believers were created in Christ, though we did not attain to regeneration historically until our appointed time.

So when did the church begin? On the day of Pentecost? Or when Christ arose from the dead? Or was it being formed through the ages as believers put their faith in the promised Messiah? It’s food for thought anyway. Perhaps Pentecost was the first instance in which the church was revealed—made apparent—though it previously existed in Christ as a mystery. Hold these notions for now. Hopefully, the rest of our study will shed light on this subject.

* * * *

In any event, I trust you would admit that until the first coming of Christ and his subsequent death and resurrection, the fact that the Messiah would suffer and die and that the Gentiles would be included in God’s plan of salvation was a mystery hid from the Old Testament believers. Paul makes the latter clear in Ephesians:

“...how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), *which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit* to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...” (Eph 3:3-6)

Could the church, the body of Christ, be greater in scope than many of us have been taught? If my hypothesis is correct, if the church is comprised of all believers from Adam to the end of the age, then such a truth is crucial to understanding the plan of God.

Now I am fully aware of the implications such a hypothesis makes concerning certain traditional views. But can it hurt to reexamine such views? Let’s be like the Bereans in the Book of Acts, who received the word with readiness of mind, and *sought the scriptures daily* to see if the things they were being taught were true.

Okay, let me show you why I believe as I do. First of all, that the church, as it is identified in the New Testament, is the *body* of Christ need hardly be argued. Consider these passages:

“And He [God the Father] put all things under His [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, *which is His body*, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (Eph 1:22-23).

“Now you [believers] are the body of Christ, and members individually.” (1 Cor 12:17).

“For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.” (Eph 5:30).

“And He is the head of the body, *the church*, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Col 1:18)

In each case the context makes it clear that the writer is talking about Christ. These are explicit statements that need no elaboration. There are other less explicit but supporting passages too numerous to mention here. There can be no mistake about it. The church, as it is defined in the New Testament, is the body of Christ.

But we have no such explicit statements that declare the church, the body of Christ, to be his bride as well or that it is comprised of all true believers from Adam to the end of the age. These truths, while I believe them to be evidently clear, must be developed through the application of the biblical rules of interpretation spoken of earlier. As I attempt to substantiate my claim, you be the judge of its validity.

To begin my documentation, let’s once again look to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the source of our focal scripture. We will find many substantiating passages in this precious book. Note that Paul addressed this letter to the Gentile believers at Ephesus (see 2:11, 3:1, 4:17). What he had to say to them will go a long way toward proving my hypothesis.

Many rich and wonderful things concerning these believers follow Paul's introduction, but I want to jump ahead to chapter two, verses eleven through twenty-two. Let's read these passages before commenting on them:

“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—¹²that 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. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having 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, ¹⁶and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Eph 2:11-22)

So, when these Gentiles were in the flesh (i.e. unregenerate—not born again) they 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.” A sad condition indeed.

When we think of an alien we think of someone from another world or another country. In a sense, both would be true in this context. But more than that, the word, alien, here means *to be estranged from, to be a non-participant*. Have you ever been estranged or alienated from someone? To be alienated is to be separated from or excluded. Similarly, to be a stranger is to be a foreigner, an outsider. In the case of these Gentiles they were outsiders, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.

The word, commonwealth, simply means citizenship or community. At that time the Gentiles were excluded from citizenship *in Israel*. This is a key passage, as we will see further into this text.

And because they were excluded from citizenship, they were strangers, or foreigners, to the covenants of promise. The covenants of promise didn't pertain to them. They had no part in them. The implication in this passage is that the covenants of promise pertained to the citizens of Israel. But the covenants of promise didn't begin with the citizens of Israel. They began with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (renamed Israel in Genesis 32). The covenants of promise pertained to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel himself, and from those three to the *citizens of Israel*.

I suppose you could go back to Noah; God made a covenant with him also, or even further back to Adam and Eve. While such notions have significance to my hypothesis,

they are not crucial to my point here. That point: prior to their conversion to Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the Gentiles were excluded from citizenship *in Israel* and the promises that pertained to *Israel*. Do you see that? Does the context make that clear?

Now before I go any further, let me make something else clear. I am not advocating a return to Jewish practices or any such thing. That notion, in my opinion, is also a deviation from New Testament teaching. God doesn't want us going back to the old, he wants us pressing into the new (Phil 3:13-14). That is why it is called the *New Covenant*. The old has been fulfilled in Christ (Matt 5:17, Rom 10:4, Jn 19:28-30). To use the analogy of a computer, the old system has been deleted (Eph 2:15-16, Col 2:14). The new system has been installed and is now the new operating system in the kingdom of God. Now, to live *is* Christ (Phil 1:21), and that life is by the New Covenant.

I also want to make it clear that I am not suggesting that the church has replaced Israel in the plan of God. *The church has not replaced Israel*. I have italicized that statement to emphasize it. The church has not replaced Israel. On the contrary, Israel has *always been* the church—the called out ones. In mystery form, to be true, as I have suggested earlier, awaiting the coming and resurrection of Christ. But the called out ones from the beginning of time, even prior to the naming of Israel.

Did not God call out Abram to go to a land that he would give him? Didn't God call the children of Israel out of Egypt by the mouth of Moses? Didn't he call out Jeremiah and John the Baptist? The church—the ecclesia—is by definition the called out ones.

You must understand that when I speak of Israel, I am not referring to the political nation of Israel geographically located in the Middle East or the natural descendants of Jacob (i.e., Israel) of the Bible. I will go into greater detail in defining the Israel of which I speak in the next chapter. For now suffice it to say that Israel—the true Israel of God—is comprised of believers in the Messiah, who in the New Testament is revealed as Jesus Christ. If that doesn't make sense, bear with me until the next chapter.

Well, I am getting ahead of myself. How can I expect you to accept that Israel is the church unless I offer more convincing proof by the scriptures?

Okay, getting back to business: What are the three most important considerations in real estate? Real estate? Who was talking about real estate? No one, but I am now. What are the three most important considerations in real estate? Location, location, location! (I am trying to drive home a point here). What are the three most important considerations in biblical interpretation? Context, context, context! And don't forget consistency. Any true interpretation of the scriptures *must* fit the context in which it is found and it *must* be absolutely consistent with the rest of the Bible.

Do you see, then, what the context is saying here in Ephesians 2:11-12? These poor Gentiles, prior to their conversion, had no citizenship *in Israel*; they were without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world. I trust that this sad plight does not pertain to any of you. If so, stop right now, call upon the Lord Jesus, put your faith in him and become a child of God (Gal 3:26).

* * * *

Let's take a breath now and reconsider verses eleven and twelve via a paraphrase. Remember, repetition is the key to learning.

Eph 2:11-12 paraphrased: Therefore you born again Gentile believers at Ephesus, remember that before you were regenerated you were without Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and the promises that pertained to Israel. As such you were without hope and without God in the world.

Verse thirteen continues: “But now...” Ahhhh! *But* can be such a wonderful word. How many things are true for all of us because of the phrase, *but now*? That would make an interesting study, don’t you think?

“But now *in Christ Jesus* you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (Eph 2:13)

But now the Gentiles who have believed the gospel and are now in Christ, who once were far away from God, have been brought near to him by the shed blood of his Son. Are you a Gentile? So am I. Do we have cause to rejoice in this truth? You bet we do. Thank you, Lord Jesus for making it possible for us Gentiles to be saved and brought into the family of God along with the believing Jews. Remember, God’s determined will is to gather together *in one* all things in Christ (Eph 1:9-10).

Let’s continue in the text with verse fourteen:

“For he [Christ] is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us...” (Eph 2:14)

Christ is our peace. What comes to mind when you think of the word, peace? Freedom from anxiety? Being at rest? Absence of war? Tranquility? These all are legitimate definitions of peace and would, in most cases, apply to the word as it is used in the scriptures. But peace has an even deeper meaning, as this verse suggests. The Greek word translated *peace* here comes from another Greek word, a primary verb, which means *to join*. That is the sense of the meaning here in verse fourteen. Christ is the one who joins, or unites, all things together.

The word, both, is referring to Jews and Gentiles. Both Jewish believers and Gentile believers have been made one—have been joined together, united—in Christ. Do you conclude the same from the context? This is crucial to an understanding of the New Covenant and to the proof of my hypothesis.

The text goes on to say that Christ has broken down the middle wall of separation between us. The KJV uses the word, *partition*: “...the middle wall of partition...” In the building of a house, a partition is a wall that *divides* rooms. In real estate, a partition accomplishes the *dividing* of one parcel of land into two or more parcels. The idea reminds me of the Berlin Wall, which for decades separated East Berlin from West Berlin. Christ, by his own shed blood, has broken down the wall which separated Jews from Gentiles. Thank you, Lord Jesus.

Verse fifteen continues:

“...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...” (Eph 2:15)

Abolished, that's a strong word. In the Greek it means to render entirely idle or useless. It is translated elsewhere in the KJV, done away with, made of no effect, brought to nothing, vanished away, made void, etc. Do you get the idea? This verse tells us that Christ, by his death on the cross, abolished—did away with—the law of commandments, calling it the enmity or hostility. There are some today, as in the Apostle Paul's day, who desire to incorporate the law (the Law of Moses) into the New Covenant. To do so is to negate the work and sufferings of Christ on the cross. Christ *abolished* the law, and thank God he did.

Now we know from Romans 7:12 that the law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good. There certainly is nothing wrong with God's righteous law. On the contrary, it reveals the holy character of God. But it is *hostile* toward unregenerate people, whether Jews or Gentiles. Why? Because unregenerate people can't keep it; the law is weak through the flesh (Rom 8:3). The law condemns unregenerate people. Paul called the law the hostility—that which was hostile toward all those who are not in Christ.

I want to be very clear on this point, because many believers are confused about the law and its place in our lives. The law has been abolished, done away with, made of no effect *in Christ*. If you are in Christ, you are *not* under the law. It has no authority over you. But if you are not in Christ, the law is still very much operative, working to do what it was designed to do—expose your sin and bring you to Christ (Gal 3:19 & 24, Rom 7:7-13). If, after having been led to Christ by the law, you reject him, the law will then indeed condemn you.

In any event, Ephesians 2:15 tells us that Christ did away with the law—did away with it as the governing principle and standard of measurement for our life. Hallelujah! Those who are in Christ are no longer under the law, because the law was not made for them.

The Apostle Paul had this to say in his first letter to Timothy:

“But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹knowing this: that *the law is not made for a righteous person*, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, ¹⁰for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.” (1 Tim 1:8-11)

The law is not made for a righteous person. What a wonderful truth. It should go without saying that all those who are in Christ have been *made righteous* by faith in him. In other words, the law is not made for those who are in Christ. I could continue on with this thought, but it is the *reason* that Christ did away with the law that I want to emphasize. His purpose was to create *in himself* from the two *one new man*; from the two divided categories of people—Jews and Gentiles—*one new man*.

What was the result of Christ's work in doing this? “...so making peace.” Making peace—joining together, unifying, making one. Consider how frequently the concept of oneness appears in this letter. Peace, or *oneness*, was included in Paul's benediction

pronounced upon the Ephesian believers in chapter one, verse two. And of course, our pivotal passage in verse ten of that chapter: all things gathered together *in one* in Christ. Then again in chapter two, verse fourteen: Christ our *peace* has made both *one*. And again in verse fifteen: *one new man*. Unity is the other central theme of God.

And now the next three verses:

“...and that he might reconcile them both to God in *one body* through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And he came and preached *peace* [oneness with the Father] to you who were afar off [Gentiles] and to those who were near [Jews]. For through Him we both have access by *one Spirit* to the Father.” (Eph 2:16-18)

Do you get the same impression that I get, that unity is a big thing with God? Paul continues to drive home this point in the remaining verses of this chapter:

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens *with the saints* [the believing Jews] and members of the household of God.” (Eph 2:19)

The Greek word translated *fellow citizens* literally means *natives of the same town*. Folks, the Gentiles are not second-class citizens to the Jews. Through the work of Christ and participation in the new creation, believing Gentiles are now natives in equal standing with the believing Jews—natives in the new creation in Christ Jesus.

The Old Testament concurs with this. In the context of dividing the land among the tribes of Israel, God spoke these words through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel:

“Thus you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. ²²It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers [Gentiles] who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They [the Gentiles who dwell among you] shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. ²³And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give him his inheritance, says the Lord GOD.” (Eze 47:22-23)

Can it get any plainer than that? Gentile believers are fellow citizens *in Israel*, just as native-born as the believing Jews.

“...and members of *the household* of God.” (Eph 2:19b)

Are you a member? How does one become a member of the household of God? How does one become a member of *any* household? By one of three means. Either by being born into it, or by being adopted into it, or by marrying into it. In the case of the household of God, all three means are applicable. If you are a child of God, it is because he has both adopted you (Rom 8:15, 9:4) and you have been born again into his family (1 Pet 1:3&23). And, while the wedding hasn't yet taken place, believers are espoused to Christ and soon to be wed to him. We can't take the time to further develop these

thoughts here. But it is my hope that you are seeing the common thread—the theme—in these passages: oneness.

“...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord...” (Eph 2:20-21)

The *whole building*. The KJV uses the phrase *all the building*. Notice, it is *one* building (singular)—all *the* building. In Christ, the whole building—all the building—being joined together, grows into one *singular* holy temple in the Lord. Hmmm? Could God be gathering all things together in Christ?

Paul concludes this thought with verse twenty-two:

“...in whom you [Ephesian believers] *also* are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Eph 2:22)

Paul understood the effectiveness of repetition in the communication of the good news of Christ. In chapter three he goes on to explain that by revelation he came to understand the mystery of Christ, which in the past was hidden from humanity. Then he repeats the mystery in these words:

“...that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, *of the same body*, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...” (Eph 3:6)

Fellow heirs—participants *in common* with. In common with whom? According to the context, the believing Jews. Of the same body—the body of Christ. And partakers [with the believing Jews] of his promise in Christ. Do you agree that the context bear this out?

In chapter one Paul identified the mystery of God as his intention to gather together in one *all things* in Christ. Here in chapter three he specifically includes the Gentiles in that category of *all things*.

By now you have noticed that when I refer to the Jews, I make reference to them as *believing* Jews. From the beginning, the promises of God have always and only applied to believers, whether believing Jews or believing Gentiles. His promises are indeed offered to *everyone*, but only those who believe him are included in them. The promises of God can only be appropriated *by faith*.

One quick reference to this is found in the exodus, when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. God had promised to give all of them a land flowing with milk and honey (i.e. Canaan), but only those who believed went into the land and received the promise. Out of a throng of perhaps two and a half million people who came out of Egypt, only two, Joshua and Caleb, went in to possess the land. Only two of all those who came out of Egypt believed and received the promise. The rest died in the wilderness (See Hebrews 3:7-19). You see, they are not all Israel that are of Israel. More on this later.

Back to Ephesians, chapter three. In verse nine, Paul explains that his commission was:

“...to make all [people] see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which *from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God* who created all things through Jesus Christ...”

From the beginning of the ages until the time of Paul, God’s mystery—that he would gather together in one all things in Christ—has been hidden, kept a secret. This plan of God’s wasn’t something that he devised mid course in history or put into motion mid course in history, but was his intention all along and was in process from day one.

Let me pose yet another question. Does a secret have to be known to be effectual or operative? If I were to include you in my will and kept that knowledge hidden from you, would the fact that you didn’t know that I had included you make my will of no effect? Your lack of knowledge wouldn’t void the will in the least. And were I wealthy and were I to leave my wealth to you, at the time of my passing, when my will was made known, you would probably be one happy individual.

Now don’t get excited. I am not wealthy and I haven’t included you in my will. My point in this illustration is simply that something can exist, even if it is hidden or kept secret.

Admittedly, the church, as we know it today, was not recognized as the church until the day of Pentecost. But it has existed in the mind of God and in the plan of God from the very beginning, and its constituents include all true believers.

Here are a few other questions for you to consider: Was Abraham a Jew? Was Noah a Jew? Was Seth? Was Adam? If they weren’t Jews, then what were they? Gentiles? If they were neither Jews nor Gentiles (I’m hedging, I’m not answering my own questions), where is their salvation found? If your answer is somewhere other than in Christ, consider this verse:

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name [than Jesus Christ] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Continuing on with Ephesians, chapter three, verse ten, Paul tells us that God has revealed the mystery of Christ in order to make his diverse and multi-faceted wisdom known to the heavenly authorities *by the church*. Apparently, God needed a physical, tangible means of communicating his wisdom. He chose to use the church to demonstrate this. The whys and wherefores are beyond the scope of this study. I cite it only to complete Paul’s thought and to bring us to verse eleven:

“...according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...” (Eph 3:11)

I think it is safe to assume that the mystery of God’s will *is* his eternal purpose—his plan and intention from before the beginning of the world and the creation of man. The context of the letter to the Ephesians seems to bear this out (look again at Ephesians 1:4-5, 9, and 11). The main point to recognize is that his eternal purpose has been accomplished *in Christ Jesus our Lord*. In other words, it’s a done deal, even before the process is played out and consummated in history.

* * * *

From here we will jump ahead to chapter four where Paul continues with the central concept of unity. Beginning in verse one:

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Eph 4:1-6)

In the first six verses of chapter four, Paul drives home the concept of unity and, lest we should miss his meaning, defines it for us. First, notice that Paul prefaces these passages with the expression, *I beseech you*. We don't use this expression much in today's vernacular. The NIV uses the expression, *I urge you*. The NASB substitutes, *I entreat you*. But the word, beseech is a stronger word yet. It literally means to invoke, to implore, to beg. *I invoke you, I implore you, I beg you*. Strong language indeed.

I beg you, Paul says, to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of your calling. That entails among other things endeavoring to keep, or guard, the *unity* of the Spirit in the bond (uniting principle) of peace. Endeavoring—making an earnest effort.

Then in verse four Paul defines what he means by unity. Once again:

“There is *one* body and *one* Spirit, just as you were called in *one* hope of your calling; *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism; *one* God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Eph 4:4-6)

That, according to the Apostle Paul, is what unity is—*oneness*.

My prayer for the church today is that it might see this, might understand this, that it might come to appall the divisions and the things that bring division to the body of Christ. My heart breaks over the divisions in the church today. And can I be so bold as to say that his heart breaks, whose body was broken for us so that we might be one?

Is there anything more important for the testimony of Jesus Christ on the earth today than the unity of his body? I doubt it.

* * * *

Chapter Six key points:

1. My hypothesis: The church is both the body and bride of Christ and is comprised of *all* believers, both Old Testament and New Testament, from Adam to the end of the age.
2. Prior to their conversion to Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the Gentiles were excluded from citizenship in Israel and the promises that pertained to Israel.
3. In Christ, the believing Gentiles have been joined to and made one with the believing Jews, and are now citizens in Israel along with them and members of the household of God.
4. Believing Jews and believing Gentiles are members of the same body—the body of Christ.
5. Unity is oneness.

Chapter 7 – Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up

Who is Israel—the real Israel? The answer to this question is essential to understanding God’s eternal plan. Much confusion exists concerning Israel today and the abundance of prophetic interpretations about the nation of Israel can leave one wondering what the truth really is. I would again challenge you to reexamine the various schools of thought, looking to the Bible for first-hand confirmation. We simply must know for ourselves what the Bible teaches about Israel. Any discussion about God’s eternal plan would be incomplete and no doubt inaccurate without an understanding of the Israel of the Bible.

Who then is Israel? To begin to address this question, let us turn to the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans. Paul reveals much truth about Israel in this letter written to the believers, both Jews and Gentiles, at Rome. We find the first clarification in the last two verses of chapter two. Here he refers not to Israel, but to the Jews who comprise Israel:

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” (Rom 2:28-29)

This then is the *true* Jew, one who has been circumcised in heart, *in the Spirit*. In the Spirit—I hope you will recognize this as a key phrase. Paul is making a distinction between one who is a true Jew and one who is not. And that distinction is based on the condition of the heart and its relationship to the Holy Spirit.

Simple logic suggests that if you are a Jew, but not a true Jew, then you are in reality a false Jew, or at the least a Jew by lineage only, without a relationship to the living God. According to the Apostle Paul, a person who is a Jew by natural birth, who has been circumcised in his flesh, is not a true Jew *unless* he has been circumcised in heart, *in the Spirit* also. Is that not what Romans 2:28-29 is saying? I hope that is clear to you.

What must one do to be circumcised in heart, *in the Spirit*? One must *believe* in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The true Jew is one who has put his faith in Christ, whether he was an Old Testament Jew looking ahead to the Messiah [Christ] who was to come, or a New Testament Jew believing in Christ who has come. Circumcision of the heart is an issue of faith.

Were not all the Old Testament believers justified—rendered innocent—by faith in the Messiah *that was to come*? Surely Abram (soon to be renamed Abraham) was justified, that is, counted righteous, through faith in the LORD (Gen 15:6, Rom 4:1-3).

Now I am not suggesting that the Old Testament believers were born again at the time of their individual pilgrimages on earth. The Holy Spirit hadn’t been given yet, because the atonement hadn’t been made yet. We understand this by the Lord’s words in the Gospel of John, chapter seven:

“On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.’³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the

Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (Jn 7:39)

I will take up the issue of being born again in a later chapter when we consider how the Old Testament believers factor into God’s eternal plan.

Now let us jump ahead and focus on Romans chapters nine, ten and eleven to continue with the question, who is the real Israel? In these chapters Paul bares his heart, expressing his great burden and desire for Israel to come to faith in Christ. He makes it clear that this burden is for unbelieving Israel, whom he calls his countrymen *according to the flesh*:

“I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,⁴ who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;⁵ of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.” (Rom 9:1-5)

Now pay particular attention to verses six and seven:

“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’.”

They are not all Israel who are of Israel. This statement is key to understanding who the real Israel is, the ones to whom the promises pertain. Do you see what this is saying? Not everyone who is a natural descendant of Israel is considered Israel.

Furthermore, not everyone who is Abraham’s offspring is considered his child. This is so important to see. Much confusion about Israel will vanish away and a greater clarity will come to the gospel when we understand this simple truth. The Lord’s promises to Abraham were through his son Isaac. This is such an important point that Paul restates it in other words in verse eight:

“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.” (Rom 9:8)

Go back to the Old Testament. You will see that Abraham had eight named children; Ishmael by Hagar, Isaac by Sarah, and six others by Keturah, his second wife (Gen 16:4-11, 21:11-3, 25:1-2). He also had other sons by concubines (Gen 25:6). It is also possible that he had daughters as well, who are not mentioned.

“...but, In Isaac shall your seed be called.” (Rom 9:7b)

The promises were given through Isaac. He alone (or more specifically, Christ in his loins - Gal 3:16) was counted as Abraham's seed, or offspring, as far as the promises were concerned.

This thought is further substantiated in Genesis:

“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’² Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your *only* son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’.” (Gen 22:1-2)

Thus, God himself calls Isaac Abraham's only son, though Abraham had begotten Ishmael years before.

So then, we have in verse eight both an explicit statement and an implied statement. The explicit statement: the children of the flesh *are not* the children of God. Period! End of argument. No room for any other interpretation here. This is explicit. Then we have in the second half of the verse the implied statement: the children of the promise *are* the children of God. Context, context, context! Does not the context bear this out? The explicit statement has no meaning or place in the context apart from the implied statement.

* * * *

Now before we move on in the Roman text, I would like to interject a passage from the letter to the Galatians, for it seems appropriate here:

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. ¹⁶And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.” (Gal 6:15-16)

I cite these verses to make a comment about the last phrase of verse sixteen:

“...and upon *the Israel of God*.” (Gal 6:16c)

What an interesting statement. The NIV, the NASB, the KJV, and the NKJV all render this phrase the same. The Amplified Bible includes the word, *true*, in brackets:

“...the [true] Israel of God!” (Gal 6:16c AMP)

The brackets indicate that the word, *true*, is not found in the Greek, but the Amplified Bible assumes it as the implied meaning of the statement. I would agree. The Israel of God refers to the *true* Israel of God.

If this is indeed the meaning of the passage, then it also implies that there is a *false* Israel. Can there be a false Israel? I believe so. The third commandment of the Ten Commandments suggests this:

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” (Ex 20:7)

Many people believe this commandment is referring to using the Lord’s name when cursing. Of course he doesn’t want us to do that—he doesn’t want us to curse at all. But the word, vain, in this context, in the Hebrew, means *falsely*, or *deceptively*. The commandment can be paraphrased:

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God falsely, or deceptively...”

That is to say, you shall not claim faith in him or identity with him when it is not true. To do so is to claim a false identity to Israel, to become a false Israelite, so to speak. There is only one way to become a part of the true Israel. That is through faith—genuine faith—in the Messiah of God.

Yes, there is a false Israel. You see, they are not all Israel who are of Israel. The children of the flesh are not the children of God. The children of the promise—the children of faith—are. These are the true Israel of God. Let us return now to the Book of Romans.

* * * *

To remain focused on the question, who is Israel, let’s move on to Romans, chapter ten, where I want to address a related question: What must Israel do to be saved? In verse one Paul reiterates his burden for Israel:

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” (Rom 10:1)

How might Israel be saved, Paul? Verse nine gives us the answer:

“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Rom 10:9)

How often we quote this verse and the surrounding passages when we are evangelizing others. But in the context Paul is directing these words specifically to unsaved, unbelieving *Israel*, though, of course, they apply to unsaved Gentiles as well.

So then, for Israel, or if you will, for a Jew to be saved, he must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. As was quoted earlier:

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name [than the name of Jesus] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

And by the way, Peter was addressing the Jews (Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, and their family members) when he made that statement.

Did the Old Testament saints believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? You bet they did. They may not have known him as Jesus, but they most certainly believed in the Christ—the Messiah—who was to come. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

In the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus told the Pharisees that if they did not believe that he was the Messiah (implied) they would die in their sins (Jn 8:24). Make no mistake about it. Jews who go to their graves rejecting Christ will perish in a Christ-less eternity, to the grief and sorrow of their Savior, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:9).

My point is this: With regard to salvation, Israel is no different than any other nation and the Jews no different than any other people. To be saved, they must believe in the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“For there is *no distinction* between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved’.” (Rom 10:12-13)

I want to point out one last thing in chapter ten before we move on:

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’” (Rom 10:16)

Remember, Paul is speaking about Israel in the context of this chapter. Not all Jews have believed in the Messiah.

* * * *

In chapter eleven of Romans, the Apostle Paul poses yet another question relevant to our original question: Who is Israel?

“I say then, has God cast away His people?” (Rom 11:1)

Paul answers his own question:

“God forbid... God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew...” (Rom 11:1-2)

I want to make a few comments about foreknowledge at this point in our study. First of all I would suggest to you that an understanding of foreknowledge is the key to understanding the doctrines of election and predestination, both of which play a major role in the plan of God. Here in the context of this chapter foreknowledge plays a major role in identifying the real Israel. God has not cast away his people *whom he foreknew*. To explain what Paul meant by this, he quotes the prophet Elijah:

“LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”? (Rom 11:3/1 Kings 19:10&14)

To this God replies:

“I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” (Rom 11:4/ 1 kings 19:18)

Note this now:

“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” (Rom 11:5)

The doctrine of election is beyond the scope of our study at the moment. What I do want to emphasize is that Paul makes it clear that just as there was in Elijah’s day, so there was in his day—a remnant of Israel who *believed* God’s message. A remnant—a portion of the whole—*not all*.

Do you know any saved Jews today, Jews who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah and have been born again? I do, Jews by natural lineage who have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. According to the Apostle Paul, these are the true Jews (Rom 2:29). So you see, there is a remnant, even today.

The implication of Paul’s words is that throughout history there have *always* been some Jews who have believed in the Messiah, both before the coming and resurrection of Christ *and* after. Not *all* Jews have believed, for they are not all Israel who are of Israel. But there is a remnant—those who do. These, along with believing Gentiles, are the *true* Israel, the Israel of God. These are his people, whom he foreknew. These he has not cast away. These he will *never* cast away (Jn 6:37).

Review the context of this chapter and confirm that the remnant is referring to Israel and that this remnant is considered the election, or if you will, the elect (they are forms of the same Greek word meaning selected or chosen). More accurately, the remnant here in Romans, chapter eleven is *part of* the elect. The Apostle Paul called the Colossian believers (who were Gentiles) the elect of God as well (Col 3:12). I hope it is becoming clearer to you who the real Israel is.

Now, in verse seven, Paul draws a conclusion:

“What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” (Rom 11:7)

Here it should be obvious that Paul is making a distinction between natural Israel—that is, *unbelieving* Israel—and *believing* Israel, whom he calls the elect. The elect—the remnant—have obtained it. What is it that the elect have obtained? Righteousness. The righteousness which comes by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 10:6-10).

Paul says:

“...and the rest were blinded.” (Rom 11:7c)

The rest of who or what? Context! The rest of Israel, that is, unbelieving Israel. The rest of Israel were blinded. Paul told the believers at Corinth that the god of this world

(Satan) has blinded the minds of those who *do not believe* (2 Cor 4:3-4). This is the thought behind the quote in verse eight:

“Just as it is written: God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.” (Rom 11:8)

Don't misconstrue what I am saying. God does not blind anyone's mind to the truth of his word. He desires that everyone come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:3-4). Blindness to the truth is the God-imposed *consequence* of not believing it. Those who do not believe God remain under Satan's authority. It is he who blinds their minds. God gives the spirit of stupor, or slumber, as the King James Version puts it, to those who *choose not to believe him*. Over them Satan has power to blind the mind.

The same applies to King David's quote in verses nine and ten:

“Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always.” (Rom 11:9-10/Ps 69:22-23)

Woe to those who do not believe the truth of the gospel, but God forbid that we should impute unrighteousness to him who is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9).

Now please move ahead to verse sixteen:

“For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.” (Rom 11:16)

In the Old Testament, the firstfruit of the sacrifices pictured Christ. The New Testament confirms this; Christ is the firstfruits (1 Cor 15:20-23). The lump is a picture of his people, believers. Likewise, the root is a picture of Christ and the branches a picture of believers (Isa 11:10, Rev 22:16, Jn 15:5)

The next sixteen verses will go a long way toward further identifying who the real Israel is and of whom it is comprised. Let's take these verses a section at a time:

“And if some of the branches were broken off, and you [believing Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’ ²⁰Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.” (Rom 11:16-21)

Here Paul employs a metaphor to communicate circumstances and conditions pertaining to Jews and Gentiles with respect to their relationship to Christ. Keep in mind that in this context he is speaking to Gentiles (Rom 11:13 – “For I speak to you Gentiles”). Here is my interpretation of the metaphor. I believe the context will bear it out.

As verse twenty makes clear, the branches referred to in verses seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen are *unbelieving* Jews. These branches were broken off of the olive tree (called a cultivated or good olive tree in verse twenty-four). They were natural branches of the cultivated olive tree. The cultivated olive tree is Israel. This is confirmed in verse twenty-four; they can be grafted in again to *their own* olive tree. So *unbelieving* Jews were broken off of *believing* Israel. Doesn't the context make this clear?

As I have indicated by the bracket inclusion, *you* in verse seventeen refers to *believing* Gentiles. It is implied that they are also branches—branches which came from a wild olive tree (v. 24). The wild olive tree refers to the Gentile nations. Remember, Paul is speaking to Gentiles. These believing Gentiles were grafted into the cultivated olive tree. Notice that these believing Gentiles were grafted in *among them*—among the believing Jews in Israel. The NIV puts it this way:

“...and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among *the others*...”

The others, the branches that remain, are believing Jews. Do you see how this relates to our study of Ephesians? (Context and consistency) The believing Gentiles became a partaker (along with the believing Jews) of the root and fatness of the olive tree. We have already established the fact that Christ is the root. The *fatness*—literally, plumpness or richness—is a reference to the *life* of Christ flowing to and through the branches. These branches (believing Jews and Gentiles) together comprise the olive tree (believing Israel), which partakes of Christ.

I have said that this is my interpretation of the metaphor. You must decide for yourself if it is an accurate interpretation, though I am convinced that the context bears these things out. This is not deep theology or an esoteric knowledge reserved for the privileged few. This is simple logic and deduction derived from the context in which it is found and confirmed by its consistency with the whole of scripture.

How then has the church missed this? Why do we view the New Testament church as somehow different and distinct from believing Israel? That is the general consensus that I have found in thirty-three years in the faith. Not all, of course, but most believers I have been associated with believe that God has two separate plans, one for the church and one for Israel. Friends in Christ, the church *is* Israel and Israel *is* the church.

At the beginning of this study I made it clear—at least I hope I did—that I do not subscribe to *replacement theology*, the notion that the New Testament church has *replaced* Israel in God's eternal plan. Not so, as I hope these passages and those in Ephesians have proved. Israel, the real Israel, the true Israel, is and always has been the church, the *ecclesia*—the called out ones. God called Noah out from a world of wickedness in which every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually (Gen 6:5). God called Abram out of idolatrous Ur of the Chaldees to follow him to the promised land (Gen 12:1). God called the children of Israel out of Egypt to return to that same promised land. And he called you and me out from the unbelieving world of our day to be his people as well.

This has been God's plan and program from the beginning of time: to call out a people unto himself—red, black, brown, white, yellow—out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation; *anyone* who will acknowledge him as God *and believe*. The church is comprised of *the called out ones*. God calls them *Israel*.

Maybe you are still not convinced. Let's go on then. Paul is not through with his teaching on this subject. In verse eighteen Paul warns the believing Gentiles not to boast against the unbelieving Jews, the branches which were broken off. Why? Because the Gentiles are saved by grace alone (Eph 2:8). They don't bear the root (Christ), the root bears them. In verse nineteen Paul assumes their reasoning:

“You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in’.” (Rom 11:19)

That is to say, the unbelieving Jews were broken off of the cultivated olive tree (Israel) that the believing Gentiles might be grafted in.”

In verse twenty, he responds to this assumption:

“Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith...” (Rom 11:20)

The Jews were broken off *because of unbelief*, and the Gentiles were grafted in *by faith*. At the risk of sounding too repetitious (I have a habit of doing that), the unbelieving Jews were broken off the natural olive tree—the true Israel—and the believing Gentiles were grafted into that same natural olive tree—the true Israel. That makes the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles *the true* Israel of God. Remember our study in Ephesians. The believing Gentiles have become fellow-citizens and fellow-heirs, of the same body, of the household of God, and partakers of his promise in Christ—with *believing Israel*. By his own words, this is the Apostle Paul's conclusion. Is it yours?

Give this time to sink in. I understand it may fly in the face of traditional thinking. But your job and mine as Bible students is to seek out and arrive at the true interpretation of the word of God. If the truth contradicts the teachings and traditions of the day, which will you subscribe to?

Continuing on in Romans, chapter eleven:

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? ²⁵For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; ²⁷For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins’.” (Rom 11:22-27)

If unbelieving Jews will turn from their unbelief and believe in Jesus Christ, God will graft them in again to the true Israel. That, of course, is God's desire. It remains for every individual to make that choice for himself or herself.

Blindness has happened to *part* of Israel, Paul says. Not all Israel rejected Christ Jesus as the Messiah. At the time of Paul's writing thousands of Jews had put their faith in Christ. And how many Jews of the Old Testament had put their faith in the Messiah that was to come we do not know. Remember, there has always been a remnant who have believed.

How long will this blindness last? Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. The NIV reads: "...until the *full number* of the Gentiles has come in." In other words, until the last Gentile that is going to believe in Christ is saved.

Will there be a revelation at the end of the age that will lift the blindness from *natural* Israel? I believe so. At that time unbelieving Jews shall see their Messiah and no doubt many shall be saved.

And now the twenty-sixth verse of Romans, chapter eleven. I sigh whenever I come to this verse, for if ever there was a misinterpreted passage of scripture, it is this one.

"And so all Israel will be saved..."

This is an explicit statement. There is no room for argument here. *All* Israel will be saved. *But* they are not all Israel who are of Israel. I hope that is clear to you by now. In these three chapters of the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul has defined the word Israel to mean all Jews and Gentiles who *believe* in Christ Jesus. All Israel, the true Israel, the real Israel, will indeed be saved. But, friends, that is not to say that all Jews will be saved. Don't be misled by unbiblical teachings. Overwhelming biblical documentation makes it clear that only those who believe in Jesus Christ will be saved. Salvation is in him. *Only* those who believe in him, in any age or dispensation, will be saved.

Notice Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20-21 to substantiate his statement that all Israel will be saved:

"...as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; ²⁷For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins'." (Rom 11:26b)

How does God turn away ungodliness from Jacob, or from *anyone* for that matter? By the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. What does it take to cleanse a person, any person, from their sins? The shed blood of Christ, appropriated through *faith in him*.

Have you ever noticed that some of the quotes in the New Testament which are cited from the Old Testament are not *exact* quotes? This is one of those instances. Paul says:

"The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And *he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.*" (Rom 11:26)

But look now at the passage in Isaiah. It reads:

“The Redeemer will come to Zion, And *to those who turn from transgression in Jacob...*” (Isa 59:20)

The NIV, NASB, KJV and the NKJV all treat these two passages the same, so I think it is safe to say that this is not an error in a particular translation. This is also not a contradiction or a misquote. It is an amplification, a clarification, of the passage in Isaiah. Yes, God *will* turn away ungodliness from Jacob, that is, from those of Jacob who turn from transgression.

“To everything, turn, turn, turn, there is a season, turn, turn, turn...” Remember that Peter, Paul and Mary song from the sixties? (For those of you who have forgotten or are too young to remember, I am not talking about the apostles and the mother of Jesus, but the folk trio).

Turn, turn. What does the word, *turn*, remind you of? It reminds me of repentance. In fact, that is what the word, repentance, means: to turn, to change direction, to change the way you think and believe.

Who does God turn ungodliness away from? Those who repent—*who turn away from* sin and unbelief and *toward* him. This is true in *any* dispensation. The promise of a redeemer was to such in Isaiah’s day and foreshadowed the New Covenant which was to come:

“As for me, says the LORD, *this is my covenant with them...*”

In our day it is no longer a foreshadow, but a present reality, for the Redeemer has come and by his death on the cross has instituted the New Covenant.

* * * *

In a moment we will go to the prophet Jeremiah to make a few points about that New Covenant. But before we do, turn with me to the Book of Hebrews, chapter eleven. This chapter has been termed *the faith chapter*, because it records the acts of faith of various Old Testament believers. The point I want to make is found in the last two verses of the chapter. I will quote these two verses in three different translations to drive home my point. Heb 11:39-40:

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect *apart from us.*” (New King James Version)

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that *only together with us* would they be made perfect.” (New International Version)

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that *they without us* should not be made perfect.” (King James Version)

The Old Testament believers, including these heroes of the faith, will not be made perfect, that is to say, complete, *without us or apart from us*. Only together with us New Testament believers will they be made complete. Do you get the point?

Some believe that God provided something better for us New Testament believers, as though he favored us over the Old Testament believers. I do not think this is so. God is not a respecter of persons, showing favoritism toward some above others of his children. I rather believe the meaning to be that he provided something better for *us all*—Old Testament and New Testament believers alike—so that *they*, the Old Testament believers, would not be made complete without *us*, the New Testament believers.

Do you see how this concept ties into the themes of Ephesians and Romans? Do you see how it all ties into God's eternal plan, which is to gather together in one *all things* in Christ?

* * * *

Now let's go to Jeremiah, chapter thirty-one. I quote from verses thirty-one to thirty-four, but I suggest you read chapters thirty and thirty-one in their entirety to put these four verses in context. We must never take things out of context. To do so is to open ourselves up to misinterpretation.

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—³²not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.³⁴No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer 31:31-34)

Notice to whom the promise of a new covenant was made.

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant *with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...*” (Jer 31:31)

“...But this is the covenant that I will make *with the house of Israel* after those days, says the LORD...” (Jer 31:33)

The promise of a new covenant was to Israel, or more specifically, to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. You will remember that Israel was divided during the reign of Rehoboam, Solomon's son who succeeded him. The tribe of Benjamin remained with the tribe of Judah while the other ten tribes broke off, forming their own kingdom. But God's plan is for unity. This is suggested in the omission of the phrase *the house of Judah* in the second reference to the new covenant that he would make (v. 33). I take this

to mean that the house of Israel is again united under the New Covenant. But in any event, the promise of the new covenant was to Israel.

We believers in the twenty-first century, both Jews and Gentiles, ought to know that we are under the New Covenant. The days of which Jeremiah prophesied have come to pass. The New Covenant has been instituted by the death of Christ and continues to this day, as the Book of Hebrews, chapters eight and nine so clearly reveals. I suggest you read these two chapters in the Book of Hebrews in their entirety. To quote them here would be tedious. I will, however, reference a few key passages to substantiate my point.

“But now He [Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a *better covenant*, which was established on better promises.
⁷For if that *first covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a *second*.⁸Because finding fault with them, He says...” (Heb 8:6-7)

The text goes on to quote Jeremiah 31:31-34 as cited above. No need to re-quote it. According to Romans 8:3, the law (i.e., the Old Covenant) was *weak through the flesh*. That is why it was faulty. In itself it was holy, just, and good (Rom 7:12). Certainly there was nothing wrong with God’s holy law. After all, the law reveals the righteous character of God. The fault to which both Jeremiah and the writer of Hebrews refer was with the Israelites:

“Because finding fault *with them*, He says...”

Because of the weakness of the flesh of fallen humanity the Old Covenant was insufficient. It wasn’t possible for unregenerate people to keep the law. It was therefore necessary to bring in a new covenant—a better covenant.

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did] sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom 8:3-4 KJV)

The law (the Old Covenant) couldn’t make us righteous. The New Covenant, through the death of Christ, does. Hebrews, chapter eight ends with these words:

“In that He says, ‘A *new covenant*,’ He has made *the first* obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” (Heb 8:13)

I would remind you that the Book of Hebrews, as the name implies, was written to Jewish believers in Christ—New Covenant believers.

Continuing on with some other quotes from Hebrews, chapter nine:

“And for this reason He [Christ] is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.¹⁶For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.¹⁷For

a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.” (Heb 9:15-17)

The testator—the covenant maker—initiated the New Covenant by means of his own death on the cross. And, by the way, the words *covenant* and *testament* as used in the New Testament of the Bible are both translated from the same Greek word, *diatheke*. They are interchangeable.

With whom is the New Covenant made? Answer: Israel. Who then, I ask, is the real Israel? Since the New Covenant was promised to Israel, and believing Jews *and* Gentiles from the resurrection forward are New Covenant believers, then it follows that believing Jews *and* Gentiles *are* Israel. Doesn't reason dictate that? Isn't that what the passages we have studied in Romans and Ephesians have clearly taught us? I am convinced of this. You will have to decide for yourself.

Friends in Christ, I reiterate, Israel is the church and the church is Israel. The church is comprised of *all those* who have put their faith in the Messiah, the Christ of God, both Old Testament and New Testament believers alike.

Perhaps you are still not convinced. Well, fortunately there is more evidence. In the next chapter we will consider the Rock.

* * * *

Chapter Seven key points:

1. The *true* Jew is one who has been circumcised in heart, in the Spirit.
2. They are not all Israel who are of Israel.
3. The children of the promise are the true children of God.
4. To be saved, both Jews and Gentiles must believe in the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. Throughout history there has always been a remnant of people who have believed in Christ, the Messiah.
6. Those who believe in Christ are God's elect.
7. Believing Gentiles have been grafted into the true Israel and along with believing Jews are partakers of the life of Christ.
8. Believing Jews and Gentiles are the true Israel of God.
9. All the true Israel will be saved.
10. Old Testament believers will not be made complete without us New Testament believers.
11. The New Covenant was promised to Israel.
12. Israel is the church and the church is Israel.

Chapter 8 –The Rock of Ages

“Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee. Let the water and the blood from Thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure, save me from its guilt and power...”

Who of us believers hasn't at one time or another sung or at least heard this beautiful hymn? It has been a favorite of mine since my conversion to Christ over thirty-three years ago. But just who is this Rock of Ages of whom we sing?

By my count there are over twenty-five references in the Old Testament citing God as the rock. All of them contextually identify him either directly or indirectly as the LORD, that is, as Jehovah. There can be no mistake about it—the LORD JEHOVAH is the Rock. But how is this fact relevant to our study of the mystery of God's will? Turn with me now to 1 Corinthians, chapter ten. I quote beginning with verse one:

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ²all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.” (1 Cor 10:1-4)

What a revealing passage of scripture. In verse one Paul uses the expression, *all our fathers*. What is interesting to me about the use of this phrase is that Paul is writing to Gentile believers (see 1 Cor 12:2). Yet he uses the plural pronoun *our*, “...all *our* fathers.” In so doing he identifies with them. Paul, a Jew, is saying to these Gentile believers that the children of Israel whom the Lord led out of Egypt and through the Red Sea were *their* fathers as well. This must be the case or he couldn't have called them brethren (brothers) in verse one. Do you see that?

This is consistent with the promise that God gave to Abraham, that he would make him a father of *many* nations:

“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.” (Gen 17:4-5)

See also Rom 4:9-18. I won't take the space to quote these passages here.

Abraham is not the father of the believing Jews only, but of the believing Gentiles as well. Are you a believing Gentile? Then Abraham is *your* father also:

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile], there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then *you* are Abraham's seed [offspring, child], and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal 3:27-29)

If you are Abraham's child, then Abraham is your father. And if Abraham is your father, or more specifically, your forefather, then Isaac is your forefather also. For to Abraham God said, "In Isaac shall your seed be called." (Gen 21:12, Rom 9:7). And if Isaac is your forefather, then so is Jacob, for the line of Christ, the promised One, came through him as well. Do you get my point? To this the Revelation of John agrees. Speaking of Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb:

"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*,¹⁰ and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev 5:9-10)

Remember, God's purpose is to gather together *in one* all things in Christ—from every tribe, tongue, people and nation.

Do you see how all this dovetails together? One of the things I love about the Bible is that it is so logical. God appeals to logic, you know. Consider this passage:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom 12:1)

The Greek word translated *reasonable* here means *logical* or *rational*. The Lord is a rational God. His plan is a rational plan. The gospel is a rational message.

Let's get back now to 1 Corinthians:

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,³ all ate the same spiritual food,⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." (1 Cor 10:1-4)

The NIV reads: "...they drank from the spiritual rock that *accompanied* them..." a more accurate rendering, according to the Greek, than the word, followed. This is perhaps one of the most revealing passages about the person of Christ. The Rock that accompanied the children of Israel through the Red Sea was Christ. Did you get that? *That Rock was Christ*. Who is Jehovah of the Old Testament? He is the Rock. Paul is telling us here in plain English (well, originally in plain Greek), Jehovah is *Christ*. There is only one Christ. We know him today as Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God.

This is explicit language. This language leaves no room for misinterpretation. That Rock was Christ. He was and is Jehovah, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land. Can it be otherwise?

Remember, we interpret the vague by the explicit, the part by the whole. Our interpretation must fit the context in which the passage is found and it must be consistent with the rest of scripture. Do you agree?

If you are scratching your head, wondering how Christ can be Jehovah when the Old Testament clearly documents God the Father as Jehovah, let me offer this clarification. The word, Jehovah, is not a name distinguishing one member of the Godhead from the other two. It is a *title* shared co-equally by the three members of the trinity. In fact the Hebrew word translated *name* in the Old Testament refers to a name *or* a title. So when God said that his name was Jehovah (Ex 6:3), he was telling Moses that Jehovah was not only his name, but his title—a title he shares with the other two members of the Godhead. And, by the way, according to what we have established so far, who was it really who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush? The One who identified himself as the *I AM* was none other than Christ, the Rock that would deliver the children of Israel out of bondage. The New Testament concurs with this. In John, chapter eight Jesus made this incredible statement:

“Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ ⁵⁸Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’” (Jn 8:57-58)

The Jews whom the Lord Jesus was speaking to in this passage clearly understood who Jesus was claiming to be—the I AM of the Old Testament. And it so enraged them that they took up stones to stone him.

Recognize this song?

*“Mary did you know your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
Mary did you know your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Did you know your baby boy is heaven’s perfect Lamb?
That sleeping child you’re holding is the great I AM.”*

The writer of this song understood who Jesus was. When the scriptures say that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10-11), the intended meaning is that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is *Jehovah God*. How do we know this? Because there is only one Lord (Eph 4:5). Jesus is not an underlord, he is *the Lord*. How we praise you, Lord Jesus!

So the Father is Jehovah, and the Word—the Son of God—is Jehovah. What about the Holy Spirit? He is Jehovah as well.

“Now *the Lord is the Spirit*; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” (2 Cor 3:17)

If the Lord *is* the Spirit, then the Spirit *is* the Lord—the Lord Jehovah. Jehovah, then, is a *title* held jointly by all three members of the triune Godhead. How could it be otherwise? If Jesus prayed to the Father in Matthew, chapter eleven, calling him Lord of heaven and earth (Matt 11:25), then the Father is Lord. And if the Father has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), then Jesus is Lord. And if the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17), then the Holy Spirit is Lord.

Jehovah God has other titles as well. For example, he is also known as Adonai. Jehovah and Adonai are not names referring to two different members of the Godhead.

They are titles held co-equally. There are numerous passages in the Old Testament in which the titles *Jehovah* and *Adonai* are used in the same verse and are referring to the same being. Friends, *Adonai is Jehovah* and *Jehovah is Adonai*. Those titles apply to all three members of the Godhead.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word, *Yehovah*, meaning *Jehovah*, the self-Existent, Eternal One, is found over six thousand times, translated LORD. Hundreds of those references are found in the exodus from Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness. Make no mistake about it; Christ Jesus is Jehovah of the Old Testament. Christ Jesus is the Rock that accompanied the children of Israel. He is also Adonai, the sovereign Lord. But remember, so is God the Father and so is the Holy Spirit. They three hold these titles jointly.

If the world doesn't believe that Christ is Jehovah God, it is because the world doesn't know who Christ is. If they deny him to the end, it will be to their everlasting destruction. What a pity it would be to perish forever, when eternal life—the very life of God—is offered as a gift to everyone who will believe.

But, again, how does the truth that Christ is Jehovah relate to God's eternal plan? The answer is *unity*. God's purpose is to gather together in one all things in Christ, that is to say, all things in *Himself*.

In the next chapter we will consider the fate of the Old Testament believers.

* * * *

Chapter Eight key points:

1. JEHOVAH of the Old Testament is the Rock.
2. That Rock is Christ.
3. Christ Jesus is JEHOVAH God.
4. JEHOVAH is a *title* shared co-equally by the three members of the trinity.

Chapter 9 – What About The Other Guys?

The other guys? What other guys? I am referring to the Old Testament believers—Enoch, Abraham, Moses, King David—all of those who were trusting in the Messiah that was to come. How do they fit into God’s intention to gather everything together in Christ? In answering this question, let’s consider this statement from the Bible. I will paraphrase it to challenge your memory.

You can’t see the kingdom of God unless you have experienced rebirth.

I am sure you recognize it? This, of course, was the Lord’s response to Nicodemus in the Gospel of John.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3:3)

Two verses later he restated that fact in different words:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3:5)

The Lord went on to explain to Nicodemus what he meant by these two statements. The context makes it clear that to be born again is to be born of the Spirit. If you are not born again—born of the Spirit—you cannot see nor enter the kingdom of God. The Greek word translated *see* in verse three is translated elsewhere *to know, perceive, understand*, etc. If you are unregenerate, not only can you not perceive the kingdom of God nor understand it, but you cannot *enter* it. Did you get that? This is serious business here.

I looked up the word *enter* just to make sure it didn’t have an alternate or unusual meaning. Sure enough, in the Greek, the word *enter* means...*enter* (literally or figuratively). No surprises. No unusual meaning. Unless one—*anyone*—is born again, *he cannot see nor enter the kingdom of God.*

Poor fellows, those other guys, I guess they are out of luck—if they weren’t born again, that is. I’m being facetious, of course. Can you imagine God saying to Abraham, “Abe, you did a good job, but, I’m sorry, you can’t enter my kingdom, because you weren’t born again.” Or to Moses: “Mo, you were my man in your day, but, sorry, you can’t enter my kingdom, because you weren’t born again.” I don’t think so. Do you?

So what am I getting at? Would you agree that the two statements I just cited in John, chapter three are explicit? If so, then we have to draw one of two conclusions. Either these statements apply to *every* human being, or God has a *different plan* for different people.

Remember our chapter on premises? This is why I included it in this study. When we come face to face with statements like John 3:3&5, we are compelled to work from certain premises—premises which we have conceived in our own minds or which we have been taught. In interpreting the Bible, we simply can’t get around this.

You have probably figured out that by *different plans for different people* I am alluding to dispensational theology. The idea is that during different periods of history God has dealt with individuals and/or nations differently. Even a casual reading of the Bible would lead most readers to this conclusion and for the most part I would agree. That is to say, God used different methods and circumstances to reveal himself to humanity.

Perhaps the most obvious example and one that is pertinent to our study is the dispensation of the Old Covenant, usually referred to as the Law of Moses, as contrasted with the dispensation of the New Covenant or the gospel of grace. God's methods differ, to be true. The children of Israel in the Old Testament were *under the law*. New Testament believers are *not under the law*, but under grace (Rom 6:14).

Entertain this question: Were the children of Israel who were under the law justified (made innocent) by keeping the law? This is not a trick question. The answer ought to be obvious.

“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom 3:20)

Did you get that? “...by the deeds of the law *no flesh* will be justified in His sight...” The verse immediately preceding this one identifies who the Apostle Paul is referring to:

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are *under the law*, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” (Rom 3:19)

Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under it—the Jews. If the Jews couldn't be justified by keeping the law, how then could they be justified? (If they aren't justified—made innocent—then they are still guilty of sin and have no hope at all). So then, how could they be justified? By faith. Just like Abraham. Just like Noah. Noah? Was he justified by faith? Well, let's see. Abraham *believed* God and his faith was counted for righteousness (Gen 15:6/Rom 4:3). Noah *believed* God and his faith, well...

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of *the righteousness which is by faith*.” (Heb 11:7 KJV)

By the way, the Greek words translated justification and righteousness are derivatives of the same word, *dike* (pronounced dee'-kay and meaning *right*), and at times are translated interchangeably.

Noah, too, was justified—made righteous, made innocent—by faith.

Then there was Enoch. *By faith* he was transported into glory, because he pleased God (Heb 11:5).

What about Abel? *By faith* he offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Notice I am working my way backward through history as recorded in the Book of Hebrews, chapter eleven. We could just as well go in the other direction. By faith...by faith...by faith...

Remember, Abraham, Noah, Enoch, and Abel, these believers preceded the Law of Moses. That is to say, they were not under the Law of Moses, just as New Testament believers are not under the Law of Moses.

So what's my point? Whether before the law, or under the law, or after the law, *all* are made righteous *by faith*. God deals with us all on the basis of faith. Faith is God's M.O. from the beginning of time to the end of it.

So has God dealt differently with mankind throughout the various dispensations of history? In reality, no. *All* must come to him by faith. *All* are justified by faith. And *all* are born again by faith.

Wait a minute, Marv! Old Testament believers born again? You are probably thinking, *the boy is out of his mind*, and I can't say I would blame you for thinking that. After all, most of us have been taught that Old Testament believers weren't born again and that is correct to a point. But since you have borne with me this far, you might as well stick around to the end. After all, I fully realize I will have to explain myself or risk being tarred and feathered and run out of town.

Okay, I'd better start explaining. I admitted earlier in this study that I didn't believe that all these *other* guys (and gals, there were believing gals in the Old Testament too, you know) were born again historically at the time of their individual pilgrimages. That was not possible. The regeneration hadn't occurred yet, because Christ hadn't been crucified and resurrected yet. The Lord made this clear in the gospel of John:

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified [resurrected].” (Jn 7:38-39)

Notice the wording:

“...the Spirit, whom those believing in Him *would receive*...”

Did Abraham believe in him? A rhetorical question, of course. At the time the Lord Jesus spoke those words in John 7:38-39 was Abraham still a believer? Remember, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Consider this quote in Luke, referring back to Moses:

“But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’³⁸“For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.” (Lk 20:37-38)

The NIV puts this passage in Luke this way:

“But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him [God] all are alive.” (Lu 20:37-38)

None of the believers received the Holy Spirit until Christ was glorified, i.e. resurrected. There was no way for them to be born again until that time. The Holy Spirit was given *after* Christ's glorification. To whom? To those who believe in him.

The NIV makes this thought clearer:

“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, *whom those who believed in him were later to receive*. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (Jn 7:38-39)

Remember, Christ is the firstfruits, the *firstborn* from the dead, the first to be born again.

Now you have really gone too far, Mary. Did Christ, the Holy One, have to be born again? Sounds blasphemous, doesn't it? But remember, he was made sin. That was part of the plan. That is why he came—to be the scapegoat, the sin bearer. He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor 5:21). Now the penalty for sin is death. And death necessitates rebirth, that is, if one is going to see and enter the kingdom of God. Consider these passages:

“For whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He [the Son] might be *the firstborn among many brethren*.” (Rom 8:29)

“He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, *the firstborn over all creation*... (Col 1:15)

“...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, *the firstborn from the dead*...” (Rev 1:5)

...And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, *the firstborn from the dead*, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Col 1:18)

The word, *preeminence*, simply means *to be first*. That he might be *first* in all things. In how many things? In *all* things. That includes first to be regenerated. He *is* the regeneration (Jn 11:25). In the resurrection, his resurrection, he was regenerated—born again. Before anyone else could be born again from the dead, Christ had to be the *firstborn* from the dead. He was born again *as* the firstborn. Does that make sense? The resurrection was his rebirth?

Why would the Holy One have to be born *again*? Answer: As I stated earlier, because there came a time when the Holy One *was made sin*. That is why he was forsaken (Matt 27:46, Ps 22:1). That is why his Father turned away from him (Hab 1:13).

Why did Christ die? Before you answer, let me clarify the question. I am not asking the purpose of his death. We understand what the purpose was: to pay the punishment for *our* sins. But *why* did Christ die? Because he was *made sin*. (My heart trembles even as I write this). Christ died *because* he was made sin. The wages of sin *is death*

(Rom 6:23). Being made sin was the *only* way the Holy One—the sinless One—could die. The Jews delivered him to Pilate and are responsible for having him crucified and killed (Acts 2:23). But the Jews didn't take his life. The Romans did the dastardly deed and will be held accountable for crucifying an innocent man. But the Romans didn't take his life. *Sin* took his life—your sin and my sin. Remember these words?

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸*No one takes it from Me*, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” (Jn 10:17-18)

No one took Christ's life from him. He died because he was willing to become sin for us, because he was willing to receive the penalty for sin—death. (Oh, my God, what a Savior!).

Why did you and I have to be born again? Because we were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). Why did Christ have to be born again? Because he *became* dead in trespasses and sins—*our* trespasses and sins.

You will find numerous psalms in the Old Testament in which the speaker is not the psalmist but Christ himself. Perhaps the best example of this is Psalm 22. Written by King David, it is a psalm about the crucifixion. Verse sixteen reads:

“For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet.” (Ps 22:16)

When you see King David in the resurrection (we will meet him one day, you know), look at his hands and his feet. You will not find nail prints there, because they didn't pierce *his* hands and *his* feet. He was speaking prophetically of Christ, or more accurately, speaking Christ's own words. Many, if not most of the psalms are written from Christ's perspective.

Christ, the unblemished Lamb, had no sin of his own. But he took *our* sins upon himself and claimed them as his own. That is the extent to which he went to redeem us from our iniquities. (Oh thank you, Lord Jesus). Christ did not commit sin, he *became* sin. And because he became sin, he died. And because he died, it was necessary for him to be born again.

I said all this to establish the fact that regeneration is in Christ. He *is* the regeneration. He is the firstborn, the first reborn, the first born again, from the dead. Don't miss this. It is a major point in my attempt to prove the hypothesis I made in chapter six. I will state that hypothesis again here, in case you have forgotten it:

The church is both the body and bride of Christ and is comprised of all believers, both Old Testament and New Testament, from Adam to the end of the age.

If you will but hear me out to the end before you draw your final conclusions, I will rest my case shortly.

So what about those other guys (and gals)? They too were born again—at the resurrection of Christ. You see, to enter God's kingdom you must be born again.

Let me offer more proof that the Old Testament believers were in fact born again when Christ rose from the dead. I wouldn't expect you to accept this without abundance of evidence. Let's once again go to Ephesians, chapter two. I'll begin in verse one to pick up the context:

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” ⁴“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...” (Eph 2:4-6)

According to verses four through six, God has made us alive *together with Christ* and raised us *up together [with Christ]* and made us sit *together [with Christ]* in the heavenly places *in Christ*. What a powerful passage of scripture this is. I think you will agree my two bracketed phrases, *with Christ*, are implied by the context. And God did it all *in Christ Jesus*.

As I noted in a previous chapter, the *us* Paul is referring to in these passages are believers—at the least, New Testament believers, if you are not yet convinced that he is referring to Old Testament believers as well.

I looked up Ephesians 2:4-6 in eight different Bible translations and all of them are in agreement concerning the idea that we believers have been made alive together, raised up together, and seated together with Christ. Put another way, when Christ revived, we believers revived with him. When Christ was raised from the dead, we believers were raised from the dead with him. When Christ sat down in the heavenly realm, we believers sat down in the heavenly realm with him.

You might be thinking, *but I was born again in the twentieth century. How could I have been made alive, raised up, and seated with Christ in the first century?* This is a legitimate question and one that needs an answer. I will do my best to give you one. If I can answer this question to your satisfaction there is a good chance you will be willing to accept that the Old Testament believers were also raised up together with Christ. If you are following along in Ephesians in your Bible, back up to chapter one:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love...” (Eph 1:3-4)

According to this passage, God the Father chose us in Christ *before* the foundation of the world. Two points need to be underscored here: the *where* and the *when*. Where did he choose us? *In Christ*. When did he choose us? *Before the foundation of the world*. Folks, that was a long time ago. Longer even than the first century. At the very least, four thousand years before God raised Christ from the dead.

Do you see how significant this is? The Apostle Paul reiterates this idea to Timothy, his son in the faith:

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began...” (2 Tim 1:8-9)

Grace, amazing grace, was given to us *before time began*. The King James Version renders that last phrase, *before the world began*. We’re talkin’ a long time ago. And where was it given? *In Christ Jesus*.

One more reference along this line:

“All who dwell on the earth will worship him [the beast, the anti-christ], whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev 13:8)

There it is again—the Lamb slain *from the foundation of the world*. As far as we know, historically speaking, Christ was crucified about the year A.D. 33. Yet the Bible says that he was slain from the foundation of the world. The NIV uses the phrase *from the creation of the world*. I take it from these passages that what happens historically has already happened in Christ previously—way previously. Would you agree?

I suppose we could look at these things in a figurative sense. *In the mind of God* we were chosen, though it hadn’t actually happened yet. *In the mind of God* we were given grace, though it actually hadn’t happened yet. *In the mind of God* Christ was crucified, though it actually hadn’t happened yet. But the truth is, with God there is no *hadn’t happened yet*. He is the eternal God. There is no past or future with him. He ever exists in the ever-existing *present*. As nearly as my feeble mind can see it, that’s what eternity is: an ever-existing present. Perhaps you can do better in defining it.

Does it sound like I am double talking? *It hadn’t actually happened yet, but there is no hadn’t happened yet with God.*

It hadn’t happened yet historically, in the speck of existence which was to take place, which God called *time*. But it had *already* happened in eternity—in the non-time continuum in which God exists. It had already happened *prior to* the beginning of time, in the non-time continuum in which God purposed it.

Are you with me? Does that make sense? You are probably thinking, *the poor guy is out there in Deep Space Nine*, and perhaps I am. Let me offer what I hope is a simpler way to look at it: The drama had already been written, but it hadn’t yet been acted out on the stage. God wrote the drama. He considered it done. He had an intention (eternal life) for each of the characters. Then he put it on the stage to be perceived and acted out by the players. This drama is uniquely different, however. God developed the plot, set the stage, and cast the characters, but he left the acting out of it to their individual discretion. Thus we have the freedom of choice.

When the drama was played out historically, it was simply the acting out of what God had done in Christ from before time began. Those who, of their own volition, chose

Christ during their time on stage were included in God's plan *for Christ* which he determined from the beginning *in Christ*. For God determined from the beginning that whoever would choose Christ would inherit eternal life. At any rate, expressions like *before time began* and *before the foundation of the world* are merely reference points for those of us who are *in time*. What God has purposed in Christ is eternal—timeless.

I suppose I am getting carried away with this. Let me summarize it this way: God purposed his plan in eternity. He accomplished it in time, historically. But time itself exists in the eternity of God. A mind-blowing concept, to be true, but I think the scriptures bear this out. Time had a beginning. God has no beginning. Time has an end. God has no end. Simple logic dictates therefore that time exists in God, in *his* eternal existence. The scriptures agree with this. The Apostle Paul, speaking to the Athenians on Mars' hill, had this to say:

“...for in Him [God] we live and move and have our being...” (Acts 17:28)

We exist in God—*everything* exists in God. He is infinite; there is nothing outside of him. There is *no* outside to him. He is the beginning and the end, the ever-existing *I AM*. Before the beginning, God ever was. After the end (whatever the end is) God will continue to ever be.

Getting back to my point: What God accomplished historically, in time, he established eternally in Christ Jesus before time. Whether we came after Christ's death and resurrection or before Christ's death and resurrection matters not. God's salvation was accomplished for both categories in Christ *at Christ's death and resurrection* as God determined *before* time began. When Christ died, the whole Adamic race died with him. That is why he is called *the last Adam* (1 Cor 15:45). When Christ arose, all *believers* arose with him—both Old Testament and New Testament believers alike.

Okay, I've said it every way I know how. I'd better leave it at that. You must decide for yourself whether these things are in fact true. Let's move on now to some other points pertinent to the fate of the Old Testament believers.

* * * *

In Matthew, chapter eight, the Lord Jesus made this statement to the people:

“And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt 8:11-12)

As always, the context in which any particular passage is found is so important to its meaning. The Lord's words in these two verses are in response to his encounter with a centurion—a Gentile—who had come to Jesus seeking healing for his servant.

When the Lord said that many would come from the east and the west, he wasn't merely referring to eastern and western Judea, but to other regions beyond the boundaries of Israel. In other words, many shall come from other countries and nationalities. This is evident by the fact that his salvation has reached to the ends of the earth. These many,

Jesus said, would sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *in the kingdom of heaven*. But the children of the kingdom (unbelieving Jews) would be cast out into outer darkness. This is both glorious and horrifying. Glorious in that the Gentiles who put their faith in Christ would have a part in the kingdom of heaven, and horrifying in that the Jews who reject him would be cast out of the kingdom intended for them.

Now I have heard the argument that the kingdom of heaven is different from the kingdom of God. To that I say, baloney! I would be the first to acknowledge that distinctions of words are of utmost significance in interpreting the Bible correctly. Words convey meaning. Different words convey different meaning. Even synonyms, though similar in meaning, carry different *shades* of meaning. So let's not loosely paraphrase the word of God, lest we should be found guilty of perverting its true meaning. But ultimately the word of God defines its meaning by the whole of its content.

There is a legitimate reason for and a distinction between these two phrases. They represent two different perspectives of the *same* kingdom. Now I don't want to get off on a rabbit trail over this. Suffice it to say that the expression, the kingdom of heaven, emphasizes *the realm* itself, while the expression, the kingdom of God, emphasizes *the ruler* of that realm. God is the ruler of the kingdom. It is *his* kingdom. That is why it is called *the kingdom of God*. The kingdom, or realm, he rules over is heaven—*the kingdom of heaven*. It is that simple. But they are one and the same kingdom. I hope that is clear to you. Of course, God rules over the earth also, but let's not complicate the issue.

I make a point of this because erroneous distinctions between what is in reality the same thing will almost always lead to erroneous conclusions. If you start from the premise that the above are two different kingdoms, you very likely will arrive at false interpretations of the plan of God (i.e., he has a different plan for each kingdom). No doubt you have encountered cult groups who have deviated from truth by doing this very thing.

Alas, I better prove this point. To substantiate my claim that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same kingdom, let's look at the counterpart to Matthew 8:11-12. It is found in Luke, chapter thirteen:

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵When 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,’ ²⁶then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ ²⁷But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ ²⁸There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you [unbelieving Jews] see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. ²⁹They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.” (Lk 13:24-29)

I quoted from the beginning of the paragraph to give context to this passage. But it is the last two verses that I want to elaborate on. Luke, as he so often does, adds more detail than the writers of the other gospels. He tells us that those who come into the

kingdom will come from the east and west *and* from the north and the south. I slept through most of high school geography class, but I think this means that they come from *all over* the world. And not only will Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be there, but *all* of the prophets also. For those of you who are “jot and tittle” students, I admit to making an assumption here; that these Old Testament fellows also will *sit down* in the kingdom with the others who come from all over the earth. I base that assumption on the corresponding statement in Matthew 8:11.

And, by the way, could the phrase *sit down*, as it is used here and in Matthew 8:11, be linked in any way to the idea of sitting down together in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph 2:6)? Hmmmm? Certainly something to think about.

Lastly, and don't miss this, they *all* will be in the *kingdom of God*.

So there are two key points here. First, *all*, that is, both believing Jews and believing Gentiles, will sit down in the kingdom of God. Second, notice that Luke calls it the kingdom of God while Matthew calls it the kingdom of heaven. Both are referring to the same context—and the same kingdom.

If you are still not convinced of this, consider the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew, chapter nineteen:

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter *the kingdom of heaven*.²⁴ And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter *the kingdom of God*.’” (Matt 19:23-24)

The Lord Jesus said, “*Again* I say to you...” In other words, I am repeating the same thing *in other words*. It is hard for a rich man to enter *the kingdom of heaven*. How hard? Well, let me put it this way, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter *the kingdom of God*. Is the Lord getting his kingdoms confused? I don't think so. The kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God—they are one and the same kingdom. And *no one* can enter that kingdom unless he or she is born again. Am I being redundant? Or am I making my point?

* * * *

Let me make one more attempt at addressing the fate of the Old Testament believers in Christ. To do so, I must ask another question. Where did the Old Testament believers go when they died? Let's consider several possibilities.

Possibility One: When the Old Testament believers died they went to the grave. Dead, gone, it's over, good bye. While this may be true of the natural body, it is certainly not true of the person who inhabited the body. As we have already cited, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Furthermore, the myriad of promises to the Old Testament believers precludes the idea that physical death is the end.

Possibility Two: When the Old Testament believers died they fell into a soul-sleep. The thought is, “Here lies faithful Mortimer. May he rest in peace.” I am not trying to be obnoxious or offend anyone. The idea of soul-sleep is suggested by passages such as this one found in the Book of Acts:

“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, *fell asleep*, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption...” (Acts 13:36)

The expression, fell asleep, as used here is a euphemism for death and not to be taken literally. This is my opinion, I admit. Nevertheless, the idea of soul-sleep is refuted by such passages as this one found in the Revelation of John:

“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. ¹⁰And 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?’ ¹¹Then 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.” (Rev 6:9-11)

In this case, either these souls were awake and conscious when they cried out or they were talking in their sleep. You decide for yourself.

Then, of course, there was the incident where Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the Book of Matthew, chapter seventeen. They certainly appeared to be awake. (That’s a pun, in case you missed it).

And don’t overlook the incident in Luke involving Lazarus and the rich man. For someone asleep, the rich man sure had a lot to say. No, I don’t believe that soul-sleep is a reasonable answer to our question of where the Old Testament believers went when they died.

Possibility Three: When the Old Testament believers died they went to heaven. That won’t work either, because the way to heaven hadn’t been opened yet. A thorough study of the Book of Hebrews should make this abundantly clear, but for now consider these passages:

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, ²⁰where *the forerunner* has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Heb 6:19-20)

He couldn’t have been the forerunner if Old Testament believers had entered heaven *before* him.

“Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. ⁷But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; ⁸the Holy Spirit indicating this, that *the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest* [apparent] *while the first tabernacle was still standing*. ⁹It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— ¹⁰concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the

time of reformation. ¹¹But 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. ¹²Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption [for us].” (Heb 9:6-12)

The way into the real holiest of all (heaven, of which the first tabernacle was only a type) wasn't apparent yet, because *that* way hadn't been made yet. Until Christ came and performed his sacrifice on the cross, no human could enter heaven.

“Therefore it was necessary that the copies (types and pictures) of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies (types and pictures) of the true, but into heaven itself, *now* to appear in the presence of God for us...” (Heb 9:23-24)

The word, now, in this passage refers to the time since Christ's resurrection. Before the *now* no one could enter in, because the forerunner hadn't entered in yet.

“But this Man, *after* He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.” (Heb 10:12-13)

I hope it is evident from these passages that the way into heaven wasn't made available until *after* Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his subsequent ascension into heaven as our forerunner. Until this happened, the Old Testament believers could not have gone to heaven.

So where *did* they go when they died? That brings us to our next possibility.

Possibility Four: When the Old Testament believers died, they went to paradise. Ah, paradise! Just the speaking of the word offers comfort and hope. Paradise—a foretaste of heaven. And that is exactly what it was. Luke referred to it as the bosom of Abraham. I have referenced that section in Luke previously, but let's go there now and take a closer look:

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to *Abraham's bosom*. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus *in his bosom*. ²⁴Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed,

so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us’.” (Lk 16:19-26)

Let’s first consider the word, paradise. It comes from the Greek word, *paradisos*, and is found only three times in the New Testament. Strong’s Greek Dictionary of the New Testament defines this word as a *park* or an *Eden*. Its counterpart in the Old Testament Hebrew is also found only three times and is translated *forest* once and *orchard* twice. Park, forest, orchard, Eden—all places suggesting pleasantness and abundance of water. I take it that paradise is a very pleasant place. Luke confirms this, saying, “...but now he [Lazarus] *is comforted*...”

The Lord Jesus used the word, paradise, while he hung on the cross:

“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’⁴⁰ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’⁴² Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’⁴³ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, *today* you will be with Me in Paradise’.” (Lk 23:39-43)

This passage has always amazed me and is perhaps the supreme example of the grace of God and of salvation through faith in Christ alone. By *one* word the thief on the cross, in his dying moments, put his faith in Christ and passed from death to everlasting life. That one word? *Lord*.

Now, let’s be thorough students of the word of God. When the Lord Jesus said, “...*today* you will be with me in paradise,” it is obvious he wasn’t talking about heaven. How do we know that? Because he was to spend *three* days and *three* nights in hell *before* he resurrected and ascended into heaven. Remember:

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matt 12:40)

And:

“For You will not leave my soul in Sheol [hell], Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” (Ps 16:10 and Acts 2:27)

No, paradise isn’t heaven. At least it wasn’t at the point in time when the Lord Jesus spoke those words on the cross. In his resurrection, three days later, Christ would take paradise and its inhabitants to heaven. But as yet he had an appointment to keep, by which he would carry our sins to the lowest hell.

In Luke, chapter twenty-three, the Lord, in effect, promised the thief on the cross that he would take him to paradise—the bosom of Abraham—to *await* the Lord’s resurrection. I will pass over the consideration of Christ’s passage through paradise as he descended into hell, because it doesn’t have a direct bearing on our present study.

Suffice it to say that he must have passed through paradise, because he told the thief on the cross that he would, on that very day, be *with him* there.

I will wrap up my thoughts on paradise shortly. But first a few comments on the word, bosom. This is an interesting word. Dr. Strong, in his Dictionary of the New Testament, defines the Greek word translated bosom as *bosom*. Not a lot of help there.

Funk & Wagnalls' Standard Desk Dictionary, 1984 (my dictionary, like me, is getting old) defines the word as: 1. The breast of a human being, especially of a woman. 2. The breast as the seat of thought and emotion. 3. Something suggesting the human breast. 4. Inner circle; midst.

This, at least, gives us a clue as to the meaning of the word, bosom, as it is used in the scriptures. The *seat of thought and emotion* speaks of the heart. The *inner circle* speaks of association—the “in crowd,” if you will. The *midst* speaks of location or position. So when the scriptures tell us that Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom, the thought is that he was taken to where Abraham was, amidst the inner circle—the crowd of other believers who, like Abraham, were awaiting the sacrifice and resurrection of the Messiah—those whose hearts and emotions were fixed on Christ.

Is that stretching it? In any event, we can be confident that Lazarus went to where Abraham was, as is evidenced by the subsequent conversation that Abraham had with the rich man after his arrival.

Now, I have made the statement that when the Lord Jesus resurrected and ascended into heaven he took paradise and its inhabitants with him. Let me see if I can document that to your satisfaction.

In Ephesians, chapter four, we find this quote taken from Psalm 68:18:

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men’.” (Eph 4:7)

The context in which this passage is found more than suggests that this is a reference to Christ's ascension into heaven after his resurrection. Consider the next two verses:

“(Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)” (Eph 4:8-9)

This is a reference to Christ's descent into hell as our sin bearer and his subsequent ascension into heaven after his resurrection? If you agree, then it should make sense that *the captivity* which he led captive, he led into heaven with him.

Just who, then, was the captivity which the Lord led captive? I submit to you that they were the Old Testament believers in the bosom of Abraham—that is to say, in paradise—who were patiently awaiting Christ's victory on the cross and his subsequent resurrection.

While you are giving that some thought, consider that the words captive and captivity as used here in Ephesians, chapter four, are both derived from the same Greek word meaning *prisoner of war*.

Were the Old Testament believers prisoners of war? You bet they were, held captive by their sin nature—by sin in the flesh. If it were otherwise, they could have entered into

heaven when they died. But as I hope I have proved, they could not enter into heaven because Christ's sacrifice for sin hadn't been accomplished yet. And if his sacrifice for sin hadn't been accomplished yet, then their sins hadn't yet been removed.

Doesn't both the Old Testament and the New Testament bear this out? The sacrifices made in the Old Testament only *covered* sin. They did not take away sin. Why?

“For *it is not possible* that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins... And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which *can never take away sins.*” (Heb 10:4&11)

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, concurs with this:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had *passed over* the sins that were previously committed...” (Rom 3:23-25)

God had passed over the sins of all those believers in Messiah, which were previous to his death and resurrection. Their sin hadn't been taken away, merely covered, passed over, until the sacrifice of the great and glorious Savior, Christ Jesus.

Were we not all captives of sin at one time, until Christ delivered us from both the penalty and power of sin? As believers, are we not now captives of Christ, in an abstract sense, at least? Hasn't he captured our hearts? Are we not his prisoners—prisoners of love? But, oh what a sweet captivity it is!

The Apostle Paul considered himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Eph 3:1, 4:1, 2 Tim 1:8, Phil 1&9). While those references may well refer to his imprisonment for the gospel, do they not express the captivity of his heart to Christ? (Only prisoners of the love of Christ will understand this).

Did not Christ, our King, come to proclaim liberty to the captives (Isa 61:1)? To fight a great and terrible war to set the captives free? Did he not emerge victorious, triumphing over Satan and all the host of hell? Is it not his right as victor to lead captivity captive? I rest my case.

* * * *

Okay, once again I have exceeded my quota of words attempting to make my point. Nevertheless, a brief recap is in order here. Where did the Old Testament believers go when they died? They went to the bosom of Abraham—paradise. Why didn't they go to heaven? Because they weren't born again. Why weren't they born again? Because the Lord Jesus hadn't yet been crucified and risen. Without the resurrection of Christ there can be no regeneration. The resurrection of Christ *is* the regeneration, the beginning of the new creation—the new creatures—Christ himself being the firstborn from the dead.

What happened to the Old Testament believers *at* the resurrection of Christ? They were regenerated—born again—with him. What happened to the Old Testament believers at the time of Christ's ascension? Christ took them to heaven with him.

* * * *

Chapter Nine Key Points:

1. No one can see nor enter the kingdom of God unless he or she is born again.
2. Whether before the law or under the law, or after the law, *all* are made righteous *by faith*.
3. All who believe in the Lord Jesus receive the Holy Spirit.
4. No one was born again until the resurrection of Christ.
5. Christ is the first-fruit, the firstborn from the dead, the first to be born again.
6. The resurrection was Christ's regeneration—his rebirth.
7. Old Testament believers were born again at the resurrection of Christ.
8. God has raised up all believers together with Christ and has made us all sit together with him in heavenly places in him.
9. What God has determined to do in Christ, he determined before time began.
10. Every human being has the freedom to choose whether to receive Christ and take part in God's eternal plan or whether to reject him and perish.
11. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God. They are one and the same kingdom.
12. All believers, both Jews and Gentiles, both Old Testament and New Testament, will sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God.
13. No one can take part in the resurrection unless he or she has been born again.
14. When Old Testament believers died, they went to paradise, also referred to as the bosom of Abraham, to await the death and resurrection of Christ.
15. Christ took the Old Testament believers to heaven upon his resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Chapter 10 – Here Comes the Bride

“Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove’s eyes behind your veil... You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you.” (Song of Solomon 4:1&7)

I have claimed that the church is both the body and bride of Christ and is comprised of all believers from Adam to the end of the age. I realize that not all believers will agree. Differences of opinion seem to stem from distinctions believers make between Israel and the church, on the one hand, and Old Testament and New Testament believers on the other hand. I have addressed those issues in previous chapters.

Let’s look now to a few scriptures that speak of the bride—that glorious creature—who is to be forever wed to the Son of God. May the Lord grant us revelation as to who she is. How fitting that we must turn to the Book of Revelation for illumination:

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.¹² Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:¹³ three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.¹⁴ Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.¹⁵ And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.¹⁷ Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.¹⁸ The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.¹⁹ The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald,²⁰ the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.²² But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.²³ The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.²⁴ And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.²⁷ But there shall by no means enter it anything that

defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." (Rev 21:9-27)

Suppose you have never met my wife and one day I invite you to my home. You arrive at my front door and I greet you, saying, "Come in, I want to introduce you to my wife." I immediately take you out back to my barn and introduce you to Luke, my Thoroughbred. I commence to tell you all about Luke.

"He stands sixteen hands, one inch and weighs about twelve hundred pounds. He's twenty-five years old, but still has a lot of life in him. Do you see that five foot gate at the end of his paddock? One day he jumped it to get out to the pasture. Not surprising, though, since he was trained to be a jumper in his youth."

"Luke is a great athlete, alright, and yet gentle as a teddy bear. I put little kids on him and lead them around the yard. Yes, Luke is one fantastic horse. Well, thanks for coming. So glad I could introduce you to my wife."

There are two conclusions you could come to after such an experience. Either I have a screw loose and have confused my horse with my wife, or I indeed married my horse. (Of course, if I married my horse, I no doubt have a screw loose.)

Anyway, let's go back to our passage in Revelations, where I hope you will see my point.

"Come," the angel said to John, "I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." Then he proceeded to show him the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.

Perhaps this angel has a screw loose. Or perhaps he did exactly what he told John he was going to do—show him the bride, the Lamb's wife. What do you think? Friends, the bride, the Lamb's wife *is* the great city, the holy Jerusalem. That is the record of the Holy Scriptures, albeit, a symbolic record.

The Book of Revelation is replete with symbolism. Few would argue that point. It ought to be obvious that such is the case here in chapter twenty-one. I suppose we can't rule out the possibility of this being a description of a literal city as well—after all, we are talking about spiritual things in the context of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21:1). But we can't overlook the explicit statement of the angel who conversed with John.

"Come, I will show you *the bride*, the Lamb's wife." (Rev 21:9b)

Here is another rule of interpretation: We interpret and understand the vague by the explicit. Given the angel's clear statement, I think we are forced to conclude that this is a *symbolic* description of the church, the bride of Christ.

Here is another clue:

"Then I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev 21:2)

Prepared *as a bride* adorned for her husband. I realize that the Apostle John used a simile here. He didn't say the holy city *was* the bride, but that it was prepared *as* a bride. But is there a connection nonetheless?

Would you agree that the great city, the holy Jerusalem (Rev 21:10), is the holy city, the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:2)? That's my conclusion. After all, how many Jerusalems are there in the scriptures? In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul distinguished two: the Jerusalem located in the geographical Israel of his day (and ours as well), and the Jerusalem which is *above* (Gal 4:25-26). Hmm? Could the Jerusalem which is above be the holy Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem? The Hebrew writer helps us here:

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, *the heavenly Jerusalem*, to an innumerable company of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.” (Heb 12:22-24)

Heaven is above the earth (Ps 103:11, Jer 31:37). I conclude, then, that the Apostle Paul was referring to the *heavenly* Jerusalem when he made reference to the Jerusalem which is *above*. Is that stretching it? I don't think so. Revelations, chapter three clarifies further:

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of *the city* of My God, *the New Jerusalem*, which comes down out of heaven from My God.” (Rev 3:12)

The city of God, the New Jerusalem, is the place where God lives. He lives in his people (Eph 2:22). They comprise the church. The church, the bride, the Lamb's wife, is the New Jerusalem.

So then, the Jerusalem which the angel described as the bride, the Lamb's wife, is heavenly, holy, new, and above. It also has the glory of God (Rev 21:11).

Does *heavenly* describe the church? Remember, we are seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6). Furthermore, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20).

Does *holy* describe the church?

“For the temple of God is holy, which temple you [believers] are.” (1 Cor 3:17)

“But you [believers] are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, *a holy* nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...” (1 Pet 2:9)

Does *new* describe the church?

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new* creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Cor 5:17)

“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...” (Eph 2:14-15)

Does the church have *the glory of God*?

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor 3:18)

“And the glory which You [Father] gave Me [Jesus] I have given them [my disciples], that they may be one just as We are one...” (Jn 17:22)

I have cited just a few examples. I am sure you are aware that we could develop each of these in depth, if it were necessary to do so.

* * * *

I admit I am prone to wander off on side trips. I hope I haven't done that in these last few pages. My goal, remember, is to prove that the church is both the body and bride of Christ and is comprised of all believers from Adam to the end of the age. In what follows, I hope you will see my purpose in attempting to prove that the holy city, the new Jerusalem, et al, is in fact the church—the true Israel of God.

Notice now a few significant points in the description of the city as the Apostle John saw it. The wall of the city had twelve gates and on these gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, one name per gate (See Eze 48:31-34). This wall had twelve foundations and on these foundations were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

One of the things I learned in my thirty years as a building contractor is that a wall is built *on top of* a foundation and not the other way around. Apparently, the builder of the city described in Revelations 21 understood that as well. The wall (in which were written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel) was built upon the foundation of *the apostles*. Folks, the Israel of today, political Israel on which the world is focused, has only one hope: To believe the gospel which the apostles preached, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and be brought into this great city—the bride, the Lamb's wife.

Let me say it once again. The names of the twelve tribes of *the children of Israel*—the real Israel, comprised of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles—were written on the gates...which were in the wall...which was on the twelve foundations...which had the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Note this. It is very significant to the point of our study, because it further addresses the question of Israel and the church and how the two relate. In reality, the *two* don't relate, they are *one* and the same.

The Apostle Paul concurs with this, adding the prophets to the picture:

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints [believing Jews] and members of the household of God [true Israel],²⁰ having been built on *the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Jesus

Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building [comprised of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles], being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Eph 2:19-22)

We looked at this passage in a previous chapter when I was making the point that Gentile believers, through the gospel, have been brought into citizenship in Israel and are now members, along with believing Jews, of the household of God. The point I want to emphasize now is that *both* are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Both are a part of the bride, the Lamb’s wife.

I realize that our current line of thought raises several other questions. For example, if the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles *and* prophets (Eph 2:20), why weren’t the prophets mentioned in the description of the church in Revelations 21? Twelve foundations, twelve apostles. What about the prophets?

And which prophets was the Apostle Paul referring to? Old Testament, or New Testament, or both? Also, just who *is* the twelfth apostle? Is it Matthias? Is it Paul? Is it James, the Lord’s brother? Is it someone else? I am going to elect to pass over these questions for a very legitimate reason: I don’t have the answers. You can write me with your thoughts on this.

Well, that’s all I want to say about the bride, the Lamb’s wife described in Revelation, chapter 21. I will leave it to you to draw your own conclusions about who she is and who she is comprised of. But before we leave this chapter I want you to know that I do love Luke, my Thoroughbred. I just can’t picture him sitting in my living room (he is a mess to clean up after), and he certainly wouldn’t fit in my water bed. Perhaps other cowboys love their horses enough to marry them, but not this one.

* * * *

Chapter Ten Key Points:

1. The bride, the Lamb's wife, is the great city, the holy Jerusalem.
2. The great city, the holy Jerusalem, is the new Jerusalem, the Jerusalem which is above, the heavenly Jerusalem.
3. This great city is the dwelling place of God.
4. The bride, the Lamb's wife, is heavenly, holy, and new, and has the glory of God.
5. The bride, the Lamb's wife, is the church, the body of Christ.
6. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Chapter 11 – What’s the Big Deal Anyway?

Why is all this important and why have I gone through the trouble and expense of publishing this little book? I hope the answers to these questions have become obvious in the course of this study. I hope also that the things I have said, though they may run against the grain of popular beliefs of the day, will not be construed as an attack upon any individuals who hold to those beliefs. My goal has not been to disprove anyone, but rather to put forth clear, substantiated teaching from the word of God. You be the judge of how well I have done that. If you deem what I have said to be clearly substantiated, you will have to decide for yourself what to do with it.

In the Gospel of John, chapter eight, the Lord Jesus made this incredible promise:

“If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed. ³²And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn 8:31-32)

If the truth makes us free, then error, or untruth, binds us. What value then can be placed on the truth? It is of utmost importance. Untruth will cause damage, make no mistake about it, damage to the body of Christ, damage to the testimony of Christ, and damage to this sin-sick world that so desperately needs the truth. If it weren’t so, if it didn’t matter, what value would there be to the truth?

The fact is that we are two thousand years beyond the death and resurrection of Christ. That’s a lot of time for the truth to be influenced by the teachings and traditions of men. That’s a lot of time for error to creep in, dilute, weaken, and ultimately pervert the truth of God.

And, while we understand that we have a spiritual enemy, Satan, who wishes to deceive us, not all error can be attributed to him. In our attempt to interpret the Bible we are susceptible to misinterpretation. After all, none of us is infallible. We all have limited capacity and understanding. As always, we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to teach us and guide us into all truth. Thank God he is pleased to do so. And since he is the author of the word of God, he is most capable of imparting understanding. Our part is to scrutinize every teaching to determine if it is Biblically accurate. By all means scrutinize this study. I will include my email address at the end of this chapter and will welcome your comments.

With these things in mind, I want to directly address an error I have only alluded to in the course of this study. There is a prevailing idea that God has two separate plans, one for the church and one for Israel. I hope, by now, you can see that the Bible teaches otherwise. This idea is linked to the ongoing debate about what has been termed the rapture—the transporting of the church out of the world. Pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, post-tribulation, I have heard all the theories. Frankly, I like the *pan-tribulation* theory the best. That one states that it will all *pan out* in the end.

I have no desire to add more fuel to this centuries-old debate. We all have our opinion. If you ask me, the *when* of it all is a smoke screen which covers up the real issue. It will happen when it happens. But friends, when it happens, the church—*every believer that is going to be saved*—will be caught away to evermore be with the Lord.

He is not coming for a partial bride. That's the real issue. *No one* will be left behind. There aren't any second chances. There is no second plan. There is no separate plan. If the Jews, or anyone else, are going to be saved, they are going to have to come into the church, the body and bride of Christ, and do so before his coming to take the church to himself.

This is so important. There is no salvation outside of the church. If you are not a part of the church, you are lost. If you are not a part of the church when it is caught up, taken up, raptured—however you want to say it—you will be lost *forever*.

According to 1 Thess 4:13-18, which I will cite shortly, the “catching up,” or rapture, *is* the resurrection. It is called the *first* resurrection in Rev 20:5. With respect to Adam's race, there are only two resurrections. Believe me, you don't want to take part in the second resurrection. The Lord called it the resurrection of damnation:

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ²⁹And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” (Jn 5:28-29 KJV)

No, you don't want to take part in that resurrection, which, by the way, doesn't occur until *the end* of the millennial reign of Christ and the church. Consider this passage from the Revelation of John:

“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. ⁵*But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.* This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” (Rev 20:4-6)

Many theories and opinions have been expounded about the end times and the order of the kingdom which is to come. But when it comes to the word of God, theory and opinion must bow to revealed truth. Jesus said the scriptures cannot be broken, meaning they are absolutely consistent throughout (Jn 10:35). We get into problems when we speculate, when we draw conclusions which, though they seem to fit, are not consistent with the whole of scripture.

There is nothing wrong with holding an opinion, but when opinion is received and accepted as doctrine, believers run the risk of falling into error. Anyway, that's my opinion.

* * * *

So, what is my point in all this? God has *one* plan. It is called the New Covenant. That covenant includes the Gentile nations as well as the Jews—people from *every*

tongue and tribe and nation who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and come into Israel—the true Israel, as defined by the Bible. That means *every soul* of Adam’s race is given the opportunity to be saved and take part in God’s eternal plan. *No one* has to perish. No one need be left behind. Christ saw to that. Anyone can be saved, through simple faith in him. But the time is now, because there are no second chances.

When Christ comes for the church—his body, his bride—it will be a *complete* church, comprised of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, from Adam to the day of Christ’s coming to rule on earth. When he gathers the church to himself, he will take salvation with him. When the church is resurrected, it will be to meet him in the air *at his coming* to initiate his millennial reign upon the earth. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul:

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [experienced physical death], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and *with the trumpet of God*. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thess 4:13-18)

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [experience physical death], but we shall all be changed— ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor 15:50-52)

According to these passages, when will the resurrection of believers occur? At the last trumpet. The last trumpet, according to the Revelation of John, is the one blown by the seventh angel:

“When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ²And I saw the *seven angels* who stand before God, and to them were given *seven trumpets*.” (Rev 8:1-2)

“...but in the days of the sounding of *the seventh angel*, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.” (Rev 10:7)

“Then *the seventh angel* sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.’” (Rev 11:15)

You will notice there is no eighth trumpet in John's revelation. I take it by these passages that the seventh and last trumpet marks the end of the age we now live in and ushers in the millennial reign of Christ. The Gospel of John supports this, linking the resurrection to the *last day*:

“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’²⁴ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection *at the last day*’.” (Jn 11:24)

How did Martha know that? She was taught it by the Lord himself. She was simply reiterating his own words (See John 6:39, 40, 44, 54). Notice that Martha called it *the* resurrection, as in the *only* resurrection of believers. This passage alone precludes another subsequent resurrection of other believers. This resurrection occurs on the last day of the current age. Notice also that the trumpet of God in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 *is* the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52. We know this because both are referring to the same event—the resurrection of the believers.

If Jews, or any one else, are going to be saved *after* the resurrection spoken of in the previous passages, what resurrection will they be a part of and when will it occur? Search the scriptures and let me know what you find. Apart from resurrection in Christ, *no one* can inherit the kingdom of God.

The Bible can be likened to a puzzle; all the pieces *must* fit. Friends, the notion of a second chance doesn't fit the puzzle. There simply isn't any provision for those left behind. I repeat, if anyone is left behind, he will be lost forever.

I began this study by stating that premises are unavoidable and are the real starting point of all thought. When it comes to the study of the Bible, every interpretation we arrive at will reflect the premises we hold. That is how the human mind works. If we begin with the premise that God makes a distinction between Israel and the church, we will very likely conclude that he has a *different* plan for each. If our premise embraces Israel *as* the church, it will become evident that God has only one plan for all humanity.

You can see, then, just how important it is to start with correct premises. But, alas, we are fallible. We may not begin with correct premises. We all have a history. We all have been influenced by many sources. Or we may, like Fred Flintstone in my example in chapter one, begin with an incomplete picture. Our only recourse is to continue to press into the word of God to have our minds (and our premises) renewed with the truth. And again, let's be patient with one another, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting principle of oneness.

* * * *

Now, as we approach the end of this study, I would like to make a few comments about the potential danger of a misinterpretation of the eternal plan of God. I want to address just two points, though there may be others. The first and perhaps most serious danger is in misleading unbelievers, particularly Jews, to believe that they will have yet another opportunity to put their faith in Christ *after* he has come for his church. This is a false hope and places countless souls in jeopardy of eternal loss.

The Lord will reveal himself to Israel as the prophets have said. But remember, they are not all Israel, who are natural descendants of Israel (Jacob). The elect of Israel—the

Israel of the promise, the Israel of faith—will see him and believe. And so all *believing* Israel, the true Israel of God, shall be saved (Rom 11:26). But the church won't be complete until that day arrives. And until the church is complete, the Lord won't come for it.

Let's look at Hebrews, chapter eleven, one last time:

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰God having provided something better for us [all of us], that they should not be made perfect [complete] apart from us [New Testament believers].” (Heb 11:39-40).

The expression, *all these*, is referring to the Old Testament saints listed throughout the chapter: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the rest. They will not be made complete without all of the New Testament believers. Is it conceivable then that there should be yet *another* group, for whom God has a separate plan? A group whose opportunity encompasses the few years allotted to the tribulation? I don't think so.

Do the prophecies and promises concerning Israel apply to the Israel of the tribulation period only, or to the Israel of every age? In the light of this study, I believe these are rhetorical questions. Let's not mislead the Jews and the unbelieving world any longer. Let's offer to them the true hope—Jesus Christ, and salvation in him *today*.

The second potential danger, while more subtle, ought to be obvious nonetheless. By very definition, *two* separate plans, one for the church and one for the people of the tribulation period, violate the doctrine of the unity of God. Is that a serious error? I will leave it to you to decide for yourself.

Remember, unity is oneness, and oneness is what God is all about. He has told us what he plans to do, what he has planned from before time began. That plan, one last time: That he might gather together *in one* all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—even *in him*.

Epilogue

Thanks for continuing with me through this study. I hope you have enjoyed it as much as I have. You can reach me with your comments at: marvadamo@bresnan.net

It is my desire to make this study available at no cost to the reader. To that end, I have purchased a small quantity of books for distribution without charge to anyone wishing to obtain a copy. Simply write me at the address above.

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Remember, none of us has *all* of the truth. It follows then that *all of us* lack some of the truth. May God bring us all into the full knowledge of the truth. Until then, may the Lord be with you and with the Israel of God.

THE END